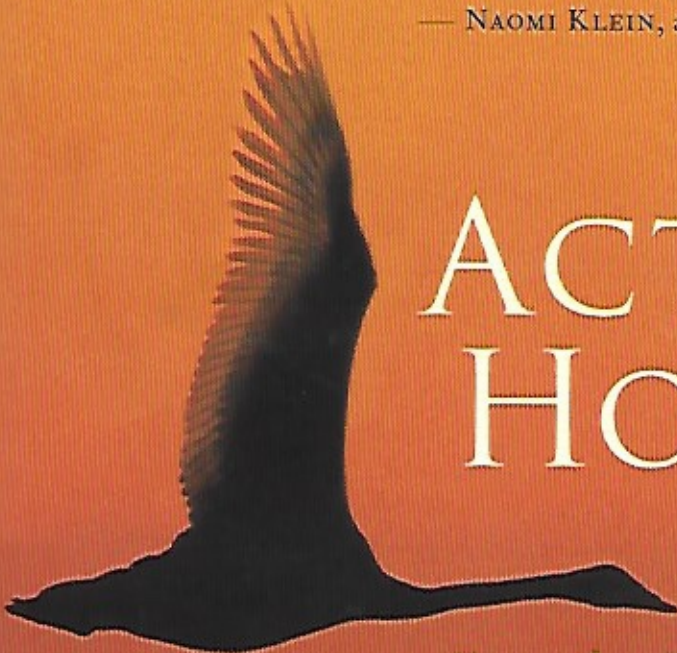


"Books about social and ecological change too often leave out a vital component: how do we change ourselves so that we are strong enough to fully contribute to this great shift? *Active Hope* fills this gap beautifully, guiding readers on a journey of gratitude, grief, interconnection, and, ultimately, transformation."

— NAOMI KLEIN, author of *The Shock Doctrine*



# ACTIVE HOPE

How to  
Face the Mess We're in  
without Going Crazy



JOANNA MACY &  
CHRIS JOHNSTONE

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Three Stories of Our Time*

*When the stories a society shares are out of tune  
with its circumstances, they can become self-limiting,  
even a threat to survival. That is our current situation.*

DAVID KORTEN, *The Great Turning*<sup>1</sup>

On May 7, 2001, journalists gathered for a press briefing at the White House. Ari Fleischer, President Bush's press secretary, had nothing to announce that day but invited questions from the assembled crowd. Rising energy costs quickly became the lead topic, with one of the early questions evoking a strong response.

JOURNALIST: "Does the President believe that, given the amount of energy Americans consume per capita, how much it exceeds any other citizen in any other country in the world, does the President believe we need to correct our lifestyles to address the energy problem?"

MR. FLEISCHER: "That's a big no. The President believes that it's an American way of life, and that it should be the goal of policy makers to protect the American way of life."<sup>2</sup>



While presidents come and go, Mr. Fleischer's "big no" remains a powerful force in our society. It is the voice that doesn't question the way we live. This conviction grows out of a particular story about how things are in our world. By *story*, we don't mean a work of fiction but rather the way we make sense of the events we see happening.

In this chapter we identify three stories being enacted in our time, as mentioned in the introduction. The first assumes that our society is on the right track and that we can carry on with business as usual. The second reveals the destructive consequences of the business-as-usual mode and the progressive unraveling of our biological, ecological, and social systems. The third is about the groundswell of response to danger and the multifaceted transition to a life-sustaining civilization. Recognizing that we can choose the story we live from can be liberating; finding a good story to take part in adds to our sense of purpose and aliveness. We will explore how these stories shape our response to global crisis.

#### THE FIRST STORY: BUSINESS AS USUAL

Of the food you've eaten in the last twenty-four hours, how much is based on ingredients produced hundreds, or even thousands, of miles away? For most of us living in industrialized countries, the answer is *lots of it*. The average carrot, head of lettuce, or box of strawberries sold in supermarkets in Iowa, for example, is likely to have traveled more than eighteen hundred miles.<sup>3</sup> And it's not just our food: many of the things we use have traveled vast distances to reach us. Transportation costs are a major factor in making ours the most energy-costly era in history. Ari Fleischer might think of this as the American way of life. But it isn't just American. Increasingly, for those living in affluent parts of our world, it is becoming the modern way, the accepted way, the one we think of as normal.

This modern life we're describing holds many attractions. It's common for people to take vacations in faraway places and to have their own cars, computers, televisions, and fridges. Just a few

generations ago, such comforts, if attainable at all, would have been seen as the preserve of the super-rich. Nowadays advertisements give the impression that everyone should have these things, and progress is measured in terms of how much more we have than we used to or how much farther and faster we can go.

One way of thinking about our times is that we are enacting a wonderful success story. Economic and technological development has made many aspects of our lives easier. If we're looking at how to move forward, the path this story suggests is "more of the same, please." We're calling this story Business as Usual.

This is the story told by most mainstream policy makers and corporate leaders. Their view is that economies can, and must, continue to grow. Even in the face of economic downturns and periods of recession, the dominant assumption is that it won't be long before things pick up again. Expressing his trust in the path of economic growth, in November 2010 President Obama said, "The single most important thing we can do to reduce our debt and deficits is to grow."<sup>4</sup>

For a market economy to grow, it needs to increase sales. That means encouraging us to buy, and consume, more than we already do. Advertising plays a key role in stimulating consumption, and increasingly children are targeted as a way of boosting each household's appetite for goods. Estimates suggest that the average American child watches between twenty-five thousand and forty thousand television commercials a year. In the United Kingdom, it is about ten thousand.<sup>5</sup> As we grow up, we learn by watching others. Our views about what's normal and necessary are shaped by what we see.

When you're living in the middle of this story, it's easy to think of it as just the way things are. Young people may be told there is no alternative but to find their place in this scheme of things. Getting ahead is presented as the main plot, supported by the subplots of finding a partner, fending for your family, looking good, and buying stuff. In this view of life, the problems of the world are seen as far away and irrelevant to the dramas of our personal lives.

Transmitted by global media, this story of modern living is catching on around the world and arousing an increasing appetite for consumption. Before 1970 just four items were regarded as essential purchases in China — a bicycle, a sewing machine, a wrist-watch, and a radio. By the 1980s a growing consumer class had expanded this list to include a fridge, a color TV, a washing machine, and a tape recorder. A decade later, it had become normal for more and more people in China to have a car, a computer, a mobile phone, and air conditioning.<sup>6</sup> And it's a list that's still growing, as Joe Hatfield, CEO of Walmart Asia, explains:

We started out with four feet of skin care; today it's twenty feet. Today we don't have deodorants, but someday down the road we will have deodorants in China. Five years ago perfumes were not a big business here. But if you look today it's the emerging market...there's a lot fewer bicycles, so that takes away from the exercise side of it, so people are getting larger, so what's that tell you? Sales of exercise equipment's getting good, exercise wear, jogging outfits, and at some point, we'll have Slimfast and all those type of products.<sup>7</sup>

Some view this as progress.

#### Box 1.1. Some Core Assumptions of Business as Usual

- Economic growth is essential for prosperity.
- Nature is a commodity to be used for human purposes.
- Promoting consumption is good for the economy.
- The central plot is about getting ahead.
- The problems of other peoples, nations, and species are not our concern.

Why shouldn't people in other parts of the world develop the lifestyle thought of as normal in the West? And why shouldn't we continue with the Business as Usual of economic growth, with people buying more things and using so much energy (see Box 1.1)? To answer those questions, we need to look at the shadow side of modern living and also at where this is taking us. That leads us to our next story.

#### THE SECOND STORY: THE GREAT UNRAVELING

In 2010 polls for both CBS<sup>8</sup> and Fox News<sup>9</sup> showed that a majority believed the conditions for the next generation would be worse than for people living today. Two years earlier, an international poll of more than 61,600 people in sixty countries yielded similar results.<sup>10</sup> With so many people losing confidence that things will be okay, a very different account of events is emerging. Since it involves a perception that our world is in serious decline, we take a term used by social thinker David Korten and call this story the Great Unraveling.<sup>11</sup>

In our work with people addressing their concerns about the world, we're struck by how many issues are triggering alarm. The list in Box 1.2 identifies five common areas of concern, and most likely you have some others you would add to this list. Facing these problems can feel uncomfortable, even overwhelming, but in order to get to where we want to go, we need to start from where we are. The story of the Great Unraveling offers a disturbing picture of where that is.

#### Box 1.2. The Great Unraveling of the Early Twenty-First Century

- |                      |                              |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| • Economic decline   | • Social division and war    |
| • Resource depletion | • Mass extinction of species |
| • Climate change     |                              |



### Economic Decline

The economic crisis that erupted in 2008 saw not only the collapse of financial institutions but also rising prices, unemployment, home foreclosures, and food riots in many parts of our world. Just a few years earlier, at the beginning of 2005, the global economy was thought of as booming. With house prices rising fast in the United States, property was considered a "safe" investment. There was money to be made in the mortgage business, and loans were freely given, even to those with poor credit ratings. But this boom grew into a bubble that eventually burst. An economist might view this as part of a boom-and-bust cycle. Another phrase we'd use to describe what happened is *overshoot and collapse*. Here's why.

When something moves beyond the point at which it can be sustained, we call this *overshoot*. To restore balance, we need to notice and correct such overextension. If we don't, and the system keeps pushing for more and more, that system can only go so far before reaching a point of breakdown and collapse. The housing market couldn't keep growing indefinitely; neither can the economy.

After years of unsustainable growth, the bubble eventually burst in the US housing market, and in 2006 and 2007 property prices collapsed. Since so many financial institutions were invested in the mortgage industry, the crisis affected the entire economy. Like a row of dominoes, financial giants fell one after the other. Governments borrowed huge amounts of money to prop up ailing institutions that had gone first into overshoot and then into collapse. But what if the whole economic system is in overshoot mode and is now unraveling as a consequence?

The bubble of continuing economic growth depends on an ever-increasing input of resources and generates ever-higher levels of toxic waste. The more we push beyond sustainable limits for both of these, the more the unraveling occurs.

### Resource Depletion

In 1859, when the first of the US oil fields was discovered in Pennsylvania, the world's population stood at just over a billion people. By 1930 it had doubled, and by 1974, with increased food production from oil-powered agriculture, it doubled again to 4 billion. We are already well on the way to another doubling, with global population passing the 7 billion mark in 2011. It isn't just population that's growing; the spread of modern lifestyles, as discussed above, has amplified our appetites, especially for energy.

In the twentieth century, global consumption of fossil fuels increased twentyfold. Oil has been our dominant fuel, and we are now consuming more than 80 million barrels a day. If we continue at this rate, we will use up available supplies within a few decades.<sup>12</sup> Problems start long before we run out; as oil fields become depleted, the remaining reserves become more difficult and costly to extract. The same is true of the world's supply as a whole. As a result, fuel prices are rising and the age of cheap oil is already behind us.

Each big rise in the price of oil over the last thirty-five years has been followed by a recession, with the price of oil doubling in just twelve months prior to the economic downturn of 2008.<sup>13</sup> When oil production levels move past their peak and into decline (the point referred to as "peak oil"), the inability to meet demand will push prices through the roof.

We're unlikely to be rescued by new oil source discoveries; for the last three decades more oil has been consumed each year than has been found in new reserves. By 2006 that deficit had grown to four barrels used up for every new barrel discovered.<sup>14</sup> What's more, the new reserves are either difficult to reach, as is the case with the deep-water wells over a mile beneath the ocean's surface, or are of much poorer quality, as is the case with the tar sands in Canada.

Our collective oil consumption cannot be sustained. If we don't address this issue, we will be heading for a crash.

Even more crucial to life on our planet, the availability of freshwater is also in decline. A recent United Nations report warns that within twenty years, as much as two-thirds of the world's population could be at risk of water shortages.<sup>15</sup> Industrialization, irrigation, population growth, and modern lifestyles have dramatically increased our water consumption, with water use increasing sixfold during the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> Climate change has also been a factor, with more rain in some parts of the world but much less in others. Since 1970 severe droughts have increased, and the proportion of the Earth's land surface suffering very dry conditions has grown from 15 to 30 percent.<sup>17</sup>

### *Climate Change*

When more people consume more things, we not only deplete resources, but we also produce more waste. The rubbish generated each year in the United States could fill a convoy of garbage trucks long enough to go round the world six times.<sup>18</sup> Not all our waste is so visible: each year, the average European puts out 8.1 tons of carbon dioxide; the average American more than double this.<sup>19</sup> While this greenhouse gas is invisible, its effects are not. Climate change is no longer only a distant threat for future generations: it has arrived in measurable and destructive form.

At the time, the 1980s was the warmest decade ever recorded. The 1990s were even warmer, and the decade starting in 2000 warmer still.<sup>20</sup> Linked to this warming, weather-related disasters (including floods, droughts, and major hurricanes) have increased dramatically: on average, three hundred events were recorded every year in the 1980s, 480 events every year in the 1990s, and 620 events every year in the decade up to 2008. In 2007 there were 874 weather-related disasters worldwide.<sup>21</sup>

As warming causes water to evaporate more quickly, land is drying out so much in some parts of the world that crops are failing and wildfires are becoming more intense. In Brazil, the droughts in 2005 were considered a once-a-century event. Yet the droughts that followed in 2010 were even worse. In Washington State, there has been more forest loss from wildfires in the last ten years than in the previous three decades combined.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, warmer winds carry more water from the oceans, causing other areas to suffer an increase in flooding and extreme rainfall events. Ronald Neilson, a professor of bioclimatology at Oregon State University, explains: "As the planet warms, more water is getting evaporated from the oceans and all that water has to come down somewhere as precipitation."<sup>23</sup>

In Bangladesh, fourteen inches of rain fell in a single day in 2004, contributing to floods that left 10 million homeless and much of the crop yield destroyed. The floods in Pakistan in 2010 put a fifth of the country underwater, displacing 20 million people.

Most of the world's major cities developed as ports bordering the sea or major rivers, and more than 630 million people live less than thirty-three feet above sea level. If the ice sheets in Greenland and West Antarctica continue melting, rising water levels will flood London, New York, Miami, Mumbai, Calcutta, Sydney, Shanghai, Jakarta, Tokyo, and many other major cities.<sup>24</sup> Melting ice is also significant because land and sea surfaces absorb more of the sun's warmth than ice cover does. This creates a vicious cycle (see Box 1.3), in which the more the ice melts, the less it reflects the sun's heat and the warmer it gets, leading to further ice melting.

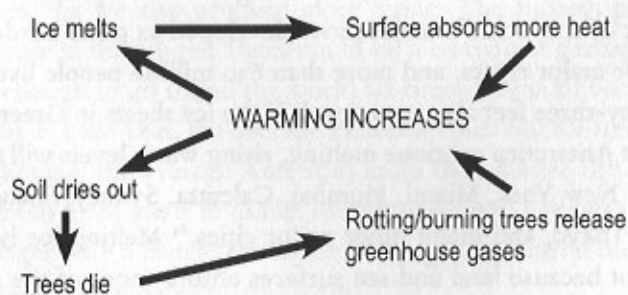
Forests play a protective role by absorbing carbon dioxide, but as woodlands are chopped down, we lose this crucial process. Tropical trees are additionally at risk because when warmer air dries out the soil beyond a certain point, the ground can no longer support large trees. A global temperature increase of 7.2°F (4°C) could be



enough to kill much of the Amazon rain forest.<sup>25</sup> If this happened, not only would we lose the forest's cooling effect, but the greenhouse gases released from rotting or burning trees would further add to warming, setting off another vicious cycle. The term *runaway climate change* is used to describe this dangerous situation, in which the consequences of warming cause more warming to occur (see Box 1.3). Professor Kevin Anderson of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change warns of the catastrophe this could lead to:

For humanity, it's a matter of life or death...it's extremely unlikely that we wouldn't have mass death at 4°C. If you have got a population of nine billion by 2050 and you hit 4°C, 5°C or 6°C, you might have half a billion people surviving.<sup>26</sup>

Box 1.3. Amplifying Loops in Runaway Climate Change



### Social Division and War

At the moment, the poor of our world are bearing the brunt of the Great Unraveling. As oil prices have gone up, the cost of food has rocketed. Global food prices more than doubled between February 2001 and February 2011, pushing more and more people below

the poverty line.<sup>27</sup> In 2010 more than 900 million people suffered chronic hunger. Meanwhile, the richest 20 percent of our world's population (that's anyone able to spend more than \$10 a day) receive three-quarters of the total income.<sup>28</sup>

While some argue that economic growth is needed to tackle poverty, wealth has flowed much more to the rich than to the poor as the global economy has grown. The number of millionaires and billionaires increases, while nearly half the world's population still lives on less than \$2.50 a day.<sup>29</sup> Within affluent countries too, the gap between rich and poor has grown wider. Twenty-five years ago, the richest 1 percent in the United States earned 12 percent of the national income and owned 33 percent of the wealth. In 2011 they earned nearly a quarter of the income and owned 40 percent of the wealth.<sup>30</sup> Studies show the more economically divided a society becomes, the more trust levels fall, crime increases, and communities fall apart.<sup>31</sup>

The UN Millennium Project estimates that extreme poverty and world hunger could be eliminated by 2025 for a cost of approximately \$160 billion a year.<sup>32</sup> The world's military spending in 2010 was ten times that amount, with the US government spending almost as much as all the other countries in the world put together.<sup>33</sup> The unraveling of our world comes, in part, from seeking security through battling enemies rather than addressing the threats presented by deepening inequalities, resource depletion, and climate change.

### Mass Extinction of Species

With rising pollution, habitat destruction, and the disturbance wrought by climate change, the toll on wildlife has been enormous. A third of all amphibians, at least a fifth of all mammals, and an eighth of all bird species are now threatened with extinction. "The Global Biodiversity Outlook," a UN report, concluded:

In effect, we are currently responsible for the sixth major extinction event in the history of Earth, and the greatest since the dinosaurs disappeared, 65 million years ago.<sup>34</sup>

Some species play critical roles in the healthy functioning of natural systems; we depend on them for our survival. Microscopic plankton in the oceans, for example, is the food that fish depend on; these plankton also produce much of the oxygen we breathe. When carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels is absorbed by the oceans, it makes the seawater more acidic, harming the plankton. The combination of ocean acidity and warming water has already led to a dramatic decline in the global population of plankton.<sup>35</sup> If this decline continues, we don't know at what point it will yield catastrophic consequences — such as the collapse of fish life or a substantial reduction in the oxygen available to us.

#### THE DOUBLE REALITY

The stories of Business as Usual and the Great Unraveling offer starkly contrasting accounts of the state of our world. They are two different realities coexisting in the same time and space. You probably know people who live in a different story than you. You may also be moving between stories yourself. It's possible to spend part of a day in our own business-as-usual mode, making plans for a future we assume will be much like today. Then something triggers an awareness of the mess we're in, and we recognize in our hearts and minds the crash that lies ahead.

For increasing numbers of people, the crash has come already: homes flooded after extreme rainfall, farms abandoned because of long-term drought, water supplies contaminated and undrinkable, jobs or savings lost. The mainstream reality of Business as Usual is increasingly becoming interrupted by the bad news of the Great Unraveling.

When we first become aware of the grimness of our situation, it can come as quite a shock. Most of these issues are squeezed out of mainstream media, their coverage confined to occasional documentaries or fringe publications. The gaze of the modern press, particularly in the Western world, is more focused on gossip about celebrities. We live, as Al Gore puts it, in a culture of distraction.<sup>36</sup>

When these issues do come up in conversation, they are often met by awkward silences. Two different views commonly block the flow of words. The first dismisses the problem as overblown. This is the voice of the first story that says it's not really that bad. The second perspective fully inhabits the Great Unraveling. This view sees continued decline as so inevitable as to render it not worth talking about. There is a resigned acceptance that things have gone too far, that we can't do anything about them, that we've crossed a point of no return.

The expression *things have gone too far* is another way of saying we are in overshoot. We are too late to prevent the harm already done or to prevent aspects of collapse already well under way. Overfishing has already led to the devastating collapse of many of the world's fisheries. Climate change has already led to an increase in extreme weather events worldwide. Many oil-producing countries (including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia) are already past their production peak, their oil output now in decline.<sup>37</sup> These things have already happened. But we can learn from them and make choices about where we go from here. In their detailed study of the global overshoot in our material economy, environmental scientists Donella Meadows, Jørgen Randers, and Dennis Meadows write:

Overshoot can lead to two different outcomes. One is a crash of some kind. Another is a deliberate turnaround, a correction, a careful easing down.... We believe that a correction is possible and that it could lead to a desirable, sustainable,



sufficient future for all the world's peoples. We also believe that if a profound correction is not made soon, a crash of some sort is certain. And it will occur within the lifetimes of many who are alive today.<sup>38</sup>

The story of Business as Usual is putting us on a collision course with disaster. And by itself, the Great Unraveling can seem like a horror story that overwhelms and defeats, paralyzing us. Fortunately there is a third story, one that is becoming increasingly visible. You are probably already part of it.

#### THE THIRD STORY: THE GREAT TURNING

In the Agricultural Revolution of ten thousand years ago, the domestication of plants and animals led to a radical shift in the way people lived. In the Industrial Revolution that began just a few hundred years ago, a similar dramatic transition took place. These weren't just changes in the small details of people's lives. The whole basis of society was transformed, including people's relationship with one another and with Earth.

Right now a shift of comparable scope and magnitude is occurring. It's been called the Ecological Revolution, the Sustainability Revolution, even the Necessary Revolution. This is our third story: we call it the Great Turning and see it as the essential adventure of our time. It involves the transition from a doomed economy of industrial growth to a life-sustaining society committed to the recovery of our world. This transition is already well under way.

In the early stages of major transitions, the initial activity might seem to exist only at the fringes. Yet when their time comes, ideas and behaviors become contagious: the more people pass on inspiring perspectives, the more these perspectives catch on. At a certain point, the balance tips and we reach critical mass. Viewpoints and

practices that were once on the margins become the new mainstream.

In the story of the Great Turning, what's catching on is commitment to act for the sake of life on Earth as well as the vision, courage, and solidarity to do so. Social and technical innovations converge, mobilizing people's energy, attention, creativity, and determination, in what Paul Hawken describes as "the largest social movement in history." In his book *Blessed Unrest*, he writes, "I soon realized that my initial estimate of 100,000 organizations was off by at least a factor of ten, and I now believe there are over one — and maybe even two — million organizations working towards ecological sustainability and social justice."<sup>39</sup>

Don't be surprised if you haven't read about this epic transition in major newspapers or seen it reported in other mainstream media. Their focus is usually trained on sudden, discrete events they can point their cameras at. Cultural shifts happen on a different level; they come into view only when we step back enough to see a bigger picture changing over time. A newspaper photograph viewed through a magnifying glass may appear only as tiny dots. When it seems as if our lives and choices are like those dots, it can be difficult to recognize their contribution to a bigger picture of change. We might need to train ourselves to see the larger pattern and recognize how the story of the Great Turning is happening in our time. Once seen, it becomes easier to recognize. And when we name it, this story becomes more real and familiar to us.

As an aid to appreciating the ways you may already be part of this story, we identify three dimensions of the Great Turning. They are mutually reinforcing and equally necessary. For convenience, we've labeled them as first, second, and third dimensions, but that is not to suggest any order of sequence or importance. We can start at any point, and beginning at one naturally leads into either of the

others. It is for each of us to follow our own sense of rightness about where we feel called to act.

### *The First Dimension: Holding Actions*

Holding actions aim to hold back and slow down the damage being caused by the political economy of Business as Usual. The goal is to protect what is left of our natural life-support systems, rescuing what we can of our biodiversity, clean air and water, forests, and topsoil. Holding actions also counter the unraveling of our social fabric, caring for those who have been damaged and safeguarding communities against exploitation, war, starvation, and injustice. Holding actions defend our shared existence and the integrity of life on this, our planet home.

This dimension includes raising awareness of the damage being done, gathering evidence of and documenting the environmental, social, and health impacts of industrial growth. We need the work of scientists, campaigners, and journalists, revealing the links between pollution and rising childhood cancers; fossil fuel consumption and climate disturbance; the availability of cheap products and sweatshop working conditions. Unless these connections are clearly made, it is too easy to go on unconsciously contributing to the unraveling of our world. We become part of the story of the Great Turning when we increase our awareness, seek to learn more, and alert others to the issues we all face.

There are many ways we can act. We can choose to remove our support for behaviors and products we know to be part of the problem. Joining with others, we can add to the strength of campaigns, petitions, boycotts, rallies, legal proceedings, direct actions, and other forms of protest against practices that threaten our world. While holding actions can be frustrating when met with slow progress or defeat, they have also led to important victories. Areas of old-growth forests in Canada, the United States, Poland, and Australia,

for example, have been protected through determined and sustained activism.

Holding actions are essential; they save lives, they save species and ecosystems, they save some of the gene pool for future generations. But by themselves, they are not enough for the Great Turning to occur. For every acre of forest protected, many others are lost to logging or clearance. For every species brought back from the brink, others are lost to extinction. Vital as protest is, relying on it as a sole avenue of change can leave us battle-weary or disillusioned. Along with stopping the damage, we need to replace or transform the systems that cause the harm. This is the work of the second dimension.

### *The Second Dimension: Life-Sustaining Systems and Practices*

If you look for it, you can find evidence that our civilization is being reinvented all around us. Previously accepted approaches to health-care, business, education, agriculture, transportation, communication, psychology, economics, and so many other areas are being questioned and transformed. This is the second strand of the Great Turning, and it involves a rethinking of the way we do things, as well as a creative redesign of the structures and systems that make up our society.

The financial crisis in 2008 caused many to start questioning our banking system. In a poll that year, over half those interviewed said interest rates used to be their main concern, but now they also considered other factors, such as where the money was invested and what it was doing.<sup>40</sup> Alongside this shift in thinking, new types of banks, like Triodos Bank, are rewriting the rules of finance by operating on the model of "triple return." In this model investments bring not only financial return but also social and environmental benefits. The more people put their savings into this kind of investment, the more funds become available for enterprises that aim for greater benefits than just making money. This in turn fuels



the development of a new economic sector based on the triple bottom line. These investments have proved to be remarkably stable at a time of economic turbulence, putting ethical banks in a strong financial position.

One area benefiting from such investment is the agricultural sector, which has seen a swing to environmentally and socially responsible practices. Concerned about the toxic effects of pesticides and other chemicals used in industrial farming, large numbers of people have switched to buying and eating organic produce. Fair-trade initiatives improve the working conditions of producers, while community supported agriculture (CSA) and farmers' markets cut food miles by increasing the availability of local produce. In these and other areas, strong, green shoots are sprouting, as new organizational systems grow out of the visionary question, "Is there a better way to do things — one that brings benefits rather than causing harm?" In some areas, like green building, design principles that were considered on the fringe a few years ago are now finding widespread acceptance.

When we support and participate in these emerging strands of a life-sustaining culture, we become part of the Great Turning. Through our choices about how to travel, where to shop, what to buy, and how to save, we shape the development of this new economy. Social enterprises, micro-energy projects, community teach-ins, sustainable agriculture, and ethical financial systems all contribute to the rich patchwork quilt of a life-sustaining society. By themselves, however, they are not enough. These new structures won't take root and survive without deeply ingrained values to sustain them. This is the work of the third dimension of the Great Turning.

### *The Third Dimension: Shift in Consciousness*

What inspires people to embark on projects or support campaigns that are not of immediate personal benefit? At the core of our consciousness is a wellspring of caring and compassion; this aspect of

ourselves — which we might think of as our *connected self* — can be nurtured and developed. We can deepen our sense of belonging in the world. Like trees extending their root system, we can grow in connection, thus allowing ourselves to draw from a deeper pool of strength, accessing the courage and intelligence we so greatly need right now. This dimension of the Great Turning arises from shifts taking place in our hearts, our minds, and our views of reality. It involves insights and practices that resonate with venerable spiritual traditions, while in alignment with revolutionary new understandings from science.

A significant event in this part of the story is the *Apollo 8* spaceflight of December 1968. Because of this mission to the moon, and the photos it produced, humanity had its first sighting of Earth as a whole. Twenty years earlier, the astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle had said, "Once a photograph of the Earth taken from the outside is available, a new idea as powerful as any in history will be let loose."<sup>41</sup> Bill Anders, the astronaut who took those first photos, commented, "We came all this way to explore the moon and the most important thing is that we discovered the Earth."<sup>42</sup>

We are among the first in human history to have had this remarkable view. It came at the same time as the development in science of a radical new understanding of how our world works. Looking at our planet as a whole, Gaia theory proposes that the Earth functions as a self-regulating living system.

During the past forty years, those Earth photos, along with Gaia theory and environmental challenges, have provoked the emergence of a new way of thinking about ourselves. No longer just citizens of this country or that, we are discovering a deeper collective identity. As many indigenous traditions have taught for generations, we are part of the Earth.

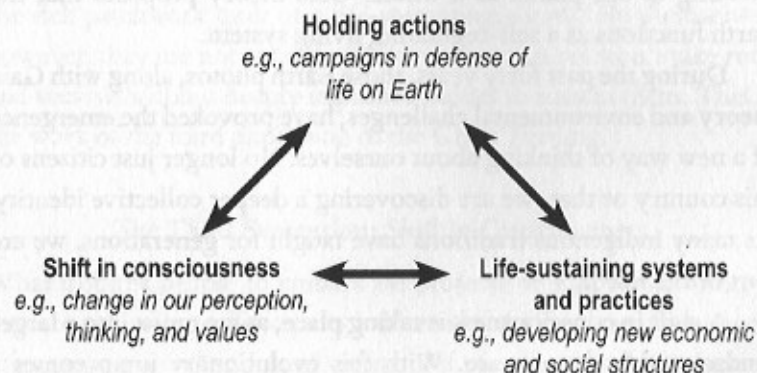
A shift in consciousness is taking place, as we move into a larger landscape of what we are. With this evolutionary jump comes a

beautiful convergence of two areas previously thought to clash: science and spirituality. The awareness of a deeper unity connecting us lies at the heart of many spiritual traditions; insights from modern science point in a similar direction. We live at a time when a new view of reality is emerging, where spiritual insight and scientific discovery both contribute to our understanding of ourselves as intimately interwoven with our world.

We take part in this third dimension of the Great Turning when we pay attention to the inner frontier of change, to the personal and spiritual development that enhances our capacity and desire to act for our world. By strengthening our compassion, we give fuel to our courage and determination. By refreshing our sense of belonging in the world, we widen the web of relationships that nourishes us and protects us from burnout. In the past, changing the self and changing the world were often regarded as separate endeavors and viewed in either-or terms. But in the story of the Great Turning, they are recognized as mutually reinforcing and essential to one another (see Box 1.4).

#### Box 1.4. The Three Dimensions of the Great Turning

These are happening simultaneously and are mutually reinforcing:



#### ACTIVE HOPE AND THE STORY OF OUR LIVES

Future generations will look back at the time we are living in now. The kind of future they look from, and the story they tell about our period, will be shaped by choices we make in our lifetimes. The most telling choice of all may well be the story we live from and see ourselves participating in. It sets the context of our lives in a way that influences all our other decisions.

In choosing our story, we not only cast our vote of influence over the kind of world future generations inherit, but we also affect our own lives in the here and now. When we find a good story and fully give ourselves to it, that story can act through us, breathing new life into everything we do. When we move in a direction that touches our heart, we add to the momentum of deeper purpose that makes us feel more alive. A great story and a satisfying life share a vital element: a compelling plot that moves toward meaningful goals, where what is at stake is far larger than our personal gains and losses. The Great Turning is such a story.