

bewitched, bothered, and bewildered

Those words have described me for half a century. Bewitched when I feel myself lived by a purpose that does not feel my own. Bothered by what I see us, humankind, becoming. And bewildered that we don't get it. The rest of the words of the song I have never listened to very carefully. Probably the usual schmaltz, yet another way to sing about love and sex. Isn't that what all popular music is about? Nowadays that song has become a staple of the kind of tamed jazz that I can occasionally tolerate as background. I have also always liked alliteration, rhyme in the first letters rather than word endings. The poetry of Vikings who wrote Beowulf. My mother's genealogy, not my soul. As everyone else I have my unexplainable contrasts.

I live alone by choice. The older I get the more silence I need. Daytime hours are spent mostly outside, definitely not in my mind but a whole other awareness. I've lived here now almost ten years, and it is still fresh every morning. I think I know every plant, every tree on these six acres, but of course I see new plants, even new species, often. Last year we had two new species of plants, so far this year only one. I don't know whether that is normal or whether it has something to do with the changing weather. Oh yes, the weather is definitely changing. For some years now we have had less rain than what used to be normal. Fruit trees produce at a different time, and the fruit is smaller and not as juicy. That is not imagination, others notice it as well. And of course in ten years everything has grown taller, thicker, closer together. More beautiful, more *wild*. I like that. The bright leaves and red flowers I planted here and there shine more brilliantly. The pond looks different after two huge trees were cut a year ago so there is more light. I have two chairs there, one for me and the other for a guest if and when I have one. I sit there for hours some days, mesmerized by the always rippling surface, straight ripples from a breeze, complex interacting circular ripples when a fish comes to the surface or the ducks move around. The water is not clear but reflects blue skies and white clouds.

In the house I am in my mind. For half a century I keep coming back to thinking of us humans, wondering about the changes I have seen in my life time. Different relationships with each other and with the planet. Too many differences to list or comprehend.

Of course there is a deep connection between my outdoor nature consciousness and my thinking. The right brain awareness embraced in Nature has leaked into my left brain western intellectual thinking. Not a very harmonious blend.

Do I really want to read what some famous commentator said about what is happening in Egypt, or Israel, or in Indiana? I know what is happening, daily details no longer change the big picture.

Years ago I figured out that humankind is at war with Nature, and with itself. The same war or two different ones? Western civilization has changed who and what we are. Perhaps all civilizations did. We think differently, we see the world differently. We have come to think ourselves apart from all other life forms, apart from the planet. Westerners think, believe, that it is our job to manage the planet as well as our own societies. We have totally forgotten that the planet, Mother Earth, existed for millions of years without us. We appeared on the scene a hundred thousand years ago, walking upright on two legs so that we had hands to manipulate with, with a swollen brain. For most of those first 100,000 years we, as all other life forms, adapted to the planet as we found it. In snow and ice we adapted, made shelters from snow, dressed with animal pelts, survived on an all meat diet because we ate all of the animals we hunted, not just muscle meat as we do today. When we found ourselves in a desert, we learned where and how to find water, what was edible. We survived. We survived at 20,000 feet altitude where our blood adapted to get enough oxygen from thinner air. We survived for a thousand years on small islands in the Pacific where nothing grows except coconut palms and perhaps sweet potato. But the lagoon is full of Life and we learned what we had to eat for a healthy survival diet.

Until one day some demented early human had the unthinkable thought that he had enough of nomading around to find food, he was going to sit on one piece of land and grow the plants he needed to eat. Grow the animals he needed for his diet. That led to the even more outlandish

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idea of *owning*. No human had ever imagined such a concept. Owning led to hierarchies, some people own more than others and therefore are better, more powerful. We learned to own land, plants, animals, other humans. We imagined ourselves the boss.

In only 10,000 years—no more than a second in the billion years Life existed on this planet—we have come to today, fighting the final war for owning all life, as well as owning the planet. We forgot how to adapt to the planet when we imagined we could adapt the planet to our wants. We learned to invent the force we thought we needed to own everything. Now we have weapons to literally destroy all life on this planet. We call that progress.

Ursula K. LeGuin in one of her wonderful books writes

OWNING IS OWING AND HAVING IS HOARDING.

Now when I find my way through the storm of the trillion words that are fighting for attention in cyber space I can only think how wrong we are, misinformed, unaware. I think back to a lecture I heard at the 1956 yearly meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Even in 1965 scientists had begun to study human population growth. One of the featured speakers report on a study he had completed. A large cage, ten feet on all sides. In the cage a few ramps, a second floor here and there. He started with two mice, Adam and Eve. They did not survive. He tried three, four, five, until a population began to grow. The mice explored their artificial planet, and as all life forms adapted. They made nests, found the water and food (from outside). The population increased exponentially because there was no limit to the food and water. The mice developed a culture. Briefly the population came to a fairly stable number. Then this artificial environment became crowded. The mice radically changed their behavior. Males attacked other males, biting off tails. Female mice ate their young. The mouse culture fell apart, the mice degenerated. The population crashed. Then he talked about how his experiment might illustrate what might happen to humans as they crowded the planet. The graph for the growth of his mice was a simple exponential curve: an upward curve steeper and steeper until it goes almost straight up. He theorized a sigmoid or S curve for the growth of human population: first increasing exponentially then slowing down to a flat horizontal line He theorized that the population of humans could not exceed 9 billion unless we could manage zero growth.

Today it is obvious that his projections left out important considerations. There are nations with zero growth now. They have to cope with more old people and not enough young people to sustain an economy. We could have thought of consequences much earlier, but we didn't. With everything we do we still do not take into account tomorrow and the day after.

As the mice we too "grew" cultures, many different ones depending on local circumstances. Now one of these cultures dominates so strongly that it is becoming a world culture. In this culture humans changed how they fit into the planet. The second half of the previous century was a period of very rapid change in the life style of a growing segment of a few populations — a segment in the U.S. called the middle class. A life style so bloated that it is obviously unsustainable. But a life style that could not help but be wanted by all humans. This artificial life style was made possible by what we call the Industrial Revolution, driven by human inventions and the ruthless exploration, and then inevitable depletion, of natural resources. We changed the planet. Instead of adapting to the planet as we found it, we imagined ourselves superior beings who would adapt the planet to our ever increasing wants.

It is becoming all too clear that something is very wrong with that view of who we are and how we think we must live. If there is one aspect of this culture that stands out it must be our attachment to *top down*. We pride ourselves on being a nation of laws (all man-made), we cannot imagine living without governments within governments within governments. Endless hierarchies. Change is expected to come from the top.

Some of us realize that our first priority is to survive. We can only survive by severely simplifying that newly acquired life style. But changing a way of seeing reality—especially if it is seen as going backward—is difficult; perhaps impossible.

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1. Now we find ourselves in a world with a growing population, an inordinate shift of wealth to a few, and impoverishment of the many. All over the world the many are beginning to stir, but the few have the guns. It will take great sacrifices and a strong continuing push from the bottom to make this war more even. The few get more oppressive while grabbing the last few cents they can squeeze from us, as well as the resources of the planet. That is one war. But there are at least two more wars going on at the same time.

2. Over the last 300 years, and mostly the last 60 years, our human exploitation of the earth has been accompanied with an utterly thoughtless despoiling, poisoning the ground, water and air of the planet. With total disregard for consequences we have changed the surface of the planet to such an extent that the planet is reacting. *The globe is warming*. Climate change is no longer deniable. Hotter hot and colder cold, wetter and drier, more severe storms, melting not only polar ice and snow but the glaciers of the planet. That is the second war. Certain to affect all humankind in one way and (not or) another.

3. And then there is the third war. In our haste to change the face of the earth we have depleted and continue to deplete the biodiversity the planetary ecology requires. By cutting enormous areas of forest, by draining wetlands, by changing rivers, cutting roads through local ecologies, we are causing the extinction of species. First we killed off all large animals, predators we imagined our enemies. Now we are eradicating species we are not even aware of. A species every 20 minutes according to Greenpeace. The health of an ecology depends on its variety. By reducing the diversity of Life, we are disabling the ecology that we need for food and water.

Our reaction has mostly been “what can we do about it” as if we were in charge, as if we have the power, the knowledge, the wisdom, to change the planetary ecology of which we are an integral part. The concept of adapting to an environment we do not (cannot) control has vanished. I am bewildered by how quickly we could have forgotten the law of survival: ADAPT.

War on ourselves—a very few against all of us—, global warming, depletion of biodiversity. Three very different wars at the same time, on different battle fields, can neither be fought nor won. The only outcome can be an uncontrollable mess, chaos. A crash, also talked about now as the Sixth Extinction. What scientists have learned of the five earlier extinctions—65 million years ago the disappearance of dinosaurs—is that each extinction has always been followed by a period of accelerated evolution: making new species. The Earth is ultra creative after a serious wounding. Who knows, homo sapiens may evolve into an entirely new species, or several species, fitting into a renewed planet at a future time.

Stephen Hawking, one of the most famous modern physicists advises “Abandon earth, or face extinction.”

<http://bigthink.com/ideas/21691>



Now imagine that we can change our ***thinking***.

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Instead of war think cooperation. Instead of leaders leading, think caring and sharing. Thinking that everything must be controlled, top down, is a *trap*. We allowed ourselves to be trapped upside down. Think growth, from the ground *up*. Think a new reality, where “we” is the core of who we are and how we fit into the Whole. Think as we used to think when we knew ourselves cosily inside all Life; part of, never the boss.

We are children of Mother Earth, as most, probably all, indigenous people felt.

Think of the Earth as a living organism, huge and complex and chaotic in a miraculously fabulous way. Think of us learning together to survive as WE, not separate as the seven billion I’s we are now. Any new reality is growing from the bottom up.

As her children our responsibility is to keep Mother Earth alive and well; not control her.

Control is a heavy word, it crushes. Down.

We must think UP, from the bottom up.

Then watch this movie by Sugata Mitra, an Education Scientist from India:

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/sugata_mitra_the_child_driven_education.html

A SELF-ORGANIZING SYSTEM IS ONE WHERE THE SYSTEM STRUCTURE APPEARS WITHOUT EXPLICIT INTERVENTION FROM OUTSIDE ALWAYS SHOWS EMERGENCE OF A PROPERTY NOT PREVIOUSLY OBSERVED AS A FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTIC OF THE SYSTEM.

Fancy words to say learning is more important than teaching. Not only more important but it happens all the time *without* teaching. Of course. All of us learned to speak one or more languages long before we were taught spelling and grammar.

Wars are top down. Governments are top down.

Corporations are top down. Laws are top down.

Change that lasts is always from the bottom up;

all human cultures are from the bottom up.

**COULD THIS BE THE CHANGE OF CONSCIOUSNESS
THAT MANY THINK OR HOPE MAY HAPPEN SOON?**

It is possible. It will be messy while the three wars war themselves out, but within each of us a new consciousness may grow, **WE** rather than **ME** ...

robert wolff, 20 may 2011

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