

THE GREAT TURNING: A BREAKDOWN OR BREAKTHROUGH? ITS SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS FOR FAITH TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT: *Exploring the choices implicit in the “Great Turning” that come from the enhanced human ability of compassion, “to care for”. Liberating this capacity individually and collectively is shown to be the most potent force in building a world that works both for humans, and the more than human existence in which our life is embedded. Why the Dragon? What does it represent? Why is the Dragon part of the concept of Dragon Dreaming?*

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INTRODUCTION

I often begin Dragon Dreaming presentations by saying that *“The next thirty years will see more change than any other thirty year period in recorded human history. In fact it is quite possible that the next three decades will see more change, of greater significance than any other thirty year period since the disappearance of the Dinosaurs on Earth, sixty five million years ago.”*

These changes are easily documented. They include the arrival of “Peak Oil” and the beginning of its planet-wide depletion; the associated Climate Change, caused by digging up fossil carbon and putting it back into the atmosphere from which it came millions of years ago; the growth in human numbers to a staggering 9 billion people, and feeding them in life supporting ways; and the loss of planet-wide biodiversity as a result of the huge demands that we are increasingly putting upon our fragile marine, forests, soil and water ecosystems; and finally the need to build a truly peaceful sustainable economy out of a collapsing economy that demands unceasing and accelerating growth and is currently maintained by huge military budgets, and the destruction that brings when violence erupts. These changes are enough to keep everyone working in productive employment for the whole of their working lives!

At the moment, the size and scale of these problems is easily daunting. Faced with the awareness of these interlocking crises, it would seem that most people respond through various forms of avoidance and denial. “Freezing” is an evolutionary survival mechanism long promoted ecologically when faced with predators or danger, and in human society all too often it has been promoted by the thought “if I keep my head down, and don’t attract attention to myself, maybe I will not be noticed and the problem will, as problems often do, simply go away.” Many stop keeping themselves informed about what is happening in the world because of the fear they feel this awareness of the size of the current predicament of the “global problematique”¹ brings. Others cultivate various forms of unrealistic hope. They trust that “others”, government, industry, science or religion will solve these problems for them. “Surely”, they ask, “they must be aware!” and they then go on to speak about new secret technologies, that will “fix” it all for us.

Joanna Macy, the visionary deep ecologist, systems thinker and Buddhist scholar has shown how such denial and unrealistic hope paralyses us into being disconnected from our feelings. Locked in our belief in our separation, and distrusting our own intelligence, out of a desire to avoid morbidity, guilt, distress, being unpatriotic, appearing weak and emotional or powerless, we dumb ourselves down. Avoidance of our negative feelings, however, comes at a price. We cannot suppress our negative feelings without suppressing the positive ones too. Feelings are feelings, they evolved in us over hundreds of millions of years of social living, in order to give us information to propel us into action. This information we can get from no other source, and a desire to appear “unemotional” is to rob ourselves of our feelings of joy, ecstasy and enthusiasm just as much as it protects us with a false sense of security. Feelinglessness leads us to “think the unthinkable”² and literally are necessary to be able plan obscene nuclear war scenarios that will see the extinction of most of humanity. And the forces propelling us towards a world cultural crisis do not diminish as a result of such apathy. The stresses continually build up in a determined and predictable fashion, driving us towards the brink of a catastrophic rupture and chaos.

Those people who do care, who do get involved may engage in many kinds of actions designed to make a better world. But here too feelings may intrude that minimize our effectiveness. Faced with the developing planetary crisis, many enter into long negotiations with “authorities”, bargaining to save a few acres of forest here, or to start a peace studies program there. Faced with numerous bureaucratic blockages, and propelled by their unsatisfied desires, it is all too easy for these people to get in touch with their anger. Rage and anger are positive emotions when they stimulate us into releasing the adrenalin we need for fast activity, or are engaged in difficult struggle. It unfortunately floods our system with stressful steroids to convert our energy stores into work as soon as possible, and thus takes energy away from our digestion, and our immune systems to channel into instinctual actions. This struggle, on slowing down the pace of destruction and saving lives, human and more than human, as a result is exhausting work. Burnout is often the result, and compelled by circumstances to rebuild their shattered finances, or their stressed families, or just keep their head above water, many “leave the cause”. This too is a survival mechanism, honed by our evolutionary past. Flight from unhealthy or unsafe circumstances can lead us to survive, but it too comes at a cost. All too often these people are seen by themselves and others as “betraying” their beliefs about what needs to be done, and they may lapse into a depressive crisis.

Dysthemia, low background levels of unceasing depression, has been linked with wild mood swings within a general dissatisfied moodiness, addictive behaviours of all kinds – over-eating, gambling, excessive shopping, sex, over-work, alcoholism or drug taking. Lack of interest, low energy, and the symptoms of dependency – fatalism, powerlessness, living for the moment, mimicry of the powerful and fratricidal violence are often the result.

But all these actions just deepen the crisis and make it more deadly. The number of failed states world wide is increasing, as nations drawn with borders decided at the 1885 Conference of Berlin, collapse into anarchy and civil war. Food riots spread, and economists fear the collapse of our entire economic system, spending billions on propping up banks and businesses. What is happening?

SIGNS OF THE GREAT UNRAVELLING

We are approaching what some call “the Great Turning”. It is as if the world itself wants us to be different, to act in a completely new way, and until we find that way, the pressures will keep growing, the risks rising, the stakes getting forever higher.

Any culture that destroys its own life support system in the name of progress is functionally insane and is ultimately suicidal, and yet our ecological ignorance seems to suggest we are on this path. The World Wildlife Fund has created a “Living Planet Index”³ which tracks the populations of 1,313 vertebrate species - fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals - from all around the world. This index shows a decline in 29% from 1970 to 2003, degrading natural ecosystems at a rate unprecedented in world history. What this means is illustrated by the work of Peter Vitousek and others in 1986⁴, who estimated the human appropriation of the products of Photosynthesis at about 39% and showed that further increases in the population of the world would within 28 years probably see this figure double. With one species in 1986 responsible, through direct expropriation and changes in land use, for consuming nearly 40% of the total photosynthetic potential of the planet, this leaves about 60% of the photosynthetic

potential for the remaining 30 million species of the planet. At a rate that compares with the scenario of the extinction pulse which saw the disappearance of the Dinosaurs, this clearly shows that a “Business as Usual” scenario is not viable for the future.

This is also the conclusion of the Stern Report⁵, prepared by the chief World Bank economist, Sir Nicholas Stern, for the British Government Treasury Office. He argued that the Business as Usual Strategy in relation to Climate Change was not viable. *“When people do not pay for the consequences of their actions we have market failure. This is the greatest market failure the world has seen.”*⁶ More recently the market failure has been witnessed in the pressures put on our banks and on the collapse of Iceland as a solvent nation. Nevertheless Stern argued that

- There is still time to avert the worst impacts of climate change if we take strong action now.
- Climate change could have very serious impacts upon growth and development.
- The costs for stabilizing climate are significant but manageable, delay would be dangerous and far more costly.
- Action for climate change is required across all countries and it need not cap the aspirations for growth of rich nor poor nations.
- A range of policy options is available to cut emissions: strong, deliberate policy action is necessary to motivate their take-up.
- Climate change demands an international response, based upon a shared understanding of long term goals and agreements on a framework of action.

But Ross Garnaut, in his recently released Draft Climate Change Report for the Australian Government⁷ has said that the Stern Report, based upon estimates of the International Energy Agency and the International Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) had greatly underestimated effects of the Business as Usual Strategy’s rapid developments in India and China, which makes the effects of an unmitigated Climate Change strategy much grimmer, and requires urgent action sooner rather than later. Others have said that the IPCC reports have also not taken into account various positive feedback effects such as those now confirmed for the rapid melting of the 2008 August Arctic Ice Sheet, and its effects on Greenland. The IPCC earlier thought that Ice Melting would only be a problem by 2070 but recent reports suggest that the Arctic will be substantially Ice Free by 2013⁸. In a study of 20% of the world’s surface, covering projected future distributions of 1103 plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, frogs, butterflies and other invertebrates, showed⁹ that by 2050 between 15-37% of all species could be driven to extinction as a result of Climate Change.

At the same time, the approach of the Hubert Peak in world oil production, and the fact that Chinese demand for oil is growing at 14% per annum, means that the gap in stagnant oil production over the last 4 years is being plugged by biofuels, resulting in massive food price rises¹⁰, and food riots in over 34 countries. Even the CEO of Anglo Dutch Shell has warned that

oil production is now failing to keep pace with demand, and that “taking the path of least resistance, policymakers pay little attention to curbing energy consumption - until supplies run short. Likewise, despite much rhetoric, greenhouse gas emissions are not seriously addressed until major shocks trigger political reactions. Since these responses are overdue, they are severe and lead to energy price spikes and volatility.”¹¹

These effects compound to affect the weakest and most vulnerable the most. The International “Failed State Index” released in July 2008 also showed that the number of highly vulnerable states increased, even before these rises in international oil and food prices¹² occurred. The Index is based on twelve factors scored between 1 (lowest) and 10 (highest) for

- the movement of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs);
- evidence of demographic pressures and serious ethnic or sectarian grievances;
- gaps between rich and poor;
- economic growth or recession;
- performance of public services;
- corruption;
- the human rights situation and rule of law; and
- the intervention of other states or foreign non-state actors.

All of this evidence when considered together shows that not only is the current situation not only failing to resolve our major world problems, it is in fact now a serious part of the problem. Alternatives are needed. Business As Usual, or as it has been sometimes called “The Washington Consensus”¹³ is leading us to what Paul Krugman¹⁴ and David Korten have called “The Great Unravelling”.

The Great Unraveling is operating on many fronts.

1. Ecologically it sees populations drastically exceeding the available ecological footprint, leading to reduced carrying capacity and collapsing ecosystems.
2. Economically it continues the divergence and polarization of a minority of the nations of the world with declining populations in rich countries, and burgeoning populations in poor majority world nations.
3. Socially it is characterized by increasing degrees of social inequality within countries between powerful rich elites and the socially disadvantaged and marginalized, and an ongoing collapse of viable communities.

4. Politically despite its avowal of democracy, it erodes civil liberties and the voluntary participatory structures upon which a healthy civil society rests. Rising concerns about “domestic security” curtail political freedoms.
5. Culturally it sees the disappearance of ecologically adapted cultural mores, and local languages, swept away in a cultural monopoly drawn from the prevalence of stereotyped media images.
6. Spiritually it is linked to rising numbers of fundamentalist dogmatic beliefs, a new irrationality based upon new age superstitions or equally vapid consumeristic hedonism.

It is easy to gather this and other such frightening information nowadays. This evidence is daunting indeed, and this is not the time or the place to enter into yet more denial, avoidance or unrealistic hope. But it is also not a place to wallow unproductively in anger, despair and depression. The question here to be answered is how do we cope? Many of the changes underway can be mitigated by correct and appropriate action. Others that are already unfolding require adaptation, as they cannot easily be halted. And those that will produce suffering for others need special programs so that the traumatic effects of this suffering can be minimised.

TOWARDS THE GREAT TURNING

Joanna Macy, David Korten and others, clearly show that the “Great Turning” is the name of the ending of the “Great Unravelling”, and the building of a genuinely life sustaining culture of the future. But how are we to do this? Modern technological cultures have forgotten much that they once knew. Even worse than this, they have forgotten that they have forgotten, enabling them to believe themselves superior to those that went before.¹⁵ One of the chief things we have forgotten is the real nature of time itself.

Time is central to the Great Turning. The risks of breakdown multiply, and if we fail in our task we will lose not only the resource base necessary for complex cultures, we will undermine the capacity for complex life to exist on Earth as well! As H.G. Wells commented on in the interwar period, it is a race between Education or Catastrophe. It looks as though the possibility for Breakdown is real, and the possibilities for Breakthrough need to be considered in the light of the fact that the outcome is not certain by any means. This adds urgency to our task.

But urgency itself is stress promoting. Ever since Benjamin Franklin, in his Almanacs, promoted the idea that “time is money”, our culture has been locked in a never ending battle to “save time”, in order to save money. The contraction of time allows huge profits to be made. This was illustrated by Lord Rothschild, the Banker during the time of the Napoleonic Wars. By arranging through a complex system of signaling, he had advance warning of the outcome of the titanic struggle between Wellington and Napoleon. Rothschild organized a minor panic on the early English stock exchange, induced a wave of panic selling, enabling himself to buy up the discounted shares for a fraction of their eventual value.

This concern about saving time has fuelled the whole of the Industrial and Informational Revolutions. Faster is always seen as better, enabling more to be made in less time, by less people and with less resources, the central belief about the nature of economic efficiency. As Michael Ende clearly showed, in his classic "Momo and the Time Thieves", this concern about "Faster" has not made people any happier. The Futurist, the late Robert Theobald was fond of quoting his friend Tom Atlee who showed us that one of the chief characteristics of the Modern World is that "things are getting better and better, and worse and worse, faster and faster".

This acceleration of time is proving problematic for a number of reasons. A great deal of the stress of modern lives is based upon the acceleration of time, as things are expected to go faster and faster. Everything seems to collapse into a never-ending present. We are told "The past is dead and gone, the future is imaginary, we only have the present moment". Not only does this make our own and everyone else's history seem irrelevant, it also causes us to lose contact with our descendants as well as with our ancestors. Economists teach us that a dollar today is worth more than a dollar in the future, and so the future is "discounted" by the rate of inflation. For example, if bank savings grow by 5% per annum, but a forest grows at 2% per annum, it makes economic sense to cut the forest, sell it for firewood, and put the money in the bank. Such future discounting, as Fred Pearce shows, leads us to promote present consumption of future resources as against future saving of present resources, and is propelling the worldwide ecological disaster which is fast looming. This disconnection of the present from past and future, not only leads us to the illness of Historical Attention Deficit Disorder, it is robbing us of our visions of a sane future. This is shown by the fact that ever since the publication of Brave New World and 1984, most portrayals of the future are increasingly Apocalyptic and Dystopian.

There is a reality to these visions that chillingly cannot be avoided. The speed of change is today such that it doesn't just exceed the capacity of our individual psyches and social systems to cope. Evidence suggests that it exceeds the capacity of our own bodies to cope. As mentioned elsewhere, stress related diseases, cancers, auto-immune diseases, allergies, various multiple chemical sensitivities, and the rise of birth defects and infertility, all suggest that environmental change is occurring at a rate faster than our bodies are biologically designed to cope. As our internal ecologies are not separated from the external ecologies of the living systems in which they are embedded, our ecosystems also are increasingly unable to cope. The collapse of the Newfoundland Fishery is only one of many such collapses, evidence of the fact that the acceleration in human impacts is exceeding the capacity of terrestrial ecosystems to adapt to such rapid change. In some ways, the global warming that is happening already, has been seen by James Lovelock as a consequence of "disseminated primataemia", as one could call the metastasising effects of industrial growth civilisation.

This is not the first time in human history that we have had a "great turning". Beginning in 8,500 BCE at Cayonu in Eastern Turkey, human cultures took a decisive shift from hunting and gathering cultures towards a form of grain farming that allowed the accumulation of a surplus. Further development led to the creation of urban communities, towns and cities, and the creation of literate civilisations, of which we are the last. This development has taken millennia to accomplish; only in the last few years have we arrived at a situation where today for the first time 50% of the world's people now live in a city.

There was a second great turning. Beginning with the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, a scientific and technological revolution transformed the lives, first of all of people living in Western Europe, and then with the expansion of European culture around the world, transforming the planet as a whole. This was the time of the building of the Industrial Growth Civilisation which now covers the planet. Today large areas, Brazil, India and China (BRIC countries) are now undergoing the kinds of development that previously characterised Europe, Japan and North America. This development too has taken centuries to accomplish.

And so we stand perched on the beginning of the third Great Turning of humankind. This great turning is the building of the Life Sustaining Cultures we will need for the future of complex life on the planet. Unlike the first and second great turnings, which took millennia or centuries to accomplish, this Third Great Turning much be achieved within decades. As I often say in my Dragon Dreaming workshops – “Welcome to the most exciting time in the history of the world. What an opportunity to truly make a difference!”

SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE GREAT TURNING

There is an urban legend that has been circulating the internet over the last ten years that claims to be an actual transcript of a US naval ship with Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October, 1995.

Americans: "Please divert your course 15 degrees to the North to avoid a collision."

Canadians: "Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision."

Americans: "This is the captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course."

Canadians: "No, I say again, you divert YOUR course."

Americans: "THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE SECOND LARGEST SHIP IN THE UNITED STATES' ATLANTIC FLEET. WE ARE ACCOMPANIED BY THREE DESTROYERS, THREE CRUISERS AND NUMEROUS SUPPORT VESSELS. I DEMAND THAT YOU CHANGE YOUR COURSE 15 DEGREES NORTH. THAT'S ONE-FIVE DEGREES NORTH, OR COUNTER MEASURES WILL BE UNDERTAKEN TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THIS SHIP."

Canadians: "This is a lighthouse. Your call."

We laugh because we realize some great truth in this tale. Our laughter is because in some, subconscious way we recognize this story as in part a metaphor for our times.

In undertaking an ocean voyage there are two parts needed. As the great liner is launched on its journey, and towed by the tug-boats away from the wharf, it accelerates to “full steam ahead”, a condition it may maintain while in the open sea. But eventually, it must return to a safe harbour, to discharge its passengers and cargo, to refuel and reload for a second journey home. When it begins to approach the shoreline, speed is no longer the chief priority. Rather what is needed most of all is a long vision, an ability to see where exactly the ship is now, where it is headed for, in relation to where it has come from, to know how fast the ship is travelling and

the direction is pointed in. People on board need to know how to steer the boat successfully, to halt its forward motion and turn it around if necessary.

To illustrate what can go wrong, in training sessions I often use the example of the Titanic, asking people to what degree their own community could be said to be an illustration of this famous disaster. To turn this vessel around to head in the opposite direction took a turning circle of 30 kilometres. To stop when under “full steam” it took 10 kilometres between when the order was given and the ship finally came to a halt. The lookout, if he saw an obstacle, called to a passing seaman, who took the message to the captain, who spoke with the first mate, who spoke to the engineer, who then telegraphed the engine room. If the message was even seen, only then were the engines put into reverse. If this chain of instructions was broken the message failed to reach its destination. To make matters worse, the lookout had left his binoculars in Europe and could not see much further than the prow of the ship, especially in difficult conditions. The ship had lifeboats for less than 30% of the first class passengers, nothing for second class or steerage passengers. To make matters worse, the rudder for steering the ship was too small for the size of the vessel and the power of its engines. The Titanic was literally an accident looking for a place in which to happen.

But are our communities like this? How much effort would it take to stop or turn our own communities around? How big is our turning circle? Do we even know how to steer our communities in a new direction? Where is our accelerator, break and steering wheel. How far can we see ahead of our vehicle through the windshield? Do we have lifeboats for both first class and steerage passengers? Do we know where we have come from, how fast we are travelling, the direction we are pointed in or where we are now? In the absence of accurate answers to all these questions, then our Gaia projects for personal growth, community building or service to the Earth may perhaps be as useful as shuffling the deck-chairs on the Titanic! It may even lull us into the false belief that we are making a difference whilst creating only temporary warm and cosy feelings for the project organisers.

However, the Industrial Growth Civilisation in which we live, for three hundred years has been continually redesigning itself exclusively for speed. Success has been determined by how fast a nation can grow economically, how quickly resources can be extracted, processed and turned into marketable products, bought and sold in a world marketplace of unfathomable speed and complexity, and then through planned or technological obsolescence, turned into waste. Depletion of one product leads to hopefully to its replacement by another, as communities, ecosystems, and individual's futures get depleted, trashed and discarded along the way, an impediment to the main task of accelerating the boat of the globalised World Development system and its need to get faster and faster. And as we gradually lose our foresight, our longer vision, having discarded our binoculars, and we then use our lifeboats for fuel, we have not recognized that we are fast approaching the opposite immovable shoreline determined by the fact we live on a finite planet. We believe we are in an unsinkable vessel, that we are part of an irresistible force of change, and we have become blind to the fact that, like the USS Abraham Lincoln, we are fast approaching an ultimately immovable object.

As we move beyond the ten-thousand year warm and stable Holocene interregnum of the last Ice Age, rather than returning to the cooler autumn and winter of the Pleistocene glacial optimum, we are racing towards a global summer unlike any ever before witnessed upon the earth. This summer of global warming has been said poses the greatest challenge ever confronted by humankind. But then there are other problems possibly equally grave to the

survival of our civilisation. “Peak oil” it has been suggested is just part of “peak everything”, and needs a massive investment in renewable infrastructure and alternative food, health, housing and transportation systems. The world economic crisis, however, means that there are not large amounts of disposable national income available in the system to fund such investment. The collapse of forest and fishery ecosystems, and the spreading deserts, the loss of biodiversity and the strains put on our fresh water systems are all also part of the picture. These crises were predicted in the 1970s, but ignored within short sighted market economics promoting consumerism and globalisation. This would suggest that our interlocking crises are not separate, but are in fact all part of an interlocking deep spiritual challenge confronting our species. It is as if that we have adopted a false spirituality, a spirituality that sees humanity as disconnected from their planet, which is merely a resource to be used or a dump for our wastes, a trap or school for the soul or some kind of battlefield between good and evil, in which we, of course, are the “good”.

Humans were a product of the Ages of Ice, a period where the solar reflective capacity of Gaia, the living planet, was maximized by the large fields of snow and glaciers across the north of the world. During this period London and New York were both under nearly a mile of Ice. But although the great northern forests were not there, the fall in sea level exposed continental margins to a depth of nearly 130 metres, and this land, covered by living forests, was augmented by a colder sea and its flourishing phytoplankton. Life flourished with a complexity and abundance never before seen on the planet. And in Africa, within this complexity of life, from one species of bipedal chimpanzee was born homo sapiens sapiens, the supposedly doubly wise man.

With the birth of the human species was born the possibility of a greater altruism, a caring for each other not possessed to the same degree by other animals. At the same time the potential of unspeakable cruelties, and a flexibility of choice of our own fate to a vastly higher degree was born. Our abilities with hindsight and foresight, our flexibility with cultural learning, our long childhood and its need for socialization, and the immense power of prepositional language created a universal predator of a kind never before seen on Earth, from a Gaian point of view we were the master parasite. The effects of all of this were felt as they rippled throughout the biosphere. Everywhere modern man, this “Third Chimpanzee”¹⁶ eventually went, the planet saw a collapse in its megafauna, until in the following period we learned greater ecological wisdom and ceased being eaters of our own future¹⁷.

Gaia, in whose body we reside, is immensely old, forming between 4.567 and 3.9 billion years ago, – nearly one third or one quarter the age of the universe. As our sun reaches middle age, its heating has continually provided Gaia with new sources of energy, and Gaia coped with the rising solar temperatures by burying carbon, and creating an oxygen atmosphere, enabling more complex forms of life to evolve. Gaia needs this life for her survival, because in the fullness of time, the heating of the sun will exceed the ability of the Earth to cope, and unless Gaia can go to seed and reproduce herself creating daughter biospheres in the spaces between the planets, life on Earth will become extinct. For this reason Gaia has, throughout evolution in the last 70 million years, been experimenting with intelligence and awareness. It has given birth to a self aware, self reflexive human consciousness.

The discovery of the fields of fossil energy, of the ancient sunlight¹⁸ buried beneath our feet gave the early globalizing culture of western Europe, a technological edge over all other people living on the planet and permitted an ego-locking individual consumerism of a kind never seen before. Unlike earlier pre-civilised cultures we have been able to destroy our local communities, subsidizing the costs of this loss with the hidden subsidy of Gaia's coal and oil. And so we have created the one of the least resilient culture yet seen on Earth, a culture of such mind-boggling complexity, that it would be almost impossible to regenerate it from first principles. In a strange way we have destroyed or weakened all the intervening communities that link individuals, so that nothing now separates the size of the globalised eternally growing economy and the single isolated individual. We seem to have become the ultimate parasite is now engaged in the task of consuming the Earth itself, and its own life support systems that underpin its future continued existence as a living culture.

The peril of this, our spiritual crisis, is that we have unleashed an irresistible force – that of the unfettered human imagination and technological creativity, within what is an immovable object, the finite nature of the limitations of the geo-biological life of the planet itself.

Change is now upon us. The many hierarchical human urban civilisations of the past have always been fostered by periods of rapid growth within periods of stable climate, within hierarchical “win-lose” systems of power of some over the lives of others. For only then could we cultivate the food surpluses necessary to support the pyramidal hierarchical system of non-food producing classes of rulers, soldiers, priests, merchants, artisans and craftsmen, healers, teachers, artists and upon which civilisations have always depended. Continued growth leads to acquiescence to these systems of power, in which an elite has “power over” the lives of the others. Upward social mobility is necessary to keep the peace, to enable that those who are unsuccessful, the losers in the great game of life, to believe that they have a real chance in the game of eventually becoming a winner. Such mobility maintains the peace in conditions where there would otherwise be disaffection, social unrest or revolt and revolution. But these systems cannot grow eternally. Eventually they are confronted by limits – geographic limits, limits to population, to resources or levels of wealth. The culture suffers what Joseph Tainter calls “declining returns to complexity”¹⁹. Jared Diamond shows that attempts to exceed these limits leads to the cutting down of forests, the loss of soil fertility, the reduction of surpluses needed to maintain systems of long distance trade. Struggles to secure the declining stock of resources leads to rising levels of inter and intra-communal violence²⁰. The historian Arnold Toynbee suggested that in such conditions, a creative minority becomes increasingly parasitic, more concerned with holding onto positions of privilege than in supporting the improvements in the lives of the “internal proletariat”²¹. Looking at the record of the thirty one civilisations with which we have shared this planet demonstrates that civilisations seem to collapse during periods of rapid climate change. Food production is threatened, elite struggles for declining surpluses get more vicious, and complexity collapses. Thomas Homer Dixon shows how with the depletion of easily accessible resources, the energy return on energy invested (EROEI) declines over time, with the result that previous levels of complexity cannot be maintained²². Dying civilisations appear to be caught into a structural contradictions of their own devising, in which the resolution of their problems is only possible through a dismantling of the system upon which the elite depends²³. This is a mental trap of limited thinking from which we may now only escape from through the rigor of a new Dark Age.

Previous dark ages have been regional affairs. Never before have we had a civilisation which is so truly global in its extent. The scientific and technical revolutions, and the exploitation of our seemingly limitless sources of fossil fuels, has enabled our modern industrial civilisation to truly become global. There is today no where outside the global international system of the division of labour, of resource extraction, manufacturing, market economies and the redistribution of the products proportional to a nation's, region's or individual's purchasing power²⁴. Any collapse into a new Dark Age will no longer be a regional affair. Today, possibility of any centuries long collapse will be global in extent.

It is time that we awoke from the trap of believing in limitless industrial growth and build for the first time in history a society that is no longer a consumer parasite upon the planet, but is rather symbiotic and synergistic with the life of Gaia as a whole. To do so in the little time we have left before Gaia decides that we human are a species as expendable as the dinosaurs is the greatest challenge that has ever confronted humankind. It vastly exceeds earlier periods of culture change such as that when Greco Roman world views confronted the temple based cultures of the Middle East that spawned the great Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is of much greater significance than the earlier Axial Age introduction of monetarised and literate iron-age economies that gave birth to Buddhism and Hinduism in India, or Daoism and Confucianism in China, Greek philosophy and monotheistic religions in the west. These were periods merely of regional crises. Never before have we faced a global crisis of such magnitude and rapidity as we do today.

How can we cope? We must extend our ability to care, make it wider than it has ever been before. No longer is caring for oneself, one's family or community enough. Even caring for our nations, as we have done over the last 300 years is far too narrow a perspective. The crisis of global warming, peace, oil, economic meltdown and biodiversity loss means we have to now really care for a whole planet, and for every species of life we share it with. Humans need to start functioning in reality collectively as the thinking neo-cortex of the brain of Gaia, because if we do not do this we will become as extinct as the dodo²⁵, and the dinosaur, and time is running out. Through us Gaia, as a living planet, is seeking to en-soul itself. It needs to do so for its own survival. It is a task that is going to take all 7, soon to be 8 billion of us to achieve, and require every potential skill and capacity each one of us has. It will take all of us, and all of what each one of us can give. To refuse this challenge, or to choose not to participate in this task is to risk suicide²⁶, and will weaken the ability of us all to make this, the transition to the Greatest Turning of history.

We thus live in an amazing time, a time that has been long in preparation and will never again be repeated in the long history of the Earth. We stand at the pivotal fulcrum point of human history, perhaps the turning point of life on Earth itself. Gaia herself seeks to have our species leave its long and painful adolescence behind and assume its rightful responsibilities of genuine adulthood. This task is going to take the harvesting of the gifts and wisdoms granted to us by all 31 of the civilisations of the last five thousand years. It needs the insights and abilities of all the first nations indigenous cultures of every continent. We need to distil the wisdom and insights of all sages, teachers, and spiritual students, swamis, gurus, prophets, saints and martyrs that have ever existed. This knowledge and wisdom needs to be preserved and not lost. Nothing can be left out, nothing can be forgotten – we need it all if we are to survive.

Recently it has been stated that there is no alternative to Globalisation, but as we have seen this is a globalisation of only of industrial corporations and a consumer culture and we are not yet global enough. We need to be truly aware of the needs of the globe as a whole, of the needs of the living body of Gaia itself. It has been said that we have arrived at the “end of history”²⁷, but then we have been surprised to find history continuing and the end is not yet in sight. We have been proclaimed to be a post-industrial civilisation, living in an information age, and yet what we find, these are just points along a trajectory of change that began long before. We have to cease thinking of ourselves as mere human beings and start to be true “human becomings”. Through us it appears that the cosmos is yearning and learning to become truly conscious of itself. Our species is not yet fully human, as our behaviour shows we are not yet “humane” enough. Our narrow egotistical selfishness and greed is still too all consuming. Not yet have we harvested our full potential as a human species. Only when we do, then will we have arrived at “the end of history”. Only then can we start living in a truly post-industrial culture. Instead at the moment we have become trapped in a consumeristic cul-de-sac of our own devising, and as a result of the coming combination of factors – peak oil, climate change, economic chaos and biodiversity loss we are being asked to restart our own evolution as a species, an evolution that has been stalled by nearly 50 centuries of incredibly bloody and destructive struggles within and between hierarchical win-lose structures, built within pyramidal civilisations. We have to start truly living, waking-up, and adhering to, and living by, the greatest moralities and ethics of which we are capable, instead of sleepwalking our lives away. We are all of us pilgrims on this journey, building a bridge between where we have come from and towards where we are going, in the greatest historical and cultural project the world has yet seen. No-one can afford to be left behind. It will take sacrifice of some of our comforts, and may require us to give up some of the things we think we hold dear, so that others may simply live. It will take daily mindfulness of a kind we have hereto only dreamed of, and the building of communities of care, support and practice in all walks of life.

I believe we are at real risk of being dangerously unable to now steer the Industrial Growth civilisation we have built safely into a new sustainable harbour. To do this we need to start decelerating immediately, improving our steering mechanisms, putting on the breaks and putting our engines into reverse. In place of our accelerating, expanding, diverging systems of wealth, justice and political power, we today need deceleration, contraction and convergence on systems that give basic prosperity, freedom and justice to all passengers on the planet, human and the more than human species upon which all life depends. Unfortunately I see little evidence of this event occurring at the moment, but instead we see much evidence of an attempt at “more of the same” or “business as usual”. We are constantly being asked to speed up, not to start slowing down. We urgently need to see a lot further than the next election or the next business cycle, and to stop discounting our children’s future. We need to make sure that we have a turning circle with sufficient room to manoeuvre, and have full control of the steering of our vessel. If we don’t know this we are really in some Titanic, a deregulated, uncontrollable vessel that is already an accident that is just looking for somewhere to happen. In the absence of all of this we need to ensure that we have sufficient lifeboats for both first class and steerage passengers, and sufficient know-how and time in which to launch them successfully if we need to do so.

We also need to recognize that much of this is not new. Similar things have happened before in the past, albeit on a much smaller scale. The collapse of the world's first Empire, the Akkadian state of Ancient Iraq was because of climate change, and resultant ecological collapse that followed. Whole cities were built and then junked within a decade as the climate collapsed and the drought and famine became permanent for generations in the Middle East. A long Dark Age was the result. A thousand years later it all happened again. The Late Bronze Age civilisations saw more than 40 cities in the ancient Near East, cities that had stood for centuries, burned or abandoned, many never to be reoccupied as a result of a new Dark Age, in which in many parts of the world, people even forgot how to read and write for up to 500 years. The most recent collapse within our culture, of the climate changes, famine and pandemics of the early middle ages, affected the Han and later the Roman Empire. It saw Rome reduced from a thriving city of more than 800,000 people to a ruined small town of 15,000 within little more than two or three centuries. The Greeks and Romans knew that the world was round, but in the European Dark Ages, most people came to believe once more it was flat, until a thousand years later when the voyages of Columbus and Magellan demonstrated for all that it was truly otherwise.

But such a Dark Age future will only happen because we let it happen, as a result of our continuing to act as though things had not changed, or in failing to act in an appropriate way. But what is appropriate for an age of climate change, peak oil, economic chaos and biodiversity loss?

Three things need to be done now.

Firstly: we need to mitigate the current situation. "Business as Usual" will just hasten the disaster and lead us to steer the ships of our nations into the reefs of the destination. We need to slow down our planetary destruction and in order to gain time for steering, put our engines into reverse.

Secondly: we need to adapt to the changes we cannot avoid. Steerage and flexibility is needed as our food production, energy, housing and transport systems are effected by "peak oil", climate change, economic crisis and loss of biodiversity.

Thirdly: we need to prepare now to assist those who will undoubtedly suffer in the process, those who through no fault of their own are in the path of economic meltdown, severe weather events, spreading deserts, loss of forests and fisheries or affected by sea-level rises that they cannot avoid.

But how can we prepare in time? When I am pessimistic I don't believe we can. We have wasted four decades. We had the chance in the 1960s and 70s when the first evidence became available, but we allowed ourselves to be lulled to sleep in an orgy of greed and consumer spending the like of which the world has never seen. We seem too locked into our current course of action to make the urgent changes needed. But we can act now to lessen and shorten the damage that is likely.

Evidence of the comparative study of the previous Dark Ages of history shows that there are 7 things which we call can do now that will shorten the coming Dark Age, and help make it less severe for all involved.

- **Build community:** as if your life depended upon it: It does. Study shows that those people living in supportive and caring communities are those who can minimize the suffering of the kinds of problems and challenges that are fast approaching. Don't leave where you are to build community elsewhere, do it in the street and suburb, village and town you live in, and start now.
- **Live Simply:** avoid dependency as much as possible on complex systems. During the growth stage of a culture, increased complexity improves the quality of life, but today, as in other periods when dark ages approach, increased complexity begins to reduce the quality of life, and the best way to improve the quality of life now is to simplify as much as possible. Complex systems collapse the first and the hardest, creating the suffering of those dependent upon them. So create more time in your life by living simply.
- **Maximise creativity:** We need to socially maximize individual and collective creativity on a scale never before attempted. We need individual and collective social, political, economic, technological, environmental, ideological, spiritual, artistic and cultural creativity to provide us with the flexible tools that enable survival. Creativity in one area helps foster creativity in other areas, and in ending and minimizing the effects of a Dark Age, and in building a New Renaissance creativity is the most important.
- **Cultivate Non-Violent Wisdom:** In a Dark Age there is a rapid spread of a feeling of fear, a spreading sense of dread and terror as militant ignorance within institutions, states, nations and even individually spreads. We tend to respond to these fears by seeking to punish and protect by building invulnerability. Demons and enemies are created within families, communities, cities, nations, and internationally. Only non-violent wisdom can stem and halt this rising sense of terror.
- **Preserve knowledge:** In the approach to a Dark Age, knowledge gets swamped by a glut of information, and information gets overwhelmed with data. Wisdom and rationality get overwhelmed by superstition, and not only do we forget, we even forget that we have forgotten. Currently the world loses one language every two weeks and with this loss we lose the ecological understandings upon which that language is based. Preserving knowledge is important as otherwise it will take more than 1,000 years to escape the Dark Age.
- **Spread inclusive inter-faith eco-spirituality:** In the approach to a Dark Age there is a rise of exclusive warring fundamentalisms of many kinds. These fundamentalist spiritualities ego-locks us into collective rigidities in which the "other" is seen as the enemy, rather than as a part of a complementary vision that we all need to make our

transition successfully. Our spiritualities for too long have seen the Earth as “fallen”, a trap, school or battle from which we need to escape. These views permit and justify eco-damage, and will mean, unless corrected, that life in the Dark Age is difficult for all.

- Construct new financial and economic systems which support the other changes. Currently our rapacious consumer financial and economic system undermines our ability to achieve the other six. It doesn't have to be this way. Many thousands of communities around the world are experimenting with alternative community based systems of finance which offer hope for the future.

It is the spiritual second coming that we have all been awaiting, but of a kind not foreseen and not anticipated. As Jean Houston says “This is the time, we are the people. We are the ones we have been waiting for”.

BUILDING THE BREAKTHROUGH TO THE GREAT TURNING

If we are to end this great unraveling, we need to reinhabit time. Not just the present. Still less the past, or the future. We need a fourth concept of time. We need to reinhabit the “Everywhen”. We need to recognize that the Great Turning is going to be truly a “post-civilised” culture, as different from conventional elitist, coercive, controlling, conditioning and commercial based civilisation, as these cultures were from the hunter-gatherer cultures that preceded them. But how is this shift to be done?

There is only one power strong enough to re-equilibrate the balance between our cultures and the living world we inhabit. Joanna Macy tells us that the Great Turning is the result of the interlocking of three different kinds of work. Firstly we must slow down the pace of destruction. This is hard work as it means in some ways going against the speeding up of our lives. Slowing the pace of destruction will save lives, it will save human lives, now and the future. It will also save much more than human lives, it saves the lives of the fellow creatures, plants and animals of the terrestrial ecosystems which we share, and help maintain our disappearing biodiversity. This work, like the Greenpeace campaigns of the lobbying of governments and developers, the letter writing, protest organisation, information sharing and direct action, can be difficult and arduous. It may like the Sea Shepherd, involve putting our fragile bodies between the army, the police and the economic powers, and the people, animals or ecosystems we try to protect. This is the work of our hands. Like military campaigns, as soldiers said of the first world war, it was 90% boredom and 10% terror. For every victory, somewhere else at the moment there are even more situations lost. It is easy to feel alone and beleaguered. It is therefore very energy consuming. By itself it is necessary, but by itself it is not sufficient. All it can do is to buy us time for the other work that needs to be done. People who leave this work, through exhaustion or burnout, may feel that they are “letting down the cause”, and this feeling of guilt or shame can be reinforced by negative attitudes of others who feel even more alone. But there is a second kind of work, according to Joanna Macy.

The second kind of work, is the conceptual work of our heads. It is the imaginative and creative work of building new institutions that can keep people fed clothed and housed, during the transition to the Life Sustaining Culture of the future. It is the amazing work being done by Michael Linton, Margrit Kennedy, Bernard Laetier, Richard Dowthwaite, Hank van Narkle and many others in building community currency systems; it is the work of the Permaculture Movement of Bill Mollinson and David Holmgren; it is the Transition Towns of Rob Hopkins and many thousands of others and their Energy Descent Plans, the work of Richard Heinberg and of organisations like the Post Carbon Institute; it is the work of the Global Ecovillage Network set up by the Ross and Hildur Jackson of the Gaia Trust. The numbers of these Global Community Network initiatives are multiplying beyond measure. They too are necessary, and it is easy to see the results, for example the adoption of organic food, or complementary medicines by large marketing organisations as a breakthrough. The Industrial Growth System of Transnational Corporations are very quick to discover new ways of making profits, and co-opting even the purest systems to that end. Again, it is important not to demonise this process unduly. There are many good people who do this process of cooption, for the best of motives, and identifying and working with these people is important. But, once again, though necessary, this work is also not sufficient. This head work needs Macy's third component. It needs the work of the heart.

The work of the heart follows on from the two previous kinds of work, and can help motivate and sustain their efforts for the long haul. It involves the shifts in awareness and consciousness in the wider community, that help sustain and maintain ourselves, in living sustainably. Its work is to help people discover a new meaning in life, to help them discover their life's purpose, and to gain the emotional strength and wisdom necessary for this. It aims to break down the separation and the isolation it is so easy to feel. It is the work of creating communities of consciousness, of finding ways for personal growth and development. To this end there are hundreds of courses, books, a whole fast growing personal growth industry. This work of the heart too is necessary but not sufficient.

So what are we to do. We need all three. We need the Personal Growth, we need the Community Building, and we need the Service to the Earth. How do we integrate all three. It is one thing to understand all of this, but it is a second thing altogether to start taking action. And for this we have a huge under-utilised resource at our fingertips.

That force is the creative power of the human imagination, gathered together for collective action. This alone is the antidote to the avoidance, denial, unrealistic hope, short-term bargaining, anger and depression mentioned above as the symptoms found all too often in crisis, or traumatic situations. Just as these feelings, when suppressed and repressed cause a narrowing of our visions and a loss of realistic hope, joy, ecstasy and enthusiasm, so by going through these feelings to discover the hidden need and the unrealised yearning with which they are associated, can liberate wellsprings of creativity undreamed upon. But how is this hope to be liberated? We need a fourth leg to our stool, we need regional projects of project support, identifying those factors common to all projects and creating systems whereby which common tasks can be undertaken in a fashion that supports personal growth, builds the community as a whole, and encourages the flourishing of the whole of life. This structure needs to identify innovative ideas and ensure their rapid dissemination elsewhere, as well as identifying needed tasks currently not undertaken due to lacks at local levels.

Dragon Dreaming is built upon the principle that such a breakthrough to a true life sustaining culture is possible. We are not alone, even though at times it may seem that way. I remember years ago seeing a cartoon in the One World Centre for Oxfam in Western Australia. It was of one person with a “thought balloon” saying to themselves, “I am only one person, what difference can I make?”. The second frame showed the same person with about a dozen heads all saying, “I am only one person...”, and the third frame showed hundreds all saying the same. Dragon Dreaming aims to liberate this, our individual and collective power to truly make a difference.

In Dragon Dreaming workshops I usually say that there is one form of prejudice that you can never escape from – far worse than racism or sexism. This is a deep and abiding prejudice against yourself, and yet that is exactly what we suffer from. As a result of negative experience suffered in families, in schools and in paid employment, most people carry this as a deep wound of insecurity and uncertainty about themselves. This wound is deeply buried in their own self image, and we live our lives as though this image is who we really are. But as we see in Dragon Dreaming, who we truly are is not our limiting self image. We are in fact the person who created this self image, it narrow beliefs is not who I am! But, how do I liberate myself from such a confining strait-jacket as the delusional image of who I think I am? I know of only one way – you need experiences that show you that you are not who you think you are. You need to engage in a world that is alive, and of which your own life is just a tiny, temporary blossoming flower. This is why every Gaia Project of the Dragon Dreaming method, has as its first principle, that all projects done should be a project of personal growth for the people involved.

This is an important goal of Dragon Dreaming. We are all far more powerful than we ever give ourselves credit. As Marianne Williamson wrote, and Nelson Mandella quoted in his inauguration speech

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

The best way of discovering that you are far vaster and bigger and more capable than you think you are is to engage in something that you believe you cannot do and succeed outrageously! The most helpful Dragon Dreaming projects, that will have the biggest effect on your personal growth, are those that you believe are totally impossible before you start.

A core aspect of Dragon Dreaming is the archetype of the Dragon. But what is the Dragon? At workshops I often get people to share in pairs what the “dragon” means for them. The words suggested are very powerful, the dragon is a symbol of power, a symbol often tinged with fear, the guardian of ancient wisdom or a hidden treasure. It represents a space outside of our comfort zone, a space of the unknown, of potential or magic.

The ouroboros, the dragon or serpent eating its own tail, is an ancient symbol which represents the self consuming nature of both the living ecology of Life itself in the World, and in Jungian psychology, the inner nature of the human psyche. Thus Plato wrote "Of design he was created thus, his own waste providing his own food, and all that he did or suffered taking place in and by himself. For the Creator conceived that a being which was self-sufficient would be far more excellent than one which lacked anything; and, as he had no need to take anything or defend himself against any one..."

In Norse mythology it appears as the Midgard (or Middle Earth) serpent Jörmungandr, was one of the three children of the trickster God, Loki, who grew so large that it encircled the world. At Ragnarok, the "Twilight of the Gods" at the end of the world, this serpent will be destroyed and the world will unravel as a result. But dragons are found in other cultures too.

Despite more than 2 centuries of cultural trauma and dispossession, Aboriginal culture in Australia has survived. This is the greatest tribute to its resilience and ongoing vitality. In Australian Aboriginal belief, and also in many first nations or indigenous traditions, unlike all traditions that have been influenced by Greek or Iranian dualism, there is no separation between matter and spirit. Matter is fully enspirited, and the spiritual life is fully integrated with our material existence.

Dragon Dreaming, when it was created was at first called Waugal Dreaming. Yet so many people would ask "Waugal, what's that?" to be told it was the name of the Rainbow Serpent for the Noongar people of southwestern Western Australia, that we searched for another archetype for those who came from a European (Wetjala) rather than an Aboriginal (Noongar) culture. For this reason we chose the dragon.

As Aboriginal people believe "In the Aboriginal Dreamtime, the Waugal meandered through the landscape, creating waterways, rivers, lakes, and wetlands, from the hills to the ocean..." The distant line of these hills, called the "Moord" or "Shadow", by the Aborigines, was said to be part of the body of the Waugal.

It is all too easy for Europeans to dismiss these beliefs as legendary, but yet scientists have now demonstrated that for possibly as long as 40-50,000 years, as a part of the extinct megafauna of Australia. An ambush predator, it is believed to have lived in natural sun-traps, in waterholes, and when one marks these kinds of places they are Waugal sacred sites.

Noongar people believe the cosmos began in the fire, or "karl" (?garl?), with the yellow sky of the morning sunrise. This coming of the fire during the daylight hours ended in the evening with the lighting of the fire at the "karlup" or fire-place or hearth around which people would gather to share story and celebration. People, custodians of many different "songlines" may gather at such places, coming together in peace to share their lives, making decisions about future activities. Such gatherings are called a "karlup-gur" – creating a band of people who may share hunting or food gathering in following days. The karl thus has many associations. For example it is associated with the morning, but also with childhood. It was also associated with the Djilba season ("the flowering") that Europeans were later to call spring. It is also associated with the spirit, with the start of new activities.

Noon was associated with the white heat of the day, the period in which most activity would occur. It was associated with the “waug” the air of the air and the wind. Mental activity was most important at this time

Our interlocking crises are thus a deep message, as if the Earth itself is telling us slow learners, to “wake up” to who and what we really are. Breakdown or breakthrough! Solving the global problematique will take all of us - literally. It will take every person making a difference, and it will take us all discovering that our human potential is not only bigger than we know, it is bigger than we dream in our wildest fantasies. We have skills and abilities that we don’t even know we don’t know. And the Great Turning will take us all to liberate these potentials. Our journey as a species is far from over, although the risks of our ecocide are growing daily more deadly. But how are we to liberate such pure and dazzling creativity? To liberate our potential, and grow our humanity, the world is setting us a task. Mitigate, adapt or die. We can meet or fail this challenge, but as I said above, to meet it will take all of us, in ways we cannot yet imagine.

The answer is therefore simple. If we can encourage sufficient numbers of ordinary men and women to undertake many millions of small projects, and ensure that their experience of these projects is successful, then these people will be enthused and excited to undertake something more, something bigger, and we might just make the added difference needed. But how do we do this?

At every Dragon Dreaming workshop I have run I say that my task as a facilitator is to unleash the buried and hidden creative energy of the group. Building community is always the second objective of any Gaia Project. As Korten²⁸ shows so convincingly, it is people who are living in a supportive and caring community who can cope best when crisis occurs. When, at the start of a Dragon Dreaming initiative, we go around the circle to hear people’s stories and witness first hand, the depths of experience each person brings and the person-years of experience of even quite a small group of teenagers will exceed the depth of experience of even the most knowledgeable facilitator. We are not alone, but are part of invisible song-lines of networks, a Noosphere or “thinking web” that independent of national boundaries, covers the whole planet. As research has shown, there are only six degrees of separation, six links in this invisible chain between any two people on the planet. If you wanted to pass a message about Dragon Dreaming to ever person in the world, and you were to tell one person a day, and get them each to tell only one person per day, and so on, you would only need, over 33 days to tell 33 new people and you would have reached every man woman and child on the Earth! Like the famous lillypad that doubles in size daily to cover a whole earth in 33 days, on the thirty first day, only one quarter of the planet would be told, the thirty second, one half. We don’t know but such a mobilization of our planet may be necessary to achieve a genuine Breakthrough to resolve the interlocking crisis of issues above could be almost be possible, given the new developments in communications technologies. But to be successful, it will require a change in our mindset and our awareness and a commitment to act on that awareness do so. As a result at the start Dragon Dreaming is based therefore upon the premise that no-one should ever undertake a project alone. It is based upon mobilizing members of your own invisible community network; friends, family, colleagues, neighbours or acquaintances, to join with you to work in making your collective dreams come true whilst avoiding the apocalyptic nightmares, some of which have already been described above. We all need teams of support in the Great Turning. Dragon Dreaming is all about how to build such teams. David Korten in his book on the Great Turning

suggests our first task is to end our isolation. Once we are a part of a team, we can see that as Margaret Mead stated, it is true that we should

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

But where to start? “Our human nature” Korten suggests “is defined by our ability to choose our nature” and “true security, prosperity and meaning depends upon vibrant, caring communities”. Personal growth in the absence of community building as we shall see is not enough. But again where to start? In some ways it really doesn’t matter. The Himalayan mountain climber, paraphrasing some ideas from Goethe has written

“Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now.”

This is the magic of Dragon Dreaming. The world is as Thich Nhat Hahn has told us that we need to start wherever we are. Start where you are at. As Christopher Fry stated in his evocative poem, “A Sleep of Prisoners”

*“The human heart can go to the lengths of God
Dark and cold we may be, but this is no winter now
The frozen misery of centuries, cracks, breaks, begins to move
The thunder is the thunder of the flows, the flood, the thaw
The upstart spring!
Thank God our time is now,
where wrong comes up to meet us everywhere,
never to leave us till we take the longest stride of soul folk ever took.
Affairs are now soul sized.
Where are you making for?
The enterprise? Is exploration into God.
It takes so many thousand years to wake.
But will you wake? For pity’s sake.”*

¹ The “global problematique” is the name given to the interlocking global crises by the Club of Rome. It was made public by the first report to the Club of Rome, “Limits to Growth” (1971) by Meadows, Dennis; Randers, Jorgen and Meadows, Donella (Universe Books). Also valuable are the 20 year update “Beyond the Limits: Confronting Global Collapse, Envisioning a Sustainable Future”.

² Ghamari-Tabrizi, Sharon (2005), “The Worlds of Herman Kahn: The Intuitive Science of Thermonuclear War” (Harvard University Press). Herman Kahn of the Hudson Institute, coined this phrase in planning nuclear war fighting strategies. He also remarked "It is possible, isn't it, that parents will learn to love two-headed children twice as much?"

³ World Wildlife Fund at

http://www.panda.org/news_facts/publications/living_planet_report/living_planet_index/index.cfm

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⁴ Vitousek, Peter; Ehrlich Paul and Others (1986), “Human Appropriation of the Products of Photosynthesis” at <http://dieoff.org/page83.htm> September 4, 2008

⁵ Sir Nicholas Stern “The Economics of Climate Change” HM Treasury Report Executive Summary at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/9/9/CLOSED_SHORT_executive_summary.pdf September 4, 2008

⁶ New Economist, Monday October 30th 2006 at http://neweconomist.blogs.com/new_economist/2006/10/stern_review_2.html September 4, 2008

⁷ Penelope DeBelle July 10 “The Age” at <http://www.theage.com.au/national/roll-up-roll-up-the-garnaut-roadshow-is-coming-to-town-20080708-3bwh.html> September 4, 2008

⁸ Robin MacKie “Meltdown in the Arctic is speeding up: Scientists warn that the North Pole could be free of ice in just five years' time instead of 60” (Oberserver, August 10, 2008)

⁹ C.D.Thomas et al., 2004, Extinction risk from climate change, Nature, vol 427, proof pages 145-148.

¹⁰ Ambrose Evans-Prichard “Why the price of ‘peak oil’ is famine” (Feb 9, 2008, Telegraph) at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/main.ihtml?xml=/money/2008/02/07/cnoil107.xml> September 4, 2008

¹¹ Jeremy Elton Jacquot “Shell CEO admits that peak oil could be here in 7 years” (Jan 26, 2008, Los Angeles)

¹² Jim Lobe “Weak States got weaker in 2007” at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/nations/sovereign/failed/2008/0623index.htm> September 4, 2008

¹³ John Williamson, creator of the “Washington Consensus” argued in his article “Did the Washington Consensus Fail” that it has not failed. Joe Stiglitz in “Globalisation and its Discontents” has argued that it did. Naomi Klein in “Shock Doctrine: the rise of disaster Capitalism” clearly shows its limitations.

¹⁴ Paul Krugman (2003) “The Great Unravelling: Losing our way in the new century” (W.W.Norton, NY)

¹⁵ The speed of this forgetting cannot be minimized. According to Terralingua we are losing one whole human language at the moment every two weeks. As we lose these languages, we also lose the ecological understandings upon which that language is based, an irreparable loss.

¹⁶ Diamond, Jarrod "The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee"

¹⁷ Flannery, Tim "The Future Eaters"

¹⁸ Hartman, Thom "The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight"

¹⁹ Tainter, Joseph, "The Collapse of Complex Systems"

²⁰ Diamond, Jarrod, "Collapse: How Societies Succeed or Fail"

²¹ Toynbee, Arnold "A Study of History"

²² Homer Dixon, "The Upside of Down: Complexity, Creativity and Collapse of Civilisations"

²³ This analysis has been provided by Johan Galtung, in his predicted collapse of the Soviet Empire and the forthcoming collapse of the American one.

²⁴ The "World Systems Theory" of Immanuel Wallerstein and others illustrates the nature of this system of expansion.

²⁵ "The Song of the Dodo; Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions"

²⁶ This is the message of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's essay on "The Spiritual Implications of the Atomic Bomb".

²⁷ Fukuyama, Francis "The End of History"

²⁸ Korten, David "The Great Turning"