



## The World Needs Change Makers

Paul Astin

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Right now, our great, life-sustaining earth is in deep peril. There is the very real threat of pending ecological collapse. The message among credible scientists is the same: our human behavior is destroying the environment, and at a faster rate than anyone predicted. There are significant adverse implications for human populations worldwide. At risk is the future viability of our planet to sustain life.

In June, 2011, scientists with the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the International Program on the State of the Ocean presented a new report to the United Nations. In a press release entitled, “Multiple Ocean Stresses Threaten Globally Significant Marine Extinction,” two of the report’s conclusions sum up the general tenor of these recent studies; (1) “The speed of many negative changes to the ocean...are faster than anticipated;” and, (2) “Unless action is taken now, the consequences of our activities are at a high risk of causing...the next globally significant [mass] extinction event in the ocean.” The report is full of gloomy statistics and dire warnings and it similar to other reports appearing with increasing regularity in the news. In November, 2013, a team of scientists led by Dr. Natalia Shakhova of the University of Alaska, reported a dramatic increase in methane gas released by melting permafrost, with adverse effects 100 times more powerful than that of carbon dioxide. The message is clear; unless we human beings significantly change our behavior, we will soon witness rising sea levels, flooding, shifting weather pattern, mass extinctions, and an increase in violent civil unrest as droughts and famines impact vast segments of the world’s population.

Within the environmental movement, a group of psychologists has developed new theories to help explain why human beings are unable or unwilling to alter their destructive behaviors towards the environment despite the obvious threat these behaviors pose to future planetary health and human viability. These ‘Ecopsychologists’ as they are called, argue that human beings are, in actuality, natural environmentalists. Historically speaking, balanced and sustainable relations with the earth have been the predominant paradigm in human cultures. On the timescale of human life on earth, our current exploitative relationships and attitudes of dominance over nature are relatively recent developments. Ecopsychologists argue that our current behavior is a kind of mental pathology or illness and is caused, in part, by our current physical isolation from wild nature, our distance from things of this earth, our prolonged time away from where we were born and grew up in the evolutionary ancestral map of time. This unexpected isolation from our homeland of the wild earth has been the source of our willing disregard for the growing, living, and breathing planet.

Looking at the ways in which contemporary indigenous or ‘nature-based’ peoples live, and considering that 99% of human history was spent in similarly-organized tribal groups, homo sapiens seem to have a natural disposition to care-take the environment. Cultural beliefs and practices found among traditional peoples uniformly place human



beings in the role earth stewards. There is an imbedded reciprocity, a conscious balance between give and take, an attitude of benevolence towards life and living systems. Tribal peoples are largely animistic, and earth is seen as living and therefore sacred. Reverence describes human attitudes towards plants, animals, and ecological systems, regarded as generously sustaining human life.<sup>1</sup>

Observing the tendency of native populations to avoid exploitive relationships with nature, Ecopsychologists argue that post-agricultural, post-industrial human beings who descend evolutionarily from a long nomadic ancestry, must possess an ‘ecological unconscious,’ a hidden sense of earth stewardship that is waiting to be brought back into consciousness. How is this to happen? How are people expected to rediscover their innate tendency to be conscious caretakers of the earth? How are modern humans going to uncover their ecological unconscious and begin creating a sustainable relationship to the planet? While the answers to these questions can be involved and complex, there is growing evidence that developing ‘deep nature connection,’ will awaken one’s latent sense of environmental stewardship.

An important component of the New Story describes our tremendous individual responsibility to becoming well informed, environmentally conscious, and ecologically mindful. As young people enter the workforce and express a growing commitment to realizing and expressing their unique gifts, adopting a role of earth steward becomes a requisite for the survival of humanity and the earth. Conscious, environmental action can no longer be reserved for activists. The survival of our species will depend upon broad and collective behavioral change. Schools must recognize and adopt the mandate offer a curriculum that can awaken adolescent sensibilities and commitments to planetary healing.

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<sup>1</sup>In the forward to Bill Plotkin’s Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche (California: New World Library, 2003), a book which advocates for transformative, wild-nature immersion experiences as the key to finding one’s ‘gift.’ cultural historian and theologian, Thomas Berry offers lucid thoughts on indigenous peoples’ relationship to nature: “In our association with indigenous cultures, we began to appreciate [that among]...these earlier cultures, the universe was experienced primarily as a presence *to be communed with and instructed by*, not a collection of natural resources *to be used* for utilitarian purposes. The winds, the mountains, the soaring birds, the wildlife roaming the forests, the stars splashed across the heavens in the dark of night: these were all communicating the deepest experiences that humans would ever know...Above all, this larger context of human existence was a caring world. It provided food and shelter, and healing in time of sickness. Beyond economic needs, the natural world in all its wonder provided inspiration for song and dance and poetry...the whole of life was thought of as a celebration of existence. There were the anxieties concerning food and shelter, there was sickness and death. Yet so long as there was assistance from the powers of the universe, these could be accepted and dealt with creatively. Suffering and death could be endured without fear because they occurred in a meaningful context of interpretation” (pp. xiii-xiv).