



The Climate Crisis
Rethinking Madness

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Section I Wholeness

Chapter 1 The Nature of the Whole

My wife and I drive into the parking lot. The lot is full of potholes, so it's a bumpy end to our trip. I am in a bad mood – didn't sleep well last night, and then had to spend time this morning (a *Saturday* morning) doing paperwork.

Once parked, we exit the car and walk to a spot along the top of the cliff overlooking the ocean. I sit down on the edge of the trail and gaze out at the sea. I feel the ocean wind on my face – cool, moist, constant. The breeze feels like it has always been there – a monument to timelessness. I zip up my jacket and feel the comforting warmth of my own body. The sky is grey, but I can see for miles to where the ocean meets the horizon. The sky seems to touch the water. I place my hands on the ground and feel the coarse texture of the sand - its grittiness is crude and primal. I scoop some up and let the wind blow it out of my hand – it disappears into nothingness. I look around. Nearby my wife is taking a photo of a wild iris flower – the top of the bluff is splashed with them, making patches of vibrantly alive blue. I look further and see people walking on the trails. They seem to be relaxed and content, talking and laughing with each other. I begin to lose touch with my bad mood. Maybe it is actually *okay* to be here?

I can be having a rough day - worried by the stressors of a professional life or my life as a father, husband or community member - but when I arrive at the beach (or a forest, or a meadow of wildflowers, or a winding trail through a rolling hillside) something *changes*. Usually before long my concerns, worries, and stresses begin to become unimportant. Instead, I find myself in a state of *being*, taking in what nature has to offer, and being in the presence of others. I leave the stress and ultimate emptiness of my life behind and I am in intimate contact with the miracle of the planet. I begin to feel *Whole*.

You and I are made of earth. Literally. The elements of the earth have combined to create a miracle: Us. Even though we live in modern culture and are separated from these elements – in cities, human-made dwellings, in automobiles, shopping in grocery stores for food, connecting with technology, etc. – when we remember and experience that we are made of earth, we begin to become capable of experiencing Wholeness.

How do you know when you feel Whole? Simple: Nothing feels like it is missing in your being. You are not in a state of desire, avoidance, striving, ambition, or need. You simply *are*.

Something is Missing

So – if you're connected with the earth, with other people, and you live in a constant state of calm, serenity and groundedness, then you're whole, right? Problem solved! Go join a monastery or live in a commune. Meditate for four hours a day. Recite mantras until you're blue in the face, and everything will be great!

Whoa - hold up. Let's get Nellie back into the barn. We all evolved in a state of wholeness when we were still in contact with the natural world and in healthy contact with each other. Before the invention of industry, commerce, modern social norms and culture, wholeness was not only possible, it was the norm. Your physical body (including your brain) evolved to be in contact with nature and with others. The problem, of course, is that like all of us, you literally no longer live in contact with the natural world - there is now a mismatch between how you evolved and how you now live. The result is that you no longer have the experience of being "Whole". Something is missing. This is a great source of suffering for all of us, and we have yet to reconcile with it. As will be discussed later, our non-conscious and delusional attempts to fill in the missing experience can be directly linked to the abuse of the planet, of each other, and to the creation of Climate Change.

Levels of Consciousness

As we explore the idea of Wholeness, it is important to understand that it is not an "all or nothing" proposition. People live in different levels of wholeness, based on their own levels of consciousness.

In her brilliant book *World as Lover, World as Self*, Joanna Macy¹ describes four levels of human consciousness: *World as Battlefield*, *World as Trap (or Prison)*, *World as Lover*, and *World as Self*. Each is described.

If I live in *World as Battlefield* consciousness, I see myself as being at war. I am aligned with the Forces of Good (or God, as the case may be), fighting against the forces of Evil. The war must be won at any

cost. Whether I am fighting against one other person, another group, or I am part of an army fighting against a whole nation, all that matters is fighting and winning the war. The earth itself is nothing but a battlefield and is expendable. My very soul is at stake. Nothing else matters. Scorched earth. An example: During the Vietnam War a US Army officer was quoted in the news as saying, “It became necessary to destroy the town to save it.” while referring to the bombing of Ben Tre².

In contrast, if I live in *World as Trap or Prison* consciousness, I don't necessarily feel the need to be in conflict. Rather, I see my life as an endless experience of pain and suffering. There doesn't seem to be any point to being alive. The only reason to stay on the planet is that I have been told that if I live a life of moral goodness (my pastor, rabbi, priest, imam, etc. tells me what that means) then I get to spend an eternity in heaven afterwards. Ok then - stick it out, be good, and then my suffering will be rewarded with eternal bliss. I get the reward of the afterlife if I have suffered righteously and earned it. Meanwhile, the earth and those who inhabit it are seen by me as a prison of suffering.

At Joanna Macy's next level of consciousness, *World as Lover*, I *fall in love* with the planet and its life forms. I have now crossed the threshold from disregarding (or demonizing) the planet and those who live on it into appreciating and loving the experience of my life. I still see myself as separate and distinct, but I want to experience and taste all that I can while I am here. Life is to be savored and enjoyed. My purpose in life is to gain experience, wisdom, connection with others, and love.

Finally, at *World as Self* consciousness, I no longer see myself as a separate being from the earth and others. I realize that the ultimate truth

is that there is no “I”. The being that inhabits this body is, in truth, an integrated, inseparable part of a much greater whole. I am *of* the earth. The earth created me. I am *of* the human community. As Joanna Macy put it, “We are the world knowing itself. We can relinquish our isolation. We can come home again to a world that can appear to us now both as self and as lover.”

After reading about Joanna Macy’s four levels of consciousness, it should be clear that something is missing. How do you go from the suffering of *World as Prison* to the joy of *World as Lover*? Do you just wake up one day having made the transition? There needs to be something in-between – an additional level which describes directly what is happening related to Climate Change and our current experience as humans on the planet. Let’s call it *World as Possession or Resource*. Living my life at this level I have little or no regard for the earth, seeing it only as a collection of raw material for food, fuel, manufacturing, and weapons. I am solely focused on exploiting the planet and others to satisfy my lust for wealth, satiation of my desires, and control over others. I don’t see the earth as a living being. I don’t feel like I am part of the earth or of humanity. I am non-conscious of my effect on the planet, resulting in my participating in the destruction of the environment.

World as Possession/Resource consciousness is prevalent everywhere in human culture, and is *the* major source of global warming, indeed the major source of our suffering as human beings. This view of the world and of our place on it takes us *away* from Wholeness, as we mindlessly use the resources of the planet to delusionally (indeed,

psychotically) fill the *Hole* left by not being *Wholly* connected to the earth. More on why we behave this way later.

The Experience of Wholeness Awaits

There is nothing you or I need to do to create an experience of Wholeness. The earth is here, literally just outside our doors. As Joanna Macy put it, “though we may feel very far from where we want to be, there is no place to get to; for we are already there”. What keeps us from the experience of Wholeness has little to do with lack of access or non-availability. We simply need to remove *inner* barriers to accessing this experience. Sections IV and V address how to make access to Wholeness possible in a durable way, which in turn will result in us living in harmony with the planet.

Chapter 2 Cells of the Universe

My cell phone alarm goes off – it’s 3am. I reach over and nudge my wife awake; she sleepily groans “Do we have to?” I am already awake and alert - I nudge her again and kiss her. She groans again and begins to pull herself out of the sleeping bag. We bundle up and leave the relative warmth of the tent into the stark coldness of the night air, walking into the middle of a very dark meadow – we need flashlights to guide our way. Once out in the meadow, we pick a comfortable spot and lie down on our backs, gazing into the dark, moonless sky. I am immediately taken in by what looks like a million stars. I can see the Milky Way – a swath of diffuse white that looks like it was carelessly painted onto the sky by a child. I look over at the horizon and see the silhouette of Half Dome – I only know it because the stars are blocked in blackness by the unmistakable shape of the mountain. As I lie there, I feel a deep, profound sense of awe – I stare into the brightly speckled blackness and know that I am staring into infinity. I feel tiny and insignificant, like the smallest speck, but inexplicably at the same time something inside of me feels full and deeply alive. I think of each of the living cells in my own body. I reach over and hold my wife’s hand. I can feel her smiling back at me in the darkness.

Like mine, your body is a whole, made up of cells. Almost 40 trillion³. That’s 40,000,000,000,000 cells! Each of your cells serves a purpose as an infinitesimally small part of a much greater Whole - you.

Now, envision the earth. The earth is also a body made up of an extremely large number of different cells – each a living part of the planet. Trees, rocks, fish, bodies of water, clouds, mountains, dust mites, strands of DNA, dogs, fidget spinners, etc. And humans, including you. As a cell of the body of the planet, you are still you, but you also are an inseparable part of the Whole of the planet.

Now let's take it even further: Think of the Universe as a Whole Body. The earth is an infinitesimally small cell in the totality of the universe.

Given that our problem is Climate Change, let's keep the breadth of focus to you, I, and the earth.

Who belongs to What?

Just as you created the cells in your body, the earth created us. What she created also has individual identity – you, me, your next-door neighbor's cat, etc. Our sense of being separate from the earth is an illusion (a delusion, really). *Earth as Possession/Resource* applies here: Because we see ourselves as separate, we have developed a sense of the earth as belonging to us to use as we see fit. The truth is the opposite: The planet created us, feeds, clothes and houses us, and ultimately causes our lives to end. We live at the behest of the earth, not the other way around.

The bottom line here is that individual identity, such as you and I experience it, is harmful and ridiculous. There is no “you”. There is no “I”, other than to realize that we are all cells of the planet.

Huh? Of course there is a “you” and an “I”! You and I are not the same. We live different lives, look different, think differently, have different beliefs and attitudes, and have different opinions regarding home decor. Also, neither one of us is a tree, nor a lizard, nor a grain of sand. And yet we are all the same: We are all creations of the earth living together individually and collectively, authors of our lives on the planet.

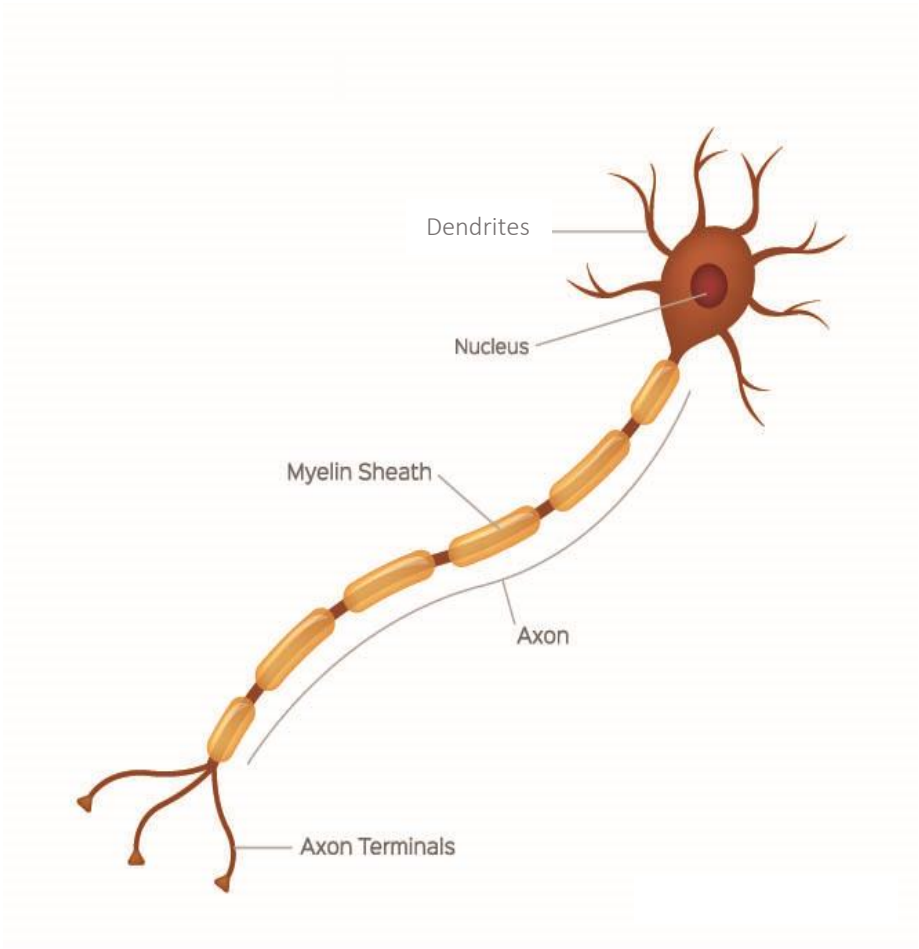
The Example of the Human Neuron

One way of illustrating what cells do is to look at what you have in your brain and throughout your body: *Neurons* (also known as “nerves” and “brain cells”). A neuron is illustrated below. Inside your skull there are approximately 86,000,000,000 neurons⁴ (and many more outside of your skull running through your body). Each neuron is very simple: A neuron works by collecting electrons sent to it from other neurons, and it then holds them inside of itself. While the neuron is collecting and storing electrons, it is dormant - inactive. Once a specific number of electrons has been collected, however, the neuron fires, sending out all of its stored electrons to other neurons. That’s it - that’s essentially *all* a neuron does. A neuron is basically a capacitor. (Don’t know what a capacitor is? Go ask a computer science geek, then you’ll *really* be confused.)

Here’s where it gets interesting: Each of your neurons is connected to approximately 1,000 others of your neurons. While a neuron is charging up, all those other neurons it is connected to are feeding it electrons. When it finally fires, the neuron sends out all of its electrons to a thousand or so *other* neurons. In this way an incredibly large number of neurons are constantly interacting with each other. As it turns out, these

neuron-to-neuron connections (known as synapses) are the building blocks for thoughts, memories, emotions, impulses, control of bodily functions, the visual perception of stars in the night sky, etc. They essentially account for everything our brains and nervous systems do. Individually, a neuron is just an extremely simple collector of electrons. Put billions of them together, you have a miracle – your own mind.

The description above is meant to serve as a metaphorical (or *not* so metaphorical) example of how individual cells can combine to create something very impressive and powerful. Now, remember that you are a cell of the planet. You – and I and everyone else – are miraculous beings all on our own. Think of what eight billion of us can create together! We can create an amazing miracle out of our combined existence, or an unimaginable nightmare, or anything in-between.



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Dependent Co-Arising

Here you sit, reading this book. You are having your own thoughts, feelings, reactions as you read (your synapses are active). No doubt there are things I write that you agree with and other things you disagree with. At some time later you may find yourself talking with someone else about what you read – a spouse, family member, friend, a

newly-needed therapist, etc. They will likely be affected in some manner by what you have to say, and likewise you may be affected by what they say to you. Later on you may even then talk with additional others. The effect of you reading this book spreads outward, but also reflects back to you, perhaps changing or adding to your thoughts and opinions. Your experience reading the book affects the world in some manner. The world's reaction feeds back and affects you.

The effect described above is an example of *dependent co-arising*. All things are created and exist in dependence and connection with other things. This can be contrasted with the classic Western scientific concept of causation, in which *one* action by *one* thing causes *one* change in *one* other thing.

Even though dependent co-arising is universal and causation is not real at all, the belief in causation is what drives the advancement of modern science. So, while we do exist as individuals, we also exist in deep interconnection with others and with every particle of the planet.

Death

You just read about whole bodies, cells, dependent co-arising, etc., and now I want you to read about death? How morbid! Not really. All cells (including whole humans) are living things. All living things die, - you, me, the earth, and eventually the known universe. Consider the following meditation:

Imagine a vast, infinite ocean. A small ladle dips into the ocean and removes some water. This little bit of water now stays separate from the ocean (but is still on the earth) for, let's say, seventy to ninety years.

As water that is now separate, it is free to have experiences that are different than if it had stayed in the ocean. Maybe it evaporates and becomes part of a cloud and then comes back down as rain. Maybe it is lapped up by a dog, goes through the dog's digestive system and comes out as urine. Maybe it is placed in a vase and waters an arrangement of fragrant roses. Maybe it's used in a water park slide where children are having fun. Maybe all of the above. Through its time of being separated from the ocean, the water becomes different because of its experiences – it is no longer the same water. Then, at the end of its period of separation, the water is re-collected and poured back into the ocean. It dissolves into the water of the ocean. Every molecule of the ladle of water now mixes with the molecules of the ocean, spreading out into the ocean's vastness. The ladle of water no longer has individual identity. The ocean, however, is subtly, infinitesimally different, for better or worse.

In most modern human cultures death is deeply feared – after all it is the end of the individual. Once you die, *you* will be gone. We have invented religion, the afterlife, reincarnation, and other pre- and post-life experiences so that we don't have to face the eventuality that as individuals we will cease to exist.

In our process of inventing ideas to pretend that we don't die we have lost sight of the fact that we *don't* cease to exist as a part of the Whole of the planet – the elements making up who we are become utilized to create other forms of life. After you die, the elements that make up who you are will return to the earth, becoming available for the creation of new life. When this happens, the only thing that ceases to exist is your idea of

“I” that you carry with you. You don’t leave the planet to arrive in heaven or hell or anywhere else. You stay here on the planet. *You are recycled.*

If you can somehow tolerate knowing that one day *you* will cease to exist, then maybe you can also allow for the knowledge that what makes up who you are will live on forever as an integrated part of a literally immortal Whole.

Let’s fold dependent co-arising vs. causation into all of this: For us as species, the idea that the death of the individual is final death is ultimately delusional and destructive. If, when I die, everything about me and the effect I have had on the world simply ceases to exist (or I believe that “I” continue to exist after my death – that I go to heaven, am reincarnated, etc.) then there arises a lack of concern for what I leave behind. If, on the other hand, I know that my existence affects all other things while I am here, then I may feel compelled to live my life consciously and then leave *I* behind knowing that I made a difference.

While writing this chapter, I found it necessary to euthanize my pet cat, Jack (a striking coincidence, as I did not plan to write this during the time of his death). I am very much a cat person (Jack was my tenth cat), and Jack and I spent 12 amazing years together. I have never experienced a feline companion of such intelligence, affection, warmth, and joy. As with all animals, his life came to an end. As I grieve his loss, I remember leaving his body behind at the animal hospital. I visualize the veterinary technician there collecting his body, placing it with others, and then a disposal service taking it to an incineration facility, where it is reduced to ash. Then the ash is buried in the earth. Jack becomes smoke, water vapor, and dirt - his atoms and molecules are returned to the earth. At the

same time, I know he lives on, inside of my mind and heart. I have vivid memories of him, which bring tears to my eyes. I also know that over time these memories will become less sharp and distinct. At some point *I* will cease to exist, and these memories will also cease to exist. And yet, somehow the world is a different place because Jack and I were here. I wouldn't change a thing.

Collective Subconscious

One way of looking at how you affect and are affected by others is to look at what is happening deep inside of your own mind – in your subconscious. The subconscious can be envisioned as if it were an iceberg floating on the ocean. Icebergs float low on the surface of the water – the vast majority of the iceberg is below the surface, hidden from view (see illustration below). Turns out that your mind is like this: Your conscious mind, where you have access to memories, thoughts, feelings, etc., is like the part of the iceberg visible above the water, while your much more voluminous subconscious mind is what is hidden below the surface, inaccessible and ultimately unknown to you.



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Let's take it a step further: According to Carl Jung - a student of Sigmund Freud (Sigmund Freud? – I know - ugh) - your subconscious mind includes *ancestral and racial knowledge*. As such, you hold the memories, experiences, thoughts and beliefs of your ancestors deep in hidden areas of your brain – literally (again, presumably as synapses). The implications of this are enormous: Generations of those who came before you (perhaps for millennia) affect who you are and what you think, feel and believe in ways that you almost never have awareness of.

Likewise, the life you are living now will affect your descendants for millennia to come.

The popularized Native American idea of planning for the “seventh generation” is a beautiful companion to this: Oren Lyons, a Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation put it this way: "The Peacemaker taught us about the Seven Generations. He said, when you sit in council for the welfare of the people, you must not think of yourself or of your family, not even of your generation. Instead, make your decisions on behalf of the seven generations coming, so that they may enjoy what you have today."⁵ Wise words.

Our existence has consequences beyond our lifespan. Regarding Climate Change, we are not just ruining our own experiences of being on the earth – we are also negatively affecting the experiences of our descendants for generations to come – not just through what we are physically doing to the planet, but also what we are passing on mentally and neurologically.

If I die of old age, cancer, or other natural cause, I am happy – it was meant to be. If the planet is destroyed by an asteroid or comet, I am happy – it was meant to be. If the human race is destroyed by our own delusional and psychotic view of reality, I am NOT ok with that.

Section II The Hole

Section I of this book focused on the characteristics of the “Whole”, both as a unity and as an integrated assemblage of cells. Now the focus will change to how we are *not* Whole. Take the “W” away from the word “Whole”, it then is missing something. It becomes the word “Hole”. Section II will focus on our experience of having a Hole inside of us.

Section IIa The Hole and Suffering

Chapter 3 Suffering Because of the Hole

Something is wrong. I feel it. The feeling is there almost every moment of every day. All I have to do to know this is talk with a friend, listen to the news, or check in with my own feelings. The feeling is getting stronger over time. Every year, every month – stronger. There is a feeling of growing danger. Obviously, I know that there is abundant data telling me that the earth is heating up, and I can see that the weather is changing. But there is something else – deeper than what I experience with my outer senses. I can deny that something is wrong, but pretending that everything is ok does not make it so. I have never met a single person in my whole life who genuinely and consistently feels content and Whole. Somehow, I know that there are others who are awake and aware of the same feeling. That gives me a glimmer of hope.

So, what's wrong? The answer is obvious to anyone who is willing to look inside their minds, their hearts, their physical bodies: We are no longer Whole. We're missing something essential – our connection to the planet, to each other and to our own inner being.

How Did the Hole Happen?

Tough question: Maybe we lost our way through the development of technology that seemed to make life easier and made it so that we could delay the scariness and messiness of death. Maybe it was the development of trade, commerce, and finance that helped to create *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness. Maybe it has been there all along, since the time when the “alpha male” evolved into being – a way for the strongest, most ruthless male to be the one who passes on his genetic code. Maybe it developed simply as a result of random chance.

No matter – it is not essential to understand how, when, or why this happened – it is here now. Our continued existence on the planet demands that we correct it.

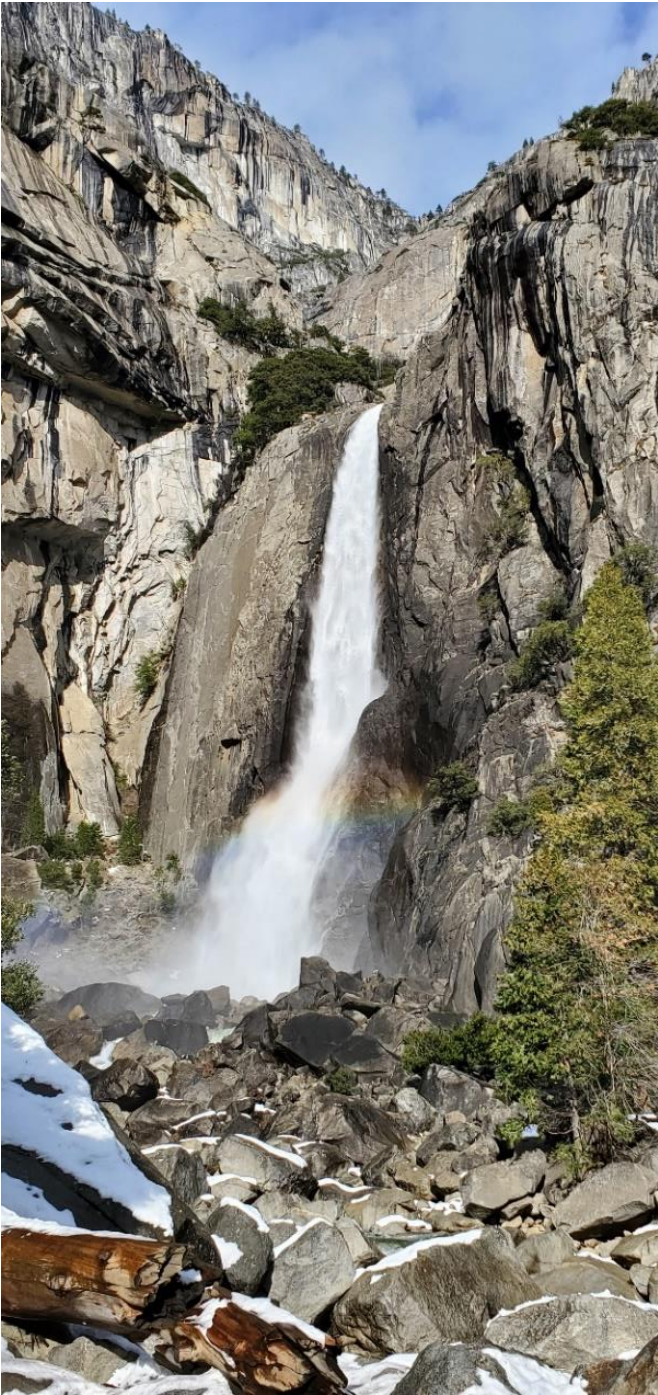
Climate change did not create the Hole. Nothing in the outer world created the Hole. Quite the other way around: As you read this, understand: Whatever created your experience of the Hole – your feeling of being like a puzzle with missing pieces - ultimately also created Climate Change. Put eight billion experiences of the Hole together and you have a planetary-wide catastrophe.

Up until now we have always conceived of our enemies as being external – other individuals, other members of the community, other communities, other races, other life forms on the planet, etc. *World as*

Battlefield. Now we must understand that the problem is internal. To put it another way: The necessary technology and resources to solve Climate Change already exist. While very expensive, the human race as a whole can come up with what's necessary. So far, what we are lacking is the *will* to come together and make it happen. Until there is a critical mass of humans who have addressed the inner Hole, we will not succeed.

Meanwhile, you, I, all the rest of us sit, experiencing the Hole. Sitting consciously with this emptiness is ultimately impossible to tolerate, and yet the Hole is pervasive and constant. I find that for myself and many others, the Hole is so difficult to tolerate that even when I am in nature, after a while the suffering of the Hole re-asserts itself. I am acquainted with a man who will go out and spend an extended period of time in what he calls "enlightened" nature - no roads, no development, no agriculture, nothing human. This man does this at least once a year and tells me that he needs to spend at least several weeks in this type of environment to be able to let go of the suffering that comes from his experience of the Hole. For the first two to three weeks, he experiences intrusive thoughts regarding "civilized" life - family relations, professional obligations, world affairs, etc. It isn't until up to a month passes that he begins to feel any kind of durable and consistent sense of Wholeness setting in.

I have experienced this myself: One of my favorite places on the planet is Yosemite National Park. This last January I walked to the bottom of lower Yosemite Falls, enjoying the experience (see pic below).



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I discovered, however, that I wasn't there very long before my thoughts began to wander toward what I have in my life when I'm home. I tried to force myself to be still and quiet while in this beautiful setting – it ultimately didn't work. I found that I made the suffering of the Hole worse through my efforts to force calmness. I discovered that pain of this level does not go away when it is pushed down, bottled up, or ignored. It gets worse over time. It seems that the answer is not in avoiding the pain, but in embracing it, feeling it, being fully present with it. By making contact with the pain, I make contact with the truth. Perhaps while I was at Yosemite Falls, the real answer would have been to allow myself to be in the environment *while* embracing my own experience of the Hole. The truth provides us with a healing path. More on this in Section IV.

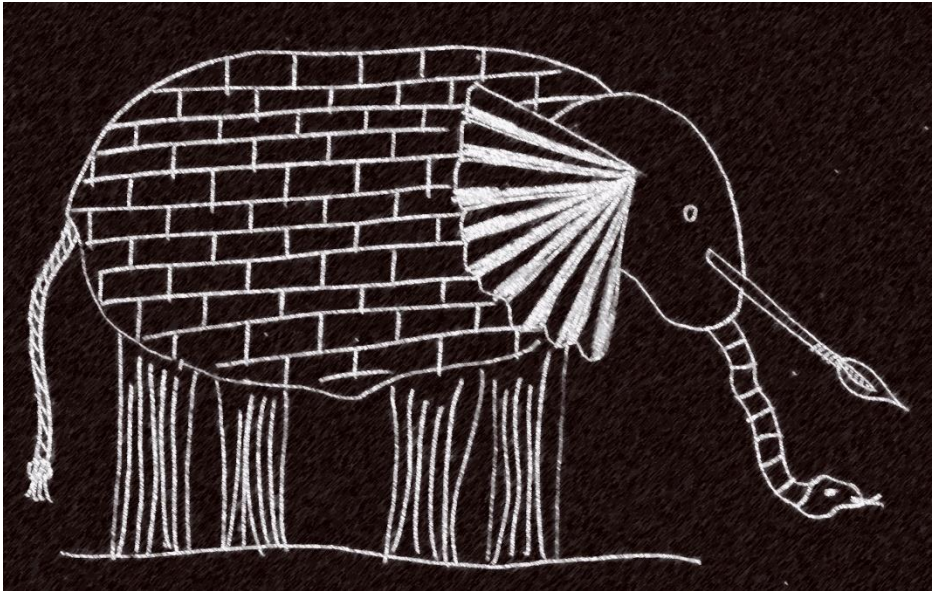
Thinking and The Hole

All of this talk about how we experience the hole has a lot to do with how we think. Even though the ability to think is a miracle of human evolution, thinking is also quite capable of taking us away from the experience of being with the planet, each other, and Wholeness.

An example: The modern process of scientific research insists on taking a whole and understanding it through the properties of its parts. This takes us back to the concept of *causation* described earlier. On the surface, using causation to know about something seems to make sense: You want to know something about the world? Go and collect valid scientific data regarding the thing you want to know about, and now you have knowledge!

Whoa, hold up again. (Did Nellie escape from the barn again?)
The problem: Any part of the whole that I measure will tell me *only* about the part that I am measuring. We are not yet smart enough to know how to collect data on *every* aspect of planet earth. Even if we could, we would still only end up with an immense volume of data that tells us only about all the different parts of the earth – we would still not know the earth as a Whole.

An ancient Indian parable illustrates⁶: A group of blind men who have never before come across an elephant encounter it for the first time. (Why are a bunch of blind men hanging around an elephant? I don't have a clue.) Each blind man touches a different part of the elephant's body, but only one part. One blind man encounters the elephant's trunk and declares that an elephant must be a snake. Another touches the elephant's ears and says, "No, you're wrong! It must be a large fan!" Still another feels the elephant's foot and declares that an elephant must be a tree trunk. Another encounters the tail, and states emphatically that an elephant is like a length of rope. And so on.



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The moral of the parable is that we humans tend to claim absolute truth based on our having examined some small part of the Whole. We also tend to ignore or come into conflict with other people's limited experiences which may be equally true. Each blind man understands truth – but only a small portion of the total, overall, whole truth. Even if there were enough blind men to study every aspect of the elephant, and then they sat down and discussed their findings, they *still* would not know an elephant. (More likely, they would come into confrontation with each other.) We are essentially blind with respect to knowing the planet, and as we try to objectively and scientifically measure it, we only end up with an incomplete database of findings, which still tells us nothing about the earth as a Whole.

Admittedly, the argument against causation is not fool-proof: The use of causation in scientific research and engineering has certainly been a major factor in the creation of global warming and Climate Change – as the industrial revolution progressed and brilliant engineers and scientists invented the machines of modern living, there was no consideration given to how these inventions spewed carbon into the atmosphere. On the other hand, more recently atmospheric scientists have discovered (using the same scientific methods) that increased carbon in the atmosphere is responsible for the greenhouse effect. Huzzah. (Although one has to wonder: What other aspects of the climate change “elephant” have we not yet become aware of?)

Human intelligence and thought are limited: The planet (and universe) are complex – we are not yet evolved enough to understand the nature of nature.

In his book *If Nietzsche Were a Narwhal*, Justin Gregg⁷ describes us as using our intelligence to be “why specialists”. According to Gregg, our propensity to use our intelligence to compulsively ask “Why?” (and “What?”) are ultimately destructive to us and to the planet. He wrote, “The world is full of animals making effective, beneficial decisions all the time – and hardly any of it involves contemplating why the world is the way it is.” We seem to be wired to *need to know*.

Pop Culture and the Hole

A very useful way of getting to know our suffering and the Hole is to examine how we entertain ourselves – our music, videos, movies, social media, etc. There are certain themes that keep showing up in

entertainment. If examined carefully, they provide symbolic clues about our experience of the Hole.

Just as an example, one of these themes is the prevalence of “alien invasions” in books, movies, videos and television series. Go turn on your cable or internet streaming service. I bet that within a few minutes you can find something related to this: An alien invader shows up on planet earth with malevolent intent. An alien species invades earth and enslaves the human race. A virus escapes from a weapons lab and implants itself in our brains turning us into zombies. A man possessed by an evil spirit becomes psychotic and wreaks havoc in a small town. The variations on the theme are endless. They all have something in common: An alien, unnatural and evil being has arrived and taken us away from our harmonious existence with each other and with the planet. Popular fiction, whether it be about zombies, aliens, or pandemics, all symbolize an enemy that has invaded and taken over. This ultimately is a subconscious symbol for how we all feel. The enemy, however, is not external – it is internal. We created it. The solution is also internal, not external. This is not about repelling aliens from outer space. It is about facing our inner alienation and reconnecting to what we ultimately know to be true and real.

A note: The discussion above firmly takes place in *World as Battlefield* consciousness. The theme should be revised: This is not about battling an inner “enemy”, where we pull out all the stops and defeat it, no matter what the cost. Rather, it is about finding a way to heal an inner wound that has led us astray. It is about embracing our suffering – getting to know it, accepting it, holding it, and offering it the love that comes from truly communing with each other and with the planet.

Darkness

Our experience of the Hole has created dark times, there are few who would doubt that. How should we define “darkness” here? Darkness can be thought of as being two different things:

The first way of looking at darkness is to see it as negative and harmful – suffering, pain, anger, malevolence, violence, hate, etc. Do you have a dark side? Of course you do – all of us do. All of us have at least something that others would view as *wrong*.

The second way of looking at darkness is *very* different. Darkness can be viewed as the ultimate crucible of creativity. A human life - your life - was conceived and nurtured in a dark womb. A seed buried in the soil begins to germinate in darkness, away from the light of the sun. Darkness is absolutely essential to any creative process.

Now the hard part: These two definitions of darkness are not mutually exclusive – they work together! They coexist inside of each of our minds and on/in the earth. They are different parts of the same system. You suffer in darkness. You feel incomplete in darkness. Your experience of the Hole is an experience of darkness. In that same darkness, however, lies the seed, nutrients, and motivating force to create something new, healing, and beautiful. Like each of us, you have an opportunity to create a great healing experience for yourself and for the planet. This process begins in the darkness of each of our experiences of suffering.

Consider the natural cycle of creation and destruction. Life is created in a way that can only be described as truly miraculous. A living being is created out of the raw material of the planet. The creation

process, begun in darkness, is intricate, complex, profound, and is, in its totality, beyond human comprehension. The created being grows and develops, becomes mature - a miracle of the creative darkness being transformed into light. As it grows and matures, it stretches toward the light. Then it begins to age. Decline happens until the being dies, decays and returns to the darkness of the earth. Darkness as crucible for creation, followed by living in light, followed by darkness as death and decay. Repeat.

In his playful graphic novel *There's a Hair In My Dirt!* Gary Larson⁸ (Creator of the wonderful comic *The Far Side*) takes the reader into an experience of a juvenile earth worm who is expected by his parents to eat a plate full of dirt with a hair in it. The boy earthworm objects, until his earthworm parents explain how life and death work, and that hairs in a dinner plate full of dirt are part of the process. The story ends with, "Author's Note: Well, truthfully, earthworms don't really sit around dinner tables complaining, telling stories, laughing, and so on. On the other hand, they do have a message for all of us.... 'See You Soon'"

Death and decay are inevitable. Being recycled into something amazing is also inevitable.

The Hole and How We View the Natural Environment

My wife and I recently made a road trip across the Southwestern part of the United States, driving from Austin Texas home to the San Francisco Bay Area. I was amazed to encounter a large variety of natural landscapes – we drove through everything from breathtaking natural vistas to horribly abused and ruined agricultural/ranch land and oil drilling

fields. The difference in how I felt while driving through these different landscapes was profound.

Not surprisingly, while driving through pristine unspoiled nature, I found myself in awe of the environment. Nature can be quite the artist, painting views that enliven the spirit and make one feel awe regarding its creative power.

More surprisingly, however, while driving through areas that had been overworked by humans and had lost their beauty, my spirit dimmed, and my feelings and thoughts became dark. I found myself going to a strange and unexpected mental place: It was obvious that humans had used up the natural resources and ruined the beauty of these places to support *World as Possession/Resource* lifestyles, and these large areas of earth were left with little or nothing remaining to offer. Seeing this, I found it difficult to not fall deeply into *World as Possession/Resource* thinking myself. I found myself thinking, “This is ugly and useless land. There is nothing left that I or anyone else can get from it - drive faster so I can get out of it and leave it behind.”

While encountering naturally beautiful areas, I am inspired and am motivated to protect them and care for them. While encountering depleted and overutilized environments, I find myself wanting to look elsewhere for other environments to exploit. It seems that what we do with the natural environment “stamps” the environment with whatever level of consciousness we have for it. This suggests that we have strong healing or damaging power - not just to protect or to abuse the planet, but to imprint it with our own energy and intentions.

Change is Painful

All humans resist change. We resist dwelling in the darkness, because being there is painful. Even worse, we resist creating something new because we are not sure what will be created – anything novel and unknown is initially met with resistance. Better to suffer in familiar surroundings than to risk going into the unknown and into change. By now it must be clear, however, that by not doing so we are on a path to our own ruin. We need to be willing to look into the darkness to see what is missing in the core of who we are so we can grow something new, sustainable, and life-affirming.

Chapter 4 Fear of Others

I arrive at the conference in a state of bleary-eyed fatigue. After all, I got virtually no sleep last night – I got to my hotel at 5am after my connecting flight was cancelled and I had to rent a car and drive 300 miles. Still, I feel excitement to be here, as I have looked forward to attending this conference for months. As I sit in presentations and listen to talks however, I begin to feel uneasy. I sit in rooms with dozens of others, but I feel inexplicably alone – all strangers. I am not a person who is naturally charismatic nor has the “gift of gab”, so I just sit there, keeping to myself. It somehow feels wrong. But, at the same time, I am unwilling to take the risk and introduce myself to anyone. What if they don’t like me? What if they are rude and rejecting? What if they *do* like me? I spend the day alone, surrounded by a thousand other people. At the end of the day, I make my way to the subway platform and wait for the train to return me to my hotel. A man walks up to me – I feel a tinge of anxiety – he is a stranger. I look at his face, however, and then vaguely remember him saying hi to me when we sat near each other earlier in the day. He introduces himself and we shake hands. We begin talking, and end up sitting together on the train, sharing stories about our lives as psychologists. Sometime later we arrive at his stop. We say goodbye and he departs. The train pulls away – alone again. As I sit, however, I become aware that I now feel better – the encounter with the stranger has lifted my spirits. When I arrive back at my hotel, I begin to entertain the

thought that maybe next time *I* can be the person who takes the initiative and says “hi”.

The most severe and tragic form of suffering because of the Hole has to do with how we view and treat each other. Recall that *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness involves seeing the Earth only as a collection of resources to exploit. This level of consciousness also applies to how we view *each other*. We have forgotten how to cooperatively work together and genuinely earn each other’s trust. Instead, we view others solely as resources for gaining wealth and power or, conversely, are suspicious that they are trying to use us for their own selfish needs.

Dominance over Others

World as Possession/Resource consciousness most likely came into existence when we were still pre-human primates: Imagine a colony of chimpanzees in the wild. The colony is peaceful – all are living together – hunting, gathering, mothers nursing babies, etc. Then, one day, a male steps up and challenges the alpha who is currently in charge. A horrible, vicious fight ensues, resulting in murder and the ascendance of a new alpha. The first order of business for the new alpha is to commit infanticide – he kills all of the babies of the colony. This causes the females to go into estrus – so now he can impregnate them and spread his DNA. Pretty gruesome, huh? As horrible as this sounds, this is our ancestry – we evolved from this. Having an alpha who dominates others is part of our genetic code.

This preponderance for domination does not represent an optimized genetic code – quite the opposite. It causes disharmony and creates imbalance in our existence on the planet. If you look at this from a Darwinian “Survival of the Fittest” point of view however, you may argue that this is not a genetic code error – after all it came from a natural evolution process fostered by the earth itself. If it came from nature, how can it be wrong? Answer: Evolution occurs as a result of genetic mutation, which is essentially random. Mutation can cause an improvement of a species’ ability to survive and procreate, or it can result in a detriment to the species’ survival, or in little to no effect at all. As such, the term “Survival of the Fittest” is an inaccurate label – it should be more like “Survival of the Merely Adequate”. Any genetic mutation that does not threaten our ability to survive and procreate will be passed on. The discussion now gets even more complex: A genetic mutation which *does* threaten our ability to survive and procreate, but only very slowly and over a long period of time (perhaps thousands of generations) will be passed on for *that period of time*, until we die out. The negative effects of this mutation accumulate very slowly. This is the kind of mutation which resulted us needing to experience dominance over each other and in turn accounts for *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness. The dominant individual is focused on two things: Satisfying his/her/their own desires, and dominance – nothing else – slowly ruining our ability to exist on the planet.

The entire history of our existence is a chronicle of our need to dominate each other. I challenge you to find a significant historical account of human habitation on the planet that is an exception. Very

rarely has the enforcement of dominance been exercised adaptively and benevolently – virtually without exception it has been enforced for the purpose of ensuring power, wealth, and status of a select few over the many who have been subjugated to them.

OK, after reading all of this, you may be thinking, “Didn’t Andy debunk causal reasoning earlier, and he is now using that very same reasoning to explain our propensity to dominate each other?” Yes – absolutely! (Insert image of Andy leading Nellie out of the barn.) Admittedly, my lapsing into this form of reasoning signifies that my contention that *World as Possession/Resource* came from Chimpanzees is, at best, an “elephant’s ear”. Again, no matter. We don’t really need to be certain of the genesis of *World as Possession/Resource* thinking to acknowledge its existence and try to figure out what to do with it.

The Creation of the Underclass

In my previous career I worked as an engineer in a medical device manufacturing company. The company designed and built cardio-vascular stents that could unblock a patient’s coronary arteries, providing life-saving relief from a horrible medical condition. I was shocked to discover while working there that those who worked on the manufacturing floor making the company’s product were paid so poorly and had such poor employee benefits that if they had a heart condition, they could not afford to use the product they were manufacturing! These “human resources” were simply viewed as a means to make those who owned the company profitable – nothing else.

When an individual or group exercises control and dominance over others, there will be those who are subjugated. It is not just an alpha on top and everyone else on the bottom. In most human cultures there is a hierarchy of multiple classes each defending its place and vying for upward mobility. There will inevitably be a single or group of lower classes, populated by those who have little power, authority, autonomy, or choice in their lives. In *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness, these are the members of society whose seemingly sole purpose is to provide labor for sustaining realization of the desires of the upper classes.

American Culture and the Underclass

My ancestors arrived in the United States in middle of the nineteenth century, escaping poverty from various locations in Northern Europe. During the Great Depression, my grandfather worked sawing wood at a lumber mill, eventually accidentally cutting off parts of several fingers and subsequently losing his job. He was then forced to hunt rabbit in order to feed his family. Once my mother became an adult, she left my grandfather's home and went to school during World War II on government grants to become a nurse. She married a man, had my sister, brother and I, and then my parents divorced. My father was a deadbeat dad, forcing my mother to live in poverty, raising us as she went to school to learn professional skills to make a living. She eventually earned a Ph.D., worked as a professor at a university school of nursing, taught graduate school students, conducted research, and published scholarly papers. She fought hard to climb the social and academic ladder. All the while, she maintained a fierce attitude of determination – Never Again

would she live in poverty. Never Again would she be treated as an inferior female by men. Never Again would she allow *anyone* to get in her way. I always admired her determination, focus, drive, and ambition. But I also saw that her “Never Again” attitude took its toll: She found it hard to trust others and to genuinely relax and enjoy her life. Her singular focus in life seemed to be to make sure that she and her children would Never Again have to live as members of the underclass.

As a nation of refugees, regardless of whether our ancestors came over from Europe one hundred and fifty years ago or if we are newly arrived from Central America, we all have something in common: We all come from the lowest levels of the societies that our ancestors lived in. (Exceptions: A small minority of immigrants arrived with wealth and privilege, having immigrated for other reasons. Also, a large number of Africans were stolen from their native cultures against their will, but then became the ultimate underclass in America – slaves.) We all have something in common, based on our ancestry: We are all part of the “Never Again” culture. I’m guessing you’ve known someone (maybe even yourself) who has, after being abused, taken on the attitude, “Never again will I be made a fool of!” “Never again will I be taken advantage of!” “Never again will I be forced to humiliate myself!” Our “Never Again” culture has spawned some good things, including aspirations for liberty, freedom, and autonomy. It has also, however, created the most individualistic culture in the world – a culture where individuals are isolated, fearful, and constantly on guard against any offense from another.

Honor Culture

One way this manifests itself in the United States is in the phenomenon of “Honor Culture”. Randolph Roth⁹, in his *American Homicide*, stated that the idea of a culture of honor creates violence resulting from social tensions. Roth claimed that when people feel that they are denied social success or the means to attain it, they will be more prone to commit violent acts. Those of the lower classes live in this country in a state of constant tension, resulting from being victims of *World as Possession/Resource* mentality. Tensions are so high that when issues arise over family honor or honor of a group they belong to, people then take their frustration out through violent acts against others. Can you say, “January 6th Insurrection” ?

It is no surprise to think that many who live without privilege in this country may feel like they are part of an endangered species and feel the need to fight for their survival. Having become the victims of *World as Possession/Resource* mentality, many are forced backwards into *World as Battlefield* thinking. Obviously, this is not a good thing for caring for the planet or for each other.

The Inner Protector

Honor culture and the “never again” view of life ultimately reside in inner human experience. Every human , including you, has an “inner protector”, created by being raised by inadequate parents and having come of age into an environment where you are expected to be a resource for generating wealth for others. For some, this inner protector is the only authority in their life that they genuinely trust. This would not be a

problem, except that as an inner experience it leaves the person isolated, alone, and without the ability or willingness to enter into any adaptive form of community with others. The Hole becomes larger.

For many, the inner protector is poorly trained and reactive: Imagine a guard dog which is fiercely trained to be constantly scanning the environment for threats. This dog does not have the capacity to think, “That person over there may or may not be dangerous to me. I should get to know them cautiously to find out what they are all about so that I can decide whether or not to trust them.” The guard dog’s thought process is much simpler: “Unfamiliar human. Must be a threat. Be ready to attack.” This makes it very difficult (but not impossible) to get through to someone who has a very strong inner protector.

Keep in mind: The inner protector did not come into existence for no reason. It developed because the individual legitimately needed or needs it, living in an environment where there is no genuinely trustworthy support. Anyone with a strong inner protector is not to be blamed for it – they are to be respected for their resourcefulness.

How does one approach another’s inner protector? How do you approach a guard dog? From [wikihow.com](http://www.wikihow.com)¹⁰:

- Approach carefully and slowly.
- Allow the other to initiate contact.
- Avoid assertive or aggressive eye contact or movements.
- Offer treats. (For my inner protector, chocolate works *very* well).
- Offer a single hand for the other to explore.
- Be consistent and supportive.
- Be patient.

Those with strong inner protectors – *anyone*, not just those who have been badly harmed by others – must be approached carefully – the one approaching should slowly, carefully earn the trust of the individual. More about how to do this later.

Before closing this part of the discussion, an apology is offered: The above discussion refers to the inner protector as if it is like a dog. The acknowledged problem with this is that in human society dogs are often referred to as being inferior to humans. Humans *own* dogs. As a dog owner, I have great affection for dogs, but realize that the comparison of a human inner protector to a dog may be viewed as demeaning to the person whom the inner protector belongs to. If we didn't experience the Hole, perhaps we wouldn't view animals, including dogs, as inferior!

The Great Resignation

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began and gained momentum in early 2020, a curious phenomenon has taken hold: Many individuals in low-paying, dead-end jobs have simply resigned, rather than endure the demeaning experience of working solely as a labor resource (along with the risk of being exposed to a deadly virus, of course). The resulting labor shortage is so profound that it is a significant factor in the current supply chain crisis. Does this indicate anything about a potential shift in human consciousness? Rather than act out inappropriately or even violently, people are beginning to simply say “no”. This is not unprecedented – history is replete with non-violent protests in which the participants enact civil disobedience simply by saying and acting out “no”, sending the message “I’m done being your human resource”. This is obviously

wonderful. As wonderful as it is, though, it hasn't yet gone far enough: Changes tend to be local and superficial. This is clearly evidenced by the fact that Climate Change and planetary exploitation have continued to worsen, despite these marvelous acts. The change is not deep and wide enough. The Hole is still there. More on finding a deeper approach in Section IV.

Chapter 5 Politics and Ideology

I love bicycle riding – it gets me outdoors into nature and fresh air, and it’s great exercise. One day I am on my way back home after a long ride, making my way through a park in my hometown of Santa Rosa. As I leave the park, I am coasting down a steep driveway – I somehow forget that there is a speed bump at the bottom. I hit it going too fast and am thrown off my bicycle. I hit the asphalt *hard*. I sit there, scraped and bruised, slowly gathering myself and my bicycle – I hurt too much to continue riding. Just then a pickup truck pulls up. Out jumps a woman – I recognize her as one of my neighbors who lives a few blocks away – we sometimes run into each other walking our dogs. She sees that I am in pain and is friendly and concerned. Do I need to go to the emergency room? No, I just need to get home and apply some peroxide to my scrapes. She places my bicycle in the back of the pickup, I get in, and she takes me home. A few days later I am talking with a friend about the experience, and my friend says, “You know she’s a Trumper, right?” After that, whenever I encounter her in the neighborhood, I am nice to her, but I feel awkward and confused. After about a year of this I finally say to myself, “Fuck it. She is still a good person.” I am now grateful that I have her as a neighbor and greet her with appreciation and joy when we encounter each other.

Political Ideals

It is no secret in the United States and in other nations that we live in a time of great ideological and political division. The two major political parties supposedly represent different ideologies – conservatism and liberalism.

From a *World as Battlefield* point of view, here's what members firmly wedded to their own point of view might have to say about the other: If you are a conservative: "Libtards are a bunch of Cucks who sit around campfires eating avocado toast, handing out participation trophies and singing Kumbaya with each other. Afterward, these coastal elite snowflakes meet in their safe spaces and talk with other tumblrinas." If you are a liberal: "Re-thug-licans are a bunch of misogynist, redneck, shaved head pistol-waving basement dwellers who are fond of reciting Donald Trump's greatest hits". Pretty nasty, eh?

What appears to have become completely forgotten is that each of these social (not actually political) ideologies represents a fundamentally sound and important view of how to live in the world.

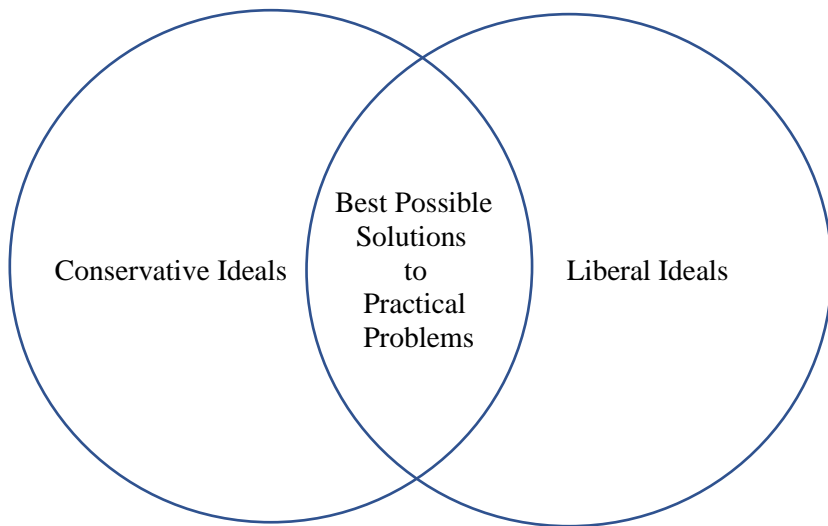
In reality, the conservative ideal represents several important and essential views, the first of which is that one must carefully consider *all* of the ramifications before making an important decision. What resources will be consumed as a result of making the decision? How much will it cost? Is it sustainable? Is there sufficient evidence that what is proposed will solve the problem it was intended to fix? What will be the long-term benefits or drawbacks of making the decision? Remember the "Seventh Generation" Native American concept discussed earlier? The second tenet of conservatism emphasizes the importance of liberty, individual

rights, and freedom – concepts vital to embodying the notion of moving us beyond *World as Possession/Resource*.

The liberal ideal – as it is practiced in the United States and other western nations - embodies the vital importance of living as a community – caring for each other, supporting each other, working for the common welfare of all. The needs of the community become a priority over the needs of the individual. The liberal ideal embraces the understanding that we are all part of a greater Whole, and that the health and well-being of the Whole should be the priority.

What appears to have become lost in American politics is that, though these ideologies are dissimilar, they are both essential to us living in a healthy, harmonious social environment and with the planet. My “Trumper” neighbor who rescued me embodied the liberal idea of supporting her neighbors!

Social and government policies are best made when both points of view are taken into account. Any law, ordinance, or policy will best serve the population and the planet when it incorporates the best of both.



What, then, has happened that has made liberals and conservatives so acrimonious with each other?

Right vs. Left

I live in left-leaning Sonoma County California. The politics here are overall left of center, progressive, and democratic. I have a small number of right-leaning friends who live in Sonoma County who complain to me that whenever they vocalize their conservative views, they are put down (or shouted down), are told that they are stupid, or are even demonized as having inferior character. Some of them are considering moving elsewhere. I have heard that it is not uncommon for the reverse to happen in right-leaning communities. This is wrong.

Consider the labels “right” and “left”. You have a right and a left hand. The hands do different things. One is stronger than the other, but both are needed for getting things done. Now imagine your right and left hand being at war with each other. The image of the two hands fighting

each other is ridiculous, right? After all, they are both part of your body. If they work against each other, nothing good happens, and something bad may happen - injury to either or both. Being ideologically right-leaning or left-leaning is an important, but small characteristic of who each of us is. We are all part of the greater Whole described in Section I. It would be ridiculous for one part of a whole to be in confrontation with another. Rather than be in confrontation, ideological differences should be honored, celebrated, and used for the betterment of individuals and of the whole. In modern culture we are trying to learn how to tolerate, honor, and utilize diversity. This should extend to embracing differences in ideology as well.

A message for all those who represent us in local, regional, state, and national governing bodies: Continuing to engage in *World as Battlefield* consciousness regarding political differences will hasten our demise on the planet. We need to *come together as individuals* to solve this potential extinction event. Our survival as a human race depends on it.

Ideological Arguing

Given that we all have different points of view, how then, do we engage with each other in a mutually respectful, beneficial, and productive manner? Let's first look at the wrong way to do this:

Steps of "Bad Arguing":

1. Decide that your view is the only right and valid view.
Become so personally attached to your view that any other

way of looking at the issue couldn't possibly be true.

Decide that any criticism of your view is a personal attack against you.

2. As you communicate your view to others, insist that there is no other valid view of the issue, and anyone who questions or disagrees with you is either inferior, stupid, or is morally deficient.
3. Immerse yourself (and others) in the dogma of your view and go into an ever-deepening spiral of an echo chamber.

“Echo chamber” is defined here: Imagine a large room full of people with differing views, communicating their views with each other. Now imagine a sub-group with similar views leaving the room to go into another, smaller room to share their views with each other. Now, a sub-subset of this group with even more narrowly defined views goes into a still smaller room. Then, finally, a very small group with extreme views leaves for a still smaller room. This is how extremism happens.

Now the Right Way:

Steps of “Good Arguing”:

1. Conceptualize your view of an issue. Look at it from all possible angles. Play devil's advocate with yourself regarding your view. As much as possible, articulate your view with respect for others, including those who you think may oppose your view.
2. Invite others to hear your view and debate it with you. No echo chamber – keep your “room” as large as is possible

through including many different (including opposing) points of view.

3. Revise your view based on your opinions and the opinions of others. Reformulate your view to be the best possible answer to the question or issue based on what you have learned.

Regarding #3 above: I have occasionally and successfully utilized this in my career as an engineer, as a psychologist, and in my personal life. I am continually amazed at how, when I seek the opinion of another, I receive wisdom that I had not previously considered. An example: Awareness of “World as Possession/Resource” consciousness did not originate with me – it came from my wife while she and I were talking about Joanna Macy’s levels of human consciousness. When I incorporate new-found wisdom, the answer becomes invariably better. For me, rather than feeling dishonored or disrespected when challenged by others, I find it to be exciting.

Politics as Community

Political divisiveness is ultimately about the Hole – about deep human suffering. When an individual or group of individuals fall into a political “echo chamber” they are non-consciously expressing suffering – loneliness, isolation, fear, and hopelessness.

The example of the “flat earthers” comes to mind: I was curious about why *anyone* would believe that the earth is flat when there is overwhelming and easily understood scientific evidence that it is spherical. Are some people really that stupid? (BTW, do flat earthers

believe that atmospheric carbon is increasing???) I began to research the topic and found that the flat earth movement is surprisingly large – there are meetings, regional and national conventions, and seminars well attended by believers. Then I realized something: Flat earthers have formed a community – a group of like-minded individuals (who appear, by the way, to be of normal levels of intelligence) who have banded together to support, communicate and bond with each other. Those who believe in flat earth are *not* really together to support the belief that the earth is flat - they are together to form a mutually supportive community! And so it is with political groups. We all need to belong to something – especially since we have lost our genuine and realistic bond with the planet and with each other. Political divisiveness can therefore be viewed as the need for community, merged with *World as Battlefield* consciousness.

The Role of News Media

Another important factor in political divisiveness is the role of news media. In order to understand how this works, we need to understand the physiology of the fight/flight/freeze response. Every human is evolutionarily wired to be able to respond to bodily threats to his/her/their safety. When we were still intimately connected to nature, life was dangerous – the earth was full of natural threats, including predators. We evolved the propensity to “scan the horizon” for these threats, so that we could know when to take measures to ensure our safety – thus the development of the fight/flight/freeze response. The capacity of this response is still present in our nervous systems, much as it was hundreds of thousands of years ago. Media companies know this. If the

news outlets (or the entertainment industry in general) constantly feed you images of threats, your fight/flight/freeze system will stay activated and you are likely stay faithfully glued to what the news outlets are feeding you, so that you can continue to scan the horizon. No one can resist a train wreck. The news outlets thus unethically increase their viewership by continually feeding us frightening images. This has a profoundly damaging effect on our nervous systems - our fight/flight/freeze responses were designed for momentary, not continuous activation. News media outlets falsely inform us that there is danger around every corner. They have a lot to answer for!

Politics “Я” Not Us

By now it should be pretty obvious that a person’s moral character is not defined by their ideology or political beliefs. I grew up in Wisconsin (and a few other places). Even though I haven’t lived there since the mid-1980s, I still feel that I have somewhat of a handle on the upper Midwest way of life, culture, and social belief systems. After spending several decades in California and learning that Wisconsin is now much more right-leaning than it was in my childhood, I became dismayed, thinking that many in the state had lost their moral compass. Shortly after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, I viewed a news story (of a rare non-trainwreck type) which showed that those who work as skilled laborers in Wisconsin and other upper Midwest states were volunteering their time to make personal protective equipment and hospital ventilators to help fight the pandemic. This reminded me that the

people who I grew up with are still good people, even though their voting trends and political beliefs no longer match my own.

The changes that need to happen in order for the human race to survive Climate Change ultimately have nothing to do with ideology and political views – they have everything to do with our inner experiences and suffering. It is still, even after considering politics and ideology, about finding healing for the inner Hole.

Chapter 6 Social (In)Justice and the Hole

I sit here, at the keyboard, ready to write about social injustice. I feel utterly unqualified to write on the topic. I represent white privilege – I am a fifth-generation European American white male. Although my siblings and I were raised in poverty by a single mom, I have taken advantage of opportunities to climb the social ladder. My whiteness, maleness, being heterosexual (and tallness, for that matter – I am 6 feet 8 inches tall) have all opened doors for me in my life that are not open for others. I was offered a good starting line. I have no choice but to write from the point of view of one with my background. I have no doubt that this makes it so that I am incapable of writing with complete accuracy or empathy toward those who do not have my privilege. In order to fully be capable of doing so, I would have to have been born a different person. I offer the following: Criticisms, comments, and corrections regarding insights that I miss in my writing are absolutely welcome. (Please offer them respectfully.) I am definitely interested in the process of “Good Arguing”!

What does Social Injustice Have to do with Climate Change?

When you engage with news media, how often do you come across the topics of Social Justice and Climate Change together in the same story? Probably not every day. So how are they related?

Social Justice is defined (Wikipedia)¹¹ in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. Achieving social

justice is about breaking barriers for social mobility, economic opportunity, and equal sharing of personal and group power. Social injustice happens when an individual or group of people are denied equality regarding wealth, opportunities, and privileges, and correspondingly face barriers to upward mobility in society.

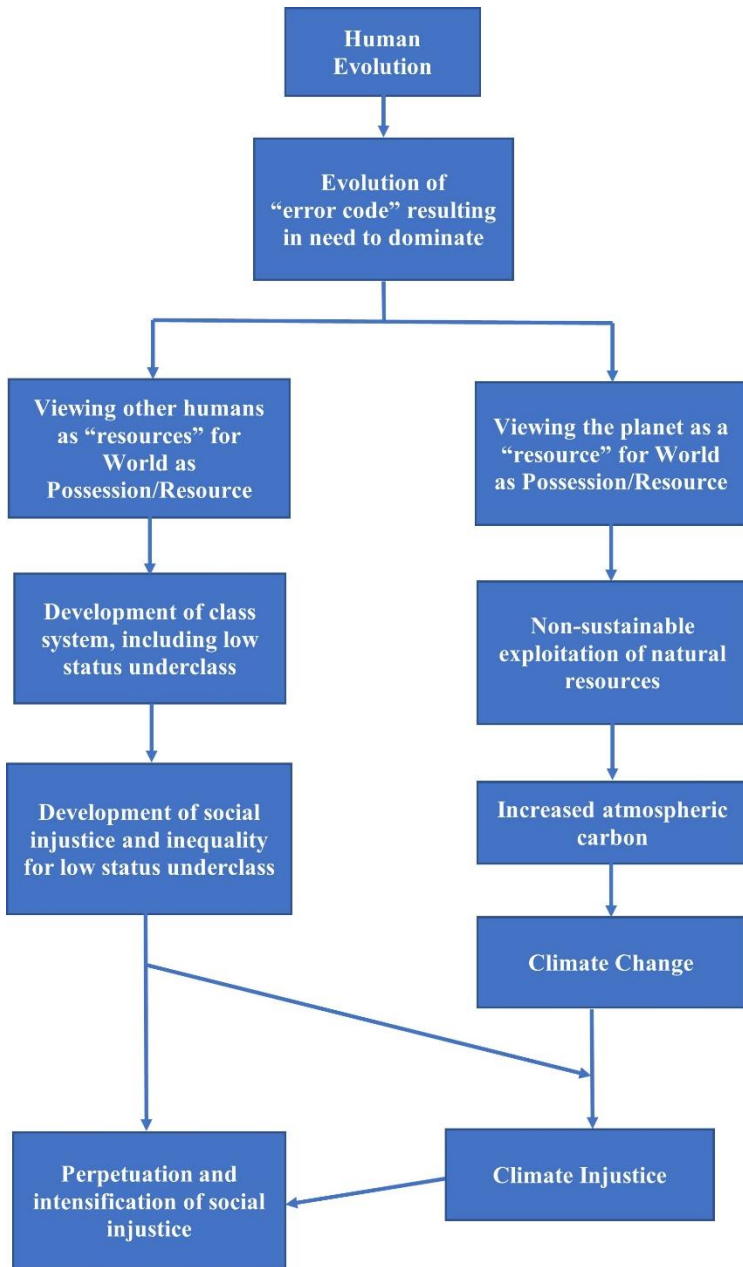
This definition has a particular vibe to it: it defines social injustice as what happens when inappropriately imposed barriers are put up that keep an individual or group from having the opportunity to equally participate in *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness. Those who are victimized are denied the opportunity to compete for wealth, status, and power - they are denied opportunities to take a bigger chunk out of the resources that are provided by the earth and by other humans.

An acquaintance put it this way: Living in America is like being in a race – those who are stronger and faster are able to cross the finish line first and win. For those who are denied social justice, the race is rigged – their starting lines are placed behind those who are born and raised with privilege. According to this model, Social Justice should not be about making sure everyone crosses the finish line at the same time, it should be about making sure everyone has the same starting line. This is all well and good from the point of view of competition to determine who wins wealth, power and status. Not so good from the point of view that the *race itself* is fundamentally flawed – it is designed from *World as Possession/Resource* thinking. Imagine a different metaphor: Each participant in the race has the same starting line. The starting gun goes off, and instead of competitively racing down the track, the participants stroll into the middle of the field where they mutually engage in utilizing

each's unique talents, intelligence, and skills to participate in solving problems and enjoying each other's presence.

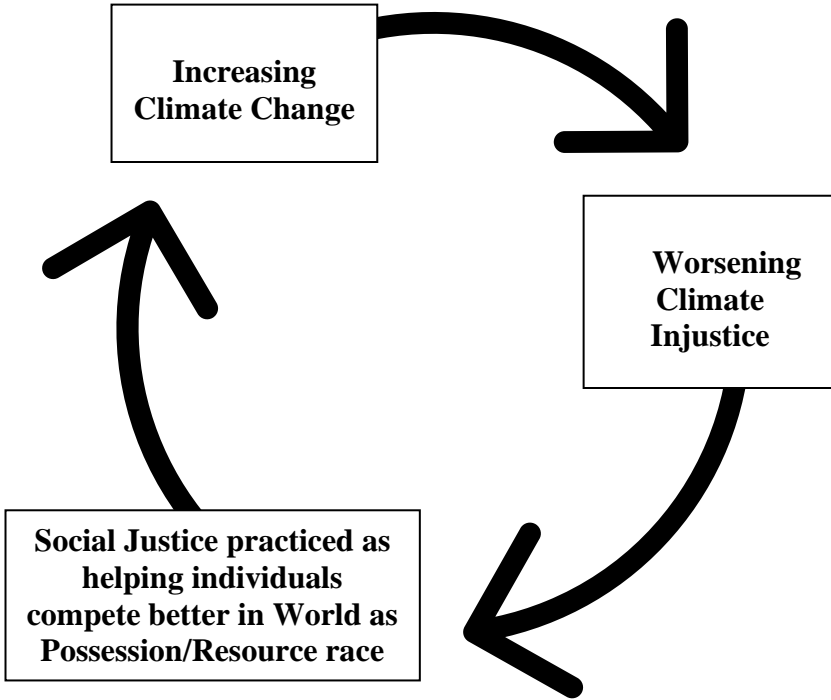
Sitting down with others in the middle of a racetrack seems like kind of a silly image, doesn't it? OK, then - let's abandon the "race" metaphor for a non-metaphorical vision where every individual, group, and flavor of human being has the opportunity to enjoy life on the planet and come together to solve our problems. No racetrack needed.

Climate Change and Social Injustice come from the same ultimate root cause: the Hole. As can be seen in the flow chart below, the evolutionary error code (discussed earlier) created the need to dominate each other, which in turn created *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness. *World as Possession/Resource* then created a social class system, resulting in lower classes being treated unjustly.



Climate Injustice

A note here regarding the term “Climate Injustice”: The term refers to an acknowledgment that Climate Change has differing social, economic, public health, and other adverse impacts on underprivileged populations. Advocates for Climate Justice strive to have these inequities addressed head-on through long-term mitigation and adaptation strategies. While this is a vitally important subject, its scope appears to be limited to how the effects of climate change are felt differently at different levels of society. If advocates for Climate Justice focus on helping victims live more holistically, then this is extremely valuable work. If, on the other hand, Climate Justice is practiced as finding ways to make it easier for underprivileged individuals to compete in the *World as Possession/Resource* race, then the problem intensifies rather than becomes solved. If you are a victim of social injustice, being helped to a better place on the social ladder of upward mobility is not a truly healing experience. See the “vicious cycle” graphic below. The vicious cycle is, in reality, a feedback loop which increases and accelerates the effects of Climate Change. I will stay focused on how social injustice and Climate Change have the same ultimate cause.



The Hole Does Not Discriminate

The core of the matter: Those who are in the upper classes experience the same ultimate root cause of suffering as those who are heavily discriminated against, as those of the lower classes, as even the homeless. The essential core experience of the Hole is the same for a billionaire as it is for everyone else. The only difference is that the

billionaire has been more successful at psychotically finding ways to insulate him/her/themselves from the experience of the Hole. The Hole remains, nonetheless. “He who dies with the most things wins.” - Not at all – we all lose. The ultimate root cause of black suffering is the same as for white suffering. Male pain is, at its innermost core, the same as female pain. Homeless pain is ultimately the same as billionaire pain. The billionaire and the homeless person both die without the experience of Wholeness that comes from being in intimate contact with the biosphere and from truly healthy and adaptive contact with each other.

Let me be clear: What is written above is *not in any form* a denial of the existence of social injustice, of white privilege, of racism, classism, or any of the myriad other ways that those of us with privilege are responsible for the creation of suffering for those without privilege. What was written *is* a statement, however, of the truth that the only viable solution to social injustice involves dismantling *World as Possession/Resource* thinking altogether. Either we all suffer and face our demise together, or we all come together to solve our problems and live in harmony with each other and the planet.

A final note on this topic – a message to each the 2700+ billionaires in the world: Read the above paragraphs – understand that they apply to you. If you spend a few billion dollars on an underground bunker that will allow you to survive the collapse of the ecosystem, how happy will you be in your bunker? My guess is, “Not much.” Wouldn’t it be better to know that you have used your considerable wealth and resources to combat Climate Change and to facilitate making the planet and its inhabitants live more sustainably? Wouldn’t it be better to know

that you are doing something to reduce or eliminate the Hole and foster Wholeness? If I were you, I would want to know that I put effort into making the needed changes, *even if those changes fail!*

Native American Tribal Food Sovereignty

A beautiful example of hope regarding social injustice can be found in the Native American Tribal Food Sovereignty movement¹². Tribal Food sovereignty can be defined as the right of indigenous nations to define their own diets and to shape food systems that are congruent with their spiritual and cultural values. Organizations such as The Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance have effectively formed alliances of native tribes to promote the following practices:

Have access to healthy food.

Have foods that are culturally appropriate.

Grow, gather, hunt, and fish in ways that are maintainable over the long term.

Distribute foods in ways so that people get what they need to stay healthy.

Adequately compensate the people who provide food.

Utilize tribal treaty rights and uphold policies that ensure continued access to traditional foods.

Through these practices Native Americans are *not* demanding a higher place on the *World as Possession/Resource* hierarchy. Rather, they are practicing the art of being out of the hierarchy altogether. This is not

about exploiting human or earthly resources. It is about uniting as a group of people for a common adaptive cause and making their way back to being in intimate contact with the earth and each other. This is especially impressive, given that Native American cultures have been utterly decimated by the invasion and colonization by those of us wed to the *World as Possession/Resource* (and *World as Battlefield* and *World as Trap/Prison*) mentality.

This example of crafting social justice is not meant to single out Native Americans as being, at core, fundamentally different from the rest of us. Rather, it is meant to show what can happen if a group of people – a social movement of any group – decides that they are ready to move to a new level of consciousness. An individual tends to have limited power and resources to make change. A large enough group of people is unstoppable.

It is also noteworthy that the Native American Food Sovereignty Movement is not top–down. It is bottom–up. This movement was not started by billionaires, the US government or religious clerics. It was started by individuals who decided to make a change, banded together, and made something happen. Like it or not, it appears that those at the top of the *World as Possession/Resource* ladder are not likely to be the ones to nucleate change. (Although, to be sure, if the any of the 2700+ billionaires addressed above decide on adaptive change, I welcome them!)

A final note on the Native American Food Sovereignty Movement: If this movement happens on its own – without the rest of humanity joining in – it will fail. The movement cannot survive the advancement of

Climate Change on its own. We are all in this together, for better or worse.

Section IIb Attempts to Fill the Hole

So far the focus has been on looking at the nature of the Whole and the Hole. I now continue with a particular level of detail regarding the Hole: We have as a species non-consciously and psychotically engaged in a variety of attempts to either pretend that the Hole doesn't exist or to try to fill it in a variety of maladaptive ways. With tongue somewhat in cheek, I refer to these attempts as engaging in the use of "artificial fillers" – we all know that artificial fillers in food are, at the very least, pointless and useless, and at the worst are toxic. A list and discussion of a few artificial Hole fillers follows.

Chapter 7 Human Practices Invented to Fill the Hole

It's the weekend – a perfectly ordinary weekend. No trips to the beach, no Yosemite stars at night, just home. The kids are grown and have moved away – empty nest syndrome. Laundry is done, groceries are shopped for and put away. The house is as clean as either of us are willing to make it. Now what???. I sit there, looking at things on my phone - boring. I think about what I could possibly do with my time. OK, I've got it - time to meditate. Ten minutes forcing myself to do breath-centered meditation. Timer goes off telling me I am done. Now what? There *has* to be *something*. *Anything* is better than sitting here with this emptiness.

Return to surfing on the phone? Go for a drive or a walk? Straighten the napkins in the napkin holder?

The discussion now turns toward examining a variety of ways that we all non-consciously and desperately use to try to fill the inner hole. After all, *anything* seems better than the raw experience of the hole itself.

Desire and Consumption

We live in a consumer-oriented society. We are literally identified, more than anything else, as “consumers”. In my home state of California, we literally have a government agency devoted to protecting citizens’ rights to consume freely and without obstacles – The California Department of Consumer Affairs. Our economy, our social values, even our work ethic all revolve around the idea that one of our main purposes (maybe our *only* purpose?) is to produce and consume. This way of thinking is at the core of *World as Possession/Resource*. Obsession with consumerism has a readily apparent connection with the (again, psychotic) need to fill the inner Hole. If we just have enough money, if we just eat enough, if we just have an expensive enough automobile or house, if we just use enough of the right substances, then the Hole appears to go away. Not really. These are the essence of the “artificial fillers”.

Imagine a person obsessed with consumerism walking into a dining hall. There he/she/they encounter table after table heaped with the most amazing delicacies – anything the person could possibly think of to sate their palette (think “earthly resources”). The person begins gorging on the food, stuffing handfuls of it into their maw. Somehow however, as

much as the person eats, they can never be satisfied. It is as if the food is moving right through them without giving them nutrition, satiation, nor satisfaction. The person feels like they are starving and continues to voraciously eat more, but to no avail. In fact, the more they eat, the more they are aware of their feeling of starvation, and the more they feel that they need to continue eating. Reason and rational thought are abandoned in the process of obsessive gorging. And so it is with us as consumers. We desperately feel the need to consume more and more, but find nourishment and satisfaction from none of it. So we consume even more.

This is vaguely consistent with the Buddhist/Asian concept of the “hungry ghost”¹⁴, who is starving, and gorges on everything, but can never be satisfied. In Buddhist/Asian folklore, the hungry ghost is the remnant of a being who died after living a life of avarice and gluttony. In the afterlife the hungry ghost is sentenced to a period of existence with no satisfaction.

Consumerism serves as a symbol for desire. We all desire greatly. What we all seem to forget, however, is that what we truly need in order to feel satiated is available to us at any time: Connection to the planet and to each other. If we become aware and engage in this manner, we become genuinely satisfied, content, and Whole. More on how to engage in this in Section IV.

Obsession with Economic Growth

In our never-ceasing efforts to fill the Hole, we have evolved an obsession with growth. In American and Western culture these values

have become venerated – anyone who sacrifices him/her/themself to these values is widely and deeply praised.

In my former career as an Engineer/Engineering Manager I worked for a number of large corporations. I eventually learned that the only real purpose of any of these corporations was to show quarterly profit, growth, and to make shareholders wealthy. All efforts were focused on making the corporation grow – nothing else mattered. I remember being in a meeting at work where an employee was effusively praised by his boss for spending 20 hours at work over a weekend. I was aghast – I knew this man - he was married and had small children! As an employee of these institutions, I eventually began to feel like my efforts were, in reality, about feeding a growing cancer.

Veneration for growth is, in reality, simply another manifestation of the need to fill the Hole, and as part of *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness it has been fundamentally responsible for damage to us and to the ecosystem.

As an example of this, one of the major indicators of overall “health” in the United States is the condition of the Economy. The Economy has become an entity unto itself – we are expected to serve it, feed it, and above all else foster its perpetual growth. “As long as the Economy is growing, America is on the right track.” Even worse than being an artificial filler, the unbounded demand to grow the Economy utterly fails to take into consideration that the earth’s resources are finite and limited. Unbounded and unlimited economic growth inherently eventually lead to catastrophic collapse.

Ambition, Purpose, Drive, Focus and Other Distractions

Even without considering that we are led to feed the monster of Economic Growth, we are still as individuals obsessed with staying busy. Anything – any activity, focus, purpose, or vocation is better than experiencing the Hole.

Until recently I sincerely believed that every person needs a purpose in their life to be happy, satisfied and fulfilled – it seemed like there is a fundamental need to have something to plug yourself into in order to live a fulfilling life. Many new-age self-help books foster this idea, stating that if you find out what you were put on the planet to do and then apply yourself whole-heartedly to doing it, you will find satisfaction and happiness. I have learned recently, however, that “purpose” is yet another Hole filler. If I am being one hundred percent honest, one of many motivations for writing this book has been to give myself something that feels meaningful to do – better than sitting here doing nothing.

A final note on distractions: We have allowed ourselves to be pacified with electronic media. When I was a child in the 1960’s, it was television. Then television evolved into cable TV. Then the internet was invented, along with gaming, constant news streaming, and social media. All ultimately designed to distract us from the emptiness of the Hole.

Belief in Human Invincibility

A very primitive invention to fill the Hole is the denial that we are vulnerable – replacing it with the belief that as individuals, communities, nations, and as a species we are invincible. When taken to an extreme, we are capable of believing that we are virtually immortal. Despite abundant

evidence to the contrary, those of us in western cultures seem to have virtually unbounded optimism that no matter what, we will survive, indeed thrive.

This perhaps has arisen from the apparent evidence so far in American history of growth and success. We have survived gaining our independence, the horror of multiple wars, westward expansion, pandemics, etc. These survival/success stories apparently have taught us that there is nothing we can't do and be successful at, even if we blunder along - as we always do - in the process of achieving the success. An example of this lies in my own generation, the "Baby Boomers": My parents survived the horrors of World War II, so the response was to make lots of babies, buy stuff, and surge forward with the Economy. All evidence of blind optimism.

How does this optimism qualify as an "Idea Invented to Fill the Hole"? As with all other such ideas, the belief in human invincibility evolved as a convenient and easily supported (and, to be honest, enjoyable) delusion that we can pretend that the Hole is not there by covering it over with beautiful, sparkly objects. Imagine a dessert cup topped with delicious whipped cream, sparkles, gold flakes, etc. (And, yes, chocolate!) Now use your spoon to dig down under the toppings - you find that there is *nothing* there - an empty void. If we trick ourselves into believing that human and planetary resources are unlimited - or, more simply, ignore that they are limited - we can trick ourselves into the delusion that all is well and live in apparent bliss.

Morality, Justice, Fairness, Lawfulness

Morality is a human invention. I state this in view of the observation that morality does not exist in the natural world. You never notice a lion stalking its prey and wondering if it is morally justified to end life. Why have we invented morality? The obvious answer seems to be so that we can live in civilized, orderly, safe society. Without moral codes, laws and rules of conduct we would live in increased fear and chaos – obviously the world would be a very dangerous place.

It is not often considered, however, that the invention of rules, justice and laws takes us further away from being in intimate connection with the planet. As non-natural human inventions these concepts come under the umbrella of artificial fillers.

In his book *If Nietzsche Were a Narwal*, Justin Gregg¹⁵ appropriately attacks human morality by citing historical examples of how human atrocities were justified and committed in the name of enforcing moral values. Gregg cites the historical period in Canada where the government forced indigenous children to leave their families, sending them hundreds of miles away to residential schools. In these schools they were forced to learn Western (Christian) values, abandoning their own cultures. Gregg included a quote from Sir John Alexander MacDonalld while speaking to the House of Commons in 1883:

When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and modes of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been

strongly pressed on myself, as the Head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.

Until 1996 when the last residential school in Canada was closed, approximately 150,000 indigenous children were taken from their families and enrolled in these schools. They were treated brutally. About 3,200 of them died while in these schools. Gregg wrote, “These atrocities are, at their core, products of moral reasoning.” We are quite capable of using moral reasoning to inflict cultural genocide or worse.

But - again – live without moral codes? You may be thinking, “Maybe Nellie isn’t the problem - maybe *Andy* needs to go back into the barn!” I would never advocate for anarchy and lawlessness in human culture. Murder is wrong. Causing suffering toward another is wrong – we need to universally agree on this, of course. How, then, do we reconcile the “artificial filler” quality of morality and laws with the necessity of living to, at minimum, basic moral codes?

The answer seems to be in how and for what purpose we create moral codes and laws. Moral codes are needed so that we can protect ourselves from the potential or actual malevolent actions of others. Given that we have created the Hole and we suffer greatly from it, one manifestation of suffering is that some individuals (and institutions) either non-consciously or deliberately act out malevolently as a result of the

suffering, causing harm to others. Bottom line: We live in suffering – while we live in this state, we need to enforce explicit codes of conduct to prevent us from harming each other. In essence, moral codes exist as band-aids to cover the immense wound created by the Hole.

On the other hand, if we engage in individual and mutual healing to genuinely fill in the Hole with the Wholeness of contact with the planet and healthy loving contact with each other, most of the need for moral codes will evaporate. (No doubt at best the healing process will be incomplete, so some residual need for moral codes will still exist.)

Human Procreation as an Artificial Filler

I was born in 1960. In my lifetime the human population of the planet has more than doubled. We are now at eight billion people¹⁶. There is no doubt that this has been a major factor in the increase in atmospheric carbon, abuse of natural resources, and all forms of human injustice. There are simply far too many of us. We have known for my entire lifespan that this growth in human population is a problem – I have vivid memories of being in elementary school in the 1960s and being taught about the evils of “population explosion”.

Why has this happened? Why have parents been having so many children? In order to double the population in 60 years, families worldwide have been having on average about 2.5 children per generation. Perhaps a clue to the answer can come from examination of how my own generation – the “baby boomers” came into existence. The baby boomer generation emerged when adults got together to have children following World War II. My birth family is an example - I am one of three children

born to my parents. The history of American and Western culture stands in evidence: The allies won the war. There was a sense of victory, invincibility, and triumph in the western world. My parents and others felt like they were moving from a place of struggle and suffering into a place of prosperity and wealth. What this essentially meant is that the parents of the baby boomer generation wholeheartedly stepped into *World as Possession/Resource* – they eagerly went for wealth, material prosperity, and having large families. More is better, including having more children. They all wanted their slice of the pie. All of it was, of course, artificial fillers. But at the time these artificial fillers seemed delicious and wonderful, so no one gave them a second thought.

Now there are eight billion of us. This unrestrained growth in population and demand on earthly resources cannot continue – it is critical that we as a species reverse population growth and move intentionally into population reduction. Not doing so (all on its own) will cause the ecosystem to collapse. Admittedly, population growth is slowing – it is estimated that by 2080 the population of the planet will level off and naturally start decreasing. Not soon enough. Moving beyond *World as Possession/Resource* is essential to making this happen – if we move into *World as Lover* or *World as Self*, then we can become wholly conscious of how population levels affect life on the planet, and we will then plan our families and communities accordingly. Not doing so will result in catastrophic collapse.

Order Versus Chaos

If we were truly in contact with the natural world, we would also be in contact with chaos, unpredictability, and the inability to really know what the future brings. If you closely look with open eyes at nature, you can see that in addition to the miracle of creation - which, in essence, is the amazing process of generating order and beauty from chaos - there are also inescapable processes of death and decay.

In nature, death and decay are messy and frightening. Death inevitably involves suffering, and decay is, in essence, putrid. An example of this is what happens to the human brain shortly following death: During your life, your brain's 86 billion neurons are all connected together with trillions of synapses, all sending electrical signals to each other to create the miracle of thought, emotion, memory, reasoning, empathy, compassion and creativity. Less than an hour after death, however, this miraculous process stops, and it all literally turns to sludge inside of your skull and begins to rot. Pretty frightening, huh?

We all see death, decay and chaos as the end of our amazing existences. What we forget, however, is that death and decay are absolutely essential to the process of creation – they are literally the fertile ground needed to create new life!

What we appear to have non-consciously done with all of this is to try to defeat the forces of chaos (they become the enemy in *World as Battlefield* consciousness), instead insisting on living lives that emphasize order, cleanliness and sterility. As you read this, look around you. If you are in-doors, you probably see lots of flat surfaces at right angles to each other – the inside of your dwelling, complete with dishwasher, clothes

washer, toilet, cleaning agents, etc. to help remove disorder. If you are outdoors in nature while reading this, you see something else entirely – congratulations! We strive for order, control, and immortality, all so we don't have to be exposed to the chaos of death and of the natural world. In this sense order and control become artificial fillers

A disastrous example of this can be found in modern forms of agriculture. Prior to approximately 100 years ago the industry of agriculture was a difficult undertaking, as the forces of nature (chaos) kept interfering with crop yields. Greens, fruit, and other fresh produce had holes in it from being eaten by bugs. Livestock died from bacterial diseases, etc. Then, following World War I, it was discovered that if the neurotoxins used to brutally kill the “enemy” were instead retooled for agricultural use, the bugs would die off and crop yields would increase dramatically. A boon for agriculture's place in *World as Possession/Resource*. The problem, as we are now finding out, is that neurotoxins don't just kill off harmful bugs – they kill off *all* forms of animal life (including humans). For most of the last century we have been treating crops and the soil they grow in with these neurotoxins – essentially increasing order and decreasing chaos as we grow food. These agents are now sterilizing the soil. Microbes, fungi, and beneficial insects are dying off everywhere because of this. We are now just beginning to understand that agents of chaos and decay are absolutely essential to growing healthy food. By some estimates¹³, if we continue to practice factory farming including the use of chemical pesticides, we have about 50 years left until agricultural soil becomes incapable of growing anything of any nutritional value whatsoever. And let's not forget, sterile soil will not

absorb atmospheric carbon (sterilizing the soil actually *releases* carbon into the atmosphere), directly increasing the effects of Climate Change. The group *Master Gardeners* of Sonoma County California (my wife is a member) has a saying: “If your plants aren’t being eaten, then they’re not part of a healthy ecosystem.”

Another example: We abhor the increase in disorder and decay that accompanies human aging and death. Anyone who has cared for a loved elder and has been present for their decline and death has witnessed the disorder and chaos that is an essential part of the end of life. So, what do we do? We place our elders into nursing homes and convalescent centers (warehouses for the dying) so we don’t have to witness their decline up close. Watching a family member dying can be frightening.

A couple of years ago I was providing in-office psychotherapy for an elderly client. Eventually she couldn’t continue to make the trip to my office and was moved into a nursing home. I consented to visit her at her nursing home to continue providing services. By going there every week I had a front-row seat to witness her journey toward death. I quickly began dreading the weekly visits, literally having to force myself to make the trip every week. Eventually she died - I experienced profound relief. I have always felt some shame in my reaction to the experience, especially as I am a psychotherapist who specializes in working with older adults!

I am guessing that the last few pages have been difficult to read – they were difficult to write! I recommend the following: A search on the internet reveals an abundance of meditations regarding the nature of death, decay and chaos. While these meditations tend to be explicit, they can gently introduce you to the idea that accepting that death, decay and chaos

are a natural part of being alive and on the planet. Working to accept that death and decay are natural can be a very healing experience!

We Are In the Stream of Life

All of the delusional inventions described above not only serve as non-conscious efforts to shield or distract away from the Hole, but they also serve the maladaptive purpose of making the experience of the Hole *worse* in reality. First, all of the fillers have the outer effect of taking us further down the road of *World as Possession/Resource*, which in turn moves us even further away from experiences of Wholeness. Second, these ideas take us away from the truth about who we are as beings *of the planet*. The estrangement deepens.

Imagine you are on a boat on the middle of a river. The boat is floating downstream. There are no paddles or oars. You have absolutely no control over your situation in the boat. The current of the river will take you where it will. You have two choices: One choice is to try frantically to find ways to control the boat. You can try paddling with your hands, you can look for sticks or logs floating in the water to help push the boat around, try rocking the boat, etc. You can even scream and pound your fists in frustration, anger and hopelessness. The effects of any of these efforts, however, are ultimately pointless – you don't have what is needed to take control. There is a second choice: Sit back and enjoy the ride. Look at the scenery along the shore as you drift by. Dip your hand in the water to feel its coolness and wetness. Breathe in and smell the air. Feel the sunshine on your skin. Enjoy the experience with a loved one. Of course, the choice is yours.

Chapter 8 Psychology and the Hole

Another day as a psychotherapist. Ride my bicycle to work. Set up my office for the day. Welcome the first client into the sacred space of healing work. Every workday I meet with a half a dozen psychotherapy clients – most are motivated to make their lives better and they take the process seriously, so it is gratifying for me to work with them. Few things are more satisfying for me than witnessing and helping a person heal and grow. Sometimes the process leaves me feeling exhausted, at other times it energizes and invigorates me. At the end of the day, as I ride my bicycle home, I feel some satisfaction from the work. Later in the evening, however, as I think about what I do, I become depressed. Soooo - I am helping a small handful of people to make it easier to cope with and participate in the *World as Possession/Resource* game. On a planetary scale it amounts to nothing more than re-arranging deck chairs on the Titanic. Somehow, however, there is solace in knowing that we are all on the same boat.

I now ask you to wade through my commentary on psychological knowledge for two reasons: First, to help you gain a deeper understanding of the Hole and how we react to it. Second, in helping you to understand how psychological knowledge - psychotherapy in particular - has been co-opted to non-consciously and blindly find ways to avoid the Hole or to provide artificial fillers.

The Subconscious

As described earlier, the subconscious refers to the part of the mind that is below the surface and is difficult or impossible to access. It is important to remember that the subconscious makes up *most of* the mind - remember the iceberg?

It is not well understood, even among professional psychologists, what the subconscious consists of, or even more importantly, what purpose it serves. Freud (I know – again ugh) believed that the subconscious consists of the “id”, which he believed to be suppressed, denied and rejected urges, desires and wishes of the individual that are socially unacceptable. According to Freud, society developed rules so that these supposedly dangerous wishes and urges can remain imprisoned and out of sight, thus keeping the social order intact.

Let’s get Nellie back into the barn one more time: In reality, the subconscious mind contains the *deepest sources* of wisdom, knowledge, and universal understanding that each of us has access to. If you were to be able to make contact with the subconscious, you would find you have access to an unimaginably vast font of knowledge and wisdom! To take it even a step further, when we were in intimate contact with the planet and each other, we had much more access to this knowledge than we do now. When we walked away from intimate connection with the planet and created the Hole, we blocked ourselves off almost entirely from the subconscious. Freud still had it right, though: Access to the subconscious *is* dangerous – it would force us individually and collectively to directly face the Hole, and to come back into contact with knowledge of what the Whole looks like. More will be presented later regarding what we can do

to increase our access to the subconscious. (Hint: Think “dreams”, “creative processes” and “intuition”.)

Psychopathology: Delusional Disorder

As we begin a discussion of psychopathology, it is important to understand that from a professional point of view, all psychopathology is categorized and cataloged in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual¹⁷ – also known as the “DSM”).

One of the disorders listed in the DSM is Delusional Disorder. A person is generally defined as holding a “delusion” if he/she/they hold a belief or impression that is contradicted by reality or rational argument. For the purposes of our discussion, it is important to examine the “reality or rational argument” part: If I believe that the sky is red instead of blue, then most would agree that there is ample rational evidence that I am delusional – anyone can look up into the sky on a clear sunny day and see blue. What if I tell you, however, that “blue” is a label for a particular range of wavelengths of light, and that sunlight includes a larger range of wavelengths, including those that we label as “red”? Am I still delusional saying that the sky is red? The definition of “delusion” is not so straightforward after all.

Now let’s apply this to the Hole and Climate Change: We have, as a species, believed for quite some time now that our way of life – the way we use technology, grow food, relate to each other, practice finance, participate in the creation and maintenance of laws and social systems, etc. – is healthy because it has seemed to be so. What if this is not the case? What if we are all delusional? Earlier in the book I stated several times

that we appear to be delusional as a species – this is not a figure of speech or a colorful expression – it is my opinion of a clinically diagnosable condition. We all seem to be participating in a mass delusion that what we have created is sustainable and healthy. This qualifies as a DSM diagnosis – the only difference is that it applies to *all* of us. There is an increasingly popular saying: “The wonderful thing about facts is that they exist, whether you believe in them or not.”

Psychopathology: Personality Disorders

The DSM lists twelve “personality disorders” defined by the American Psychiatric Association as “a way of thinking, feeling and behaving that deviates from the expectations of the culture, causes distress or problems in functioning, and lasts over time.”

Personality disorders have a small number of core features in common: The individual afflicted is excessively self-focused, is incapable of seeing others as valid beings, and seems desperate – in a maladaptive and harmful way – to get their own needs met. These core features all seem to point to a common, paradoxical root: The individual has virtually no sense of self at their core and experiences a profound sense of emptiness! The person feels so empty and isolated inside that he/she/they desperately reach out for validation from others so that it will seem that there is even someone present inside at all! Here, then, we have the deepest, most vivid and horrifying experience of the Hole – for people with personality disorders the Hole is so terrifying and intolerable that it deeply shapes how they relate to others in the world in a deeply harmful way.

I am guessing that you have met at least one person in your lifetime that meets the criteria for one of these disorders. You probably found it very difficult to be in contact with the person. People with personality disorders are often shunned socially. We find interaction with them particularly difficult because they are, in reality, holding a mirror up to us to see how bad the Hole is. Turn away so that you don't have to see it in yourself.

Psychopathology: Addiction

Addiction is defined in the DSM as “a cluster of cognitive, behavioral, and physiological symptoms indicating that the individual continues use of the substance despite significant substance-related problems. There is a pattern of repeated use that can result in tolerance, withdrawal, and compulsive drug-taking behavior.” Put more simply, the individual compulsively uses the substance to their detriment, even after knowing that it is damaging to continue to do so.

Recall that the Hole is defined as the experience of missing something vital in one's being. As already discussed, the Hole is very difficult - impossible, really - to tolerate, and we each end up desperate in one way or another to find relief. Addiction to substances comes from the desperate need to provide relief from this profound suffering.

It is not just alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamines, food, etc. that constitute the focus of addiction. It goes much farther and deeper than that. Let's expand “addictive substances” to include all forms of technology, entertainment, social media, and any other form of distraction that seems to take us away from the experience of the Hole. These types

of addictive processes are yet another core facet of *World as Possession/Resource*. The possession/resource is consumed addictively to provide relief from the Hole. With this in mind, we can conclude that we are *all* addicted – desperately trying to recreate that initial high that felt so good to begin with, but which is now destroying the biosphere and our place on the planet.

So, what do we do about this? In addiction vernacular, the addicted person needs to go into *recovery*. Recovery is defined as the difficult and painful process of leaving the substance behind and returning to an adaptive, healthy way of living.

For my doctoral thesis¹⁸, I studied people who had achieved stability after successfully recovering from substance dependence and were now living their lives substance-free. The goal of this research was to find out what these individuals found to be meaningful in their everyday lives. I used a creative process to collect data: I gave each participant a disposable camera and asked them to go out and take pictures of anything they wanted. Then I asked each participant to select 3-4 pictures to talk about in an interview. During the interview process I asked non-leading, open-ended questions about the pictures. I then used a data coding process to define “meaning units” from the interview transcripts. Finally, I looked at what meaning units all participants had in common. The following themes seem to be important for those in recovery:

1. Helping others to achieve recovery.
2. Being open to receiving help from others.
3. Experiencing the natural world.

4. Learning and education.
5. Being spiritually active.
6. Adaptive, healthy self-care.
7. Being open to both positive and negative experiences.
8. Recovery may need to be preceded by “hitting rock bottom.”

If one looks at this list, one can boil down the items into three general themes: First, it is important to go into and maintain recovery as a member of a community of like-minded and supportive individuals. Second, various forms of good individual self-care are very important. Third, exposure to the natural world was a central theme of the research results. As it turns out, each of these general themes makes up the backbone of Section IV of this book, *Healing the Hole*.

One example of the success of these approaches can be found in 12-step programs. While preparing for the research I conducted a literature review, looking at a wide variety of established recovery programs. I found that by far 12-step recovery programs are the most successful. 12-step programs focus on community, self-care, and spirituality. 12-step programs don't focus explicitly on exposure to nature, but I seriously doubt that anyone in such a program would object to participating in such activity.

A final note on my research: The research was carried out a full ten years before I even began to think about writing this book. It was *not* carried out with Wholeness, The Hole, or Climate Change in mind, yet these themes appear to be very consistent in both the topics of substance

addiction recovery *and* in the topic of Healing the Hole. Seems that recovery from addiction and recovery of Wholeness have a lot in common.

Psychopathology: Romantic Love

In western cultures - American, especially - we venerate romance. It seems that the most fulfilling thing you can do in your life is to fall madly in love and spend the rest of your life “happily ever after” with your paired mate. When a person is in love and intimately pairs with their love interest, they seem to feel Whole – they feel that they have everything that they need.

Dang, Nellie keeps getting out of that darned barn! Let’s get er back in one more time. Here's how being in love *really* works: When in love, we feel Whole because the experience of the other seems to perfectly match and fill our own Hole, making it seem as if the Hole is not there at all. I’m sure you have heard the phrase “You complete me”. This is exactly what it feels like. Below is a small sample of other in-love phrases:

You’re that part of me that I always need.

If I know what love is, it is because of you.

You are the source of my joy, the center of my world.

My heart belongs to you.

Our love is like the sun shining on a beautiful day.

Being with you is like being in a field of wildflowers.

Being in love with you makes every morning worth getting up for.

I am *falling* in love with you.

Sound familiar? The list of such sayings is endless. Notice, however, that they all have something in common – they all say, “When I am with you, I feel Whole”. Sometimes the sayings will also compare the experience of love with some beautiful aspect of nature.

The problem is that this is an illusion. Romantic love does not complete anyone - it is the most alluring of artificial fillers. Evidence of this is presented in the fact that being *in love* is never permanent. Inevitably, sooner or later, the fireworks fade, passion subsides, and the person returns to their experience of the Hole, even with the loved other still present. The best that can be hoped for is that passionate romantic love transitions to genuine love and care for the other. In couples where this happens, this is where *real* love begins. Fireworks transitions into what has been referred to as “stir the oatmeal” love – not exciting or passionate, but nurturing, healthy, and fostering of genuine Wholeness.

We were never meant to *fall in love* with each other. We were meant to *love* each other. Two different things entirely.

A Critique of the Process of Psychotherapy

The process of psychotherapy can, by some accounts, be traced back to the ninth century, where it was developed in the Middle East¹⁹. Over the ensuing millennium a large variety of popular psychotherapy approaches have appeared, ranging generally from those that focus on the patient’s current problems (such as cognitive, behavioral, and mindfulness therapy) to those which focus on childhood (psychodynamic and psychoanalytic approaches), as well as existential, ecopsychology, Gestalt, just to name a few.

All of these therapeutic approaches have something in common: Their goal is to help the patient to find his/her/their way *from* a state of abject suffering *toward* returning to living in harmony with his/her/their environment. There is a paradigm that has developed with this approach: Living in harmony or tolerance with one's environment assumes that the environment is healthy and non-pathological. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The DSM was developed to catalog and categorize mental illness symptoms that are defined as being deviant from "normal" functioning in the general population. Thus, what is different from normal is considered diseased. What if, in some manner, the reverse is true? As has been discussed, what is considered "normal" at present is highly pathological, given that we live in *World as Possession/Resource* (or *Battlefield*, or *Trap/Prison*) level of consciousness. The psychology profession has thus pathologized those who are, in reality, simply ill-equipped to fit in with our current *pathological* experience of living on the planet and with each other and have been damaged by efforts to do so. Nellie is not only out of the barn - Nellie's on a different planet!

An example of this is what is labeled as major depression. It is estimated that at some time in their lives 60% of the population of the United States is diagnosable with depression or is closely connected with someone else who is depressed. That means that a *majority* of those who live in this country have been exposed this devastating mental illness. What if, rather than being an actual mental illness, depression is a natural response to living with the Hole? In this manner, mental illness is not so much individuals deviating from a "healthy norm", but rather is an

indicator that something is very wrong with humanity in general.

Mentally ill individuals are canaries in the coal mine.

Bottom line: The profession of clinical psychology has normalized a pathological cultural paradigm. That which is considered as “normal” reinforces pathology and that which is considered as “pathological” is not seen for what it really is: A mirror held up for all of us to see how broken our human systems are. As described earlier, psychotherapy thus seems to be at best a process of rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. At worst it serves to reinforce cultural norms that are pathological, delusional, indeed psychotic.

Eco-anxiety

The American Psychological Association has defined eco-anxiety as “anxiety or worry about climate change and its effects”²⁰. Many clinical psychologists try to serve their clients who have eco-anxiety (a growing population) by helping them cope with and find resources to overcome this anxiety. The problem: Most therapists adhere to the medical model paradigm which demands that health care professionals work to suppress disease so that individuals can return to serving *World as Possession/Resource*. In this manner eco-anxiety is viewed along with all other mental illnesses as a diseased state which demands relief and cure. In reality, eco-anxiety is not a mental illness – it is a natural response to the reality of the world that we have created for ourselves to live in. More than anything else, this type of anxiety is a giant red flag that something is wrong in the world and needs our attention – it is part of a wake-up call for us to become aware and to take action. If, as clinical

psychologists we treat eco-anxiety as “just another mental illness” which requires treatment and then the patient is cured, we are entirely missing the point.

Admittedly, if anxiety becomes so severe that the individual is effectively immobilized, then clinical intervention is absolutely necessary. Anyone paralyzed by fear cannot effectively heed the wake-up call. Once the fear is brought down to a manageable level, however, the ultimate source of the fear must be addressed. Once again, we are all on this boat together.

Chapter 9 Spiritual Traditions and the Hole

Approximately 30 years ago I was deeply involved in my own personal healing and growth process. On that journey I was introduced to Holotropic Breathwork. In this process, a trained therapist guided me in a very specific breathing technique – no drugs or anything else, just very specialized breathing - which took me into an altered state. It was like being turned inside out. Everything on the inside – my suffering, my despair, my woundedness, was suddenly flushed out for me to be conscious of and to work on. I underwent this “rebirthing process” many times over several years, gaining what felt like extraordinary healing. Toward the later part of this period, I found that the breathwork took me to what seemed to be like an awakened state – an intense high of feeling like I was connected to my spirit. After being at a weekend-long retreat where I was in this state for some time, I returned to my ordinary life of being a father to young children, husband, homeowner, professional engineer, etc. Since I had now achieved enlightenment, however, it was time to bring this amazing light into my life and live forevermore as an enlightened being. Finally, after two months of trying I became exhausted, depressed, angry, and discouraged. Time for my true self - a broken, damaged, scarred self - to resume healing.

For this final exploration of the nature of the Hole, we will delve into an examination of religion and mainstream spiritual practices, which are utilized as a special flavor of artificial fillers.

World as Prison/Trap

As discussed earlier, the *World as Prison/Trap* level of consciousness posits that life on the planet is an experience of suffering. To a limited extent this is true – every human being inevitably experiences pain, loss, unmet desire, and ultimately death. According to the *World as Prison/Trap* model, however, this suffering is the *core* experience of your life on the planet. Life is so horrible in fact, that the only possible relief from your suffering is to die and be rewarded in the afterlife with heaven. Per the dogma of all major religions, you must first live a moral life to become eligible. Through defining and enforcing what is moral, the church finds an ingenious way to dominate and control you and other parishioners. The leadership of the world’s mainstream religions has found ways to exploit suffering created by the Hole, offering an artificial filler that much of the world’s population wholeheartedly believes in. In reality, mainstream religious practices are yet another human addiction, with the priests, ministers, and clergy serving as dealers in “salvation”.

World as Prison/Trap mentality fails to address that your life can also be beautiful, affirming, purposeful, and may embody the experience of Wholeness. Joy, love, satisfaction, compassion, and awe do not have to wait for the afterlife. They are here for all of us now. You’ve heard the phrase “Heaven on Earth”? It’s not just an expression – it is available here, in this lifetime, now, in the experience of being with the planet and with each other.

To be sure, not all earthly religions fall completely into *World as Prison/Trap* mentality. One example of such is Wicca. The practice of Wicca is essentially a practice of creating Gods and Goddesses for the

purpose of worshipping aspects of the natural world. The Wicca practitioner lives mostly in *World as Lover* mentality, which indirectly helps to connect the worshiper to the natural world. Even Wicca falls short, however, in that aspects of nature are anthropomorphized – made to have human qualities - as deities. There is no religion that seems to fully and wholly foster *World as Self* consciousness.

The Existence of God

Whether monotheistic or polytheistic, religions seem to have the need for deities. In western cultures (Christian, especially) we view God as being omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent (all knowing, all powerful, and everywhere). We all have a need to be connected to an entity that is greater than us. What this seems to mean in reality is that we feel small, insignificant, and powerless. When viewed in the grand scale of the planet and the universe, this is realistically true – not delusional. It is natural when feeling this way to want to connect with a (hopefully beneficent) entity which uses its power to protect and care for us so that we can feel safe and secure in its care. We become children under the care of our God.

When you think of God, what comes to mind? What does God look like? What is his/her personality? What does his/her voice sound like? We tend not to just look for Gods in a general sense – we look for Gods which resemble us physically and psychologically. This happens because we are literally programmed for it. When a baby is born, he/she/they is neurologically hard-wired before birth to look for a human face. When the newly born baby finds a face, it psychologically latches on

to that face to find comfort, food, care, and safety. It is in our deepest core programming to connect with other beings who have a human appearance. Thus when we look for Gods, we tend to look for them in human form. Here is where it gets interesting: There is a popular Christian saying, “God created us in his image.” Turns out the exact inverse is true: The saying should state, “We created God in our image.” In our subconscious need to feel safe, nurtured and cared for, we created the ultimate loving parent.

OK, one more time... Nellie??? In the process of creating God(s) and religion, we have forgotten something essential – everything we need to feel Whole and connected is right here already, available to us anytime. We have the earth. We have each other. The earth is our creator. We are each other’s creators. I have been in a few churches (even cathedrals) and must admit to some sense of feeling impressed while standing in these magnificent human creations. None of these amazing places of worship can even begin to match, however, the sense of Wholeness and awe that I feel when I stand in the middle of a grove of old growth redwood trees, or when I am on an ocean beach feeling the power of crashing waves, or when I witness a beautiful bird of prey soaring in the sky above me. If I really want to feel connected to God, these are the places. Someone recently told me what they thought was a joke: “All the planets in the solar system are named for Gods except Earth – Earth is named for the stuff on the ground.” Absolutely right! That stuff on the ground created us, and when we die, we will return to it.

It is important to note that I am not advocating worshiping nature the way we normally worship our Gods. The kinds of worship we have

invented are distorted, delusional, and even psychotic. While I am in nature it is not about any formal kind of doctrine. I don't need to say a prayer or recite a litany. I don't need to offer a sacrifice or receive communion. I don't need to dress in my Sunday best. I don't need to say or do anything. All I need to do is to *be present* - to allow myself to be connected *with*, to commune *with* nature. Oh, and by the way, it is better when I am there with someone I love.

Finally, a message for all those who steadfastly believe in deities: If you believe in the existence of a god or gods – then ok. That is your right. But I am guessing you would also believe that your god or gods created the earth as a paradise for us to live in. Are you honoring the existence of your god or gods when you live in the *World as Possession/Resource*, *World as Battlefield*, or *World as Prison/Trap* level of consciousness? I would guess not.

Dark vs. Light

In our practice of religion, we often refer to the terms *light* and *dark*. Remember our discussion of darkness earlier? These terms are usually associated with *good* and *evil*. (Does this remind you of a certain level of human consciousness?). The forces of light are those associated with God, spirit, goodness, piety, and the doing of good deeds. The forces of darkness are associated with evil, pain, suffering, malevolence, the devil, hell and eternal damnation. These are, in reality, purely human definitions.

If we look to the natural world, the terms *light* and *dark* mean something else entirely. Without light the forces of nature do not have

energy to do their work. Light fuels everything. Darkness, on the other hand, is not an oppositional force in nature to light - it is simply the absence of light. Darkness is also essential to the natural world.

Now let's look at light and darkness at a different, more abstract and psychological level. Psychologically, light is often referred to as the "light of awareness", comically depicted as a light bulb turning on over a person's head. A person who has an epiphany "sees the light" or is "enlightened". The concept of light almost universally refers to a conscious awakening of some sort.



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But what about darkness? There is much less available in popular references to describe darkness, other than to say that it is metaphorically

the opposite of light – if I am ignorant, stupid or uninformed, I am “in the dark”. There is another way of looking at darkness: The subconscious mind (recall the image of the iceberg) exists away from the light of consciousness. It is in this darkness that we hold most of our wisdom, intelligence, and knowledge. We fear it, however, because we can’t see it – it is hidden from the light.

Bottom line: Most mainstream religions venerate light and demonize darkness. The natural truth, however, is that both light and darkness are absolutely necessary for our existence. This is true physically, biologically, ontologically, psychologically, metaphorically, and, if one chooses, spiritually.

Spiritual Bypassing

In his 1980’s work *Toward a Psychology of Awakening*, John Welwood²¹ defined spiritual bypassing as a “tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks.” I am guilty of this if I use my religion or spiritual practice as a way to avoid the suffering of my life (the Hole) so that I can “soar above it all”. This practice is ultimately a bridge to nowhere, and at best provides temporary relief from suffering, and at worst causes the sources of suffering



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to go unchecked, ultimately making suffering worse. Those who practice spiritual bypassing are ultimately guilty of engaging in a hastened version of *World as Prison/Trap* – they choose not to wait for the “reward” of heaven in the afterlife, choosing instead to insist on experiencing it now, while they are alive on the planet. The ultimate effect is the same, however, as the person fails to engage in the experience of life while it is happening and misses out on the necessary opportunity of addressing their own suffering. According to verywellmind.com²², the following are indications of spiritual bypassing:

1. Avoiding feelings of anger
2. Believing in your own spiritual superiority as a way to hide from insecurities

3. Believing that traumatic events must serve as “learning experiences” or that there is a silver lining behind every negative experience
4. Believing that spiritual practices such as meditation or prayer are always positive
5. Extremely high, often unattainable idealism
6. Feelings of detachment
7. Focusing only on spirituality and ignoring the present
8. Only focusing on the positive or being overly optimistic
9. Projecting your own negative feelings onto others
10. Pretending that things are fine when they are clearly not
11. Thinking that people can overcome their problems through positive thinking
12. Thinking that you must “rise above” your emotions
13. Using defense mechanisms such as denial and repression

Have you ever been in an argument with someone, and the person ends the argument with, “I’m sorry you feel that way?” Someone once told me that this is a new age way of saying “Fuck you!”.

The cure for spiritual bypassing (and all other forms of participating in *World as Prison/Trap*) is to become embodied – to be willing to occupy and inhabit the suffering of your own body, of your own mind and emotions, as well as to become aware of and connect to the suffering of others. Get down from the exalted bridge and get your hands and feet dirty. A difficult but necessary task indeed. We were not designed to be disembodied souls. We were designed to be grounded,

embodied beings experiencing the beauty, pain, wonder, suffering, and all else associated with being creations of the earth.

Salvation

The term “salvation” often refers to preservation or protection from harm, loss, or injury. In religious parlance, the term usually refers to being protected by a *savior*. The savior is that special, magical humanoid who will fix everything and make it all good. All the savior asks for in return is absolute devotion and worship. Christians have Jesus, Muslims have Muhammad, etc. As you have no doubt ascertained by now, I do not believe in such beings.

A few years ago I read Mohandas Gandhi’s autobiography²³. Gandhi was often referred to as a Mahatma, or “Great One”. His accomplishments stand in evidence – he was largely responsible for nonviolently leading India’s fight for independence, improving living and working conditions for his fellow countrymen, and promoting peace between rival religious factions. What is not commonly known, however (admitted to in his autobiography) is that he was thoroughly human and flawed. He admitted to physical violence against his wife early in their marriage and that he created problems with at least one of his children which lead to their estrangement. Gandhi also admitted to failures in his work. Even though he may have earned the title of Mahatma, he was certainly flawed and human - a very flawed savior! No one who has ever walked the earth can claim otherwise. We are all limited. We are all broken. We all fail.

Let's now look instead at a different form of the word salvation – the word *salve*. Salve is usually defined as an agent applied to promote the healing of a wound or affliction. I propose a new marriage between the words *salvation* and *salve* – that the word *salvation* be defined as the process of applying a *salve*. Thus when salvation occurs, this means that an effective healing agent is being applied which will promote a return to health and Wholeness. As applied to Climate Change, our salve is to reconnect to the earth, each other, and to our own genuine inner presence.

Section III Apocalypse

Dictionary.com traces the origins of the word “apocalypse” to the Greek word apokálypsis, meaning “uncovering,” a derivative of the verb apokályptein “to take the cover off.” This is perhaps a little different from the current popular definition, which typically defines apocalypse as the end of all things. In this section it is important to adopt the true Greek meaning rather than the popular definition. What we are facing from unchecked Climate Change is *not* the end of all things – the planet will continue to exist, and it is likely that the human race will also continue to exist. What we *are* facing, however, is the end of our current way of living on the planet. Per the Greek definition, we are entering into the phase of Climate Change where it is becoming increasingly evident that our efforts to keep the Hole covered with denial, artificial fillers, delusions, etc. are finally falling apart. The Hole is becoming increasingly revealed, no matter our efforts to keep it covered and out of sight. Chapter 10 focuses on what we are in for and how choices we make will profoundly affect how we continue to exist as a species.

Chapter 10 Contraction/Collapse

One of the things I enjoy most about my career as a psychotherapist is working as a supervisor for interns. It gives me great satisfaction and joy to teach and mentor those who are learning the art and practice of helping

others. My interns find their work to be very challenging, especially given that they're called on to help those who are underprivileged and who have the fewest resources. As difficult as all this is, it is actually getting *worse* over time – the challenges that those face who are not thriving in the World as Possession/Resource game are becoming harder than ever to bear. I remember the challenges of being an intern myself 10 years ago. As difficult as that experience was for me, my therapy clients from then were higher functioning and had more resources than the ones my interns are currently working with. This tells me in no uncertain terms that things in the local community are getting worse.

Collapse Vs. Contraction

What we are doing on the planet is increasingly being shown not to work. Human social systems are breaking down. We are becoming increasingly divided over politics. Violence and lawlessness are becoming worse everywhere. The divide between rich and poor is becoming more severe as economic systems falter. And, of course, the weather is changing – the planet is becoming warmer and weather systems are becoming more and more disordered. (As I write this in spring 2024, scientists are letting us know that we are about to blow through the 1.5 degree C goal of global warming with no relief in sight.) Change – collapse or contraction – is inevitable.

Let's define the two terms here – “Collapse” and “Contraction”: Collapse can be defined as what happens when something falls apart and becomes disordered. Think of a house made of cards – such a structure is

made in a manner which is very fragile, and it takes very little for it to fall apart – it collapses into chaos.



Image courtesy of playingcarddecks.com

Contraction, on the other hand, is defined here simply as the process of becoming smaller. The thing that contracts has less size and weight. There is less of it than before, but it is still relatively free of chaos and may be more resilient against collapse.

How does this relate to the Climate Crisis? If we continue to live in the delusional/psychotic state of believing that what we have created will work, the result will be collapse – all that which is being shown increasingly not to work will continue to get worse until it finally

catastrophically falls apart into chaos and disorder. We are already seeing this in a number of places in the world: The government of Haiti has collapsed and has been replaced with street gangs – news reports show that life there is now brutal. The southern border of the US is now being besieged by refugees from Central America who have nowhere else to go because of the effects of Climate Change and political unrest in their homelands. Things are getting worse. Things are finally beginning to fall apart and will get worse in a chain-reaction of collapse if we fail to enact fundamental changes in how we live on the planet.

On the other hand, if we wake up from our delusional dream and intentionally move into a place of contraction, we will have the opportunity to “re-size” our existence toward a sustainable and manageable state. We can intentionally reduce our population. We can intentionally move away from the runaway addiction of unlimited economic growth on a planet which has limited resources. We can work toward moving from World as Possession/Resource to World as Lover or Self. The result of this is that *everything* becomes smaller. But guaranteed to be better.

Features of Contraction

What does contraction look like, specifically? In their book *An Inconvenient Apocalypse*²⁴, Wes Jackson and Robert Jensen list nine characteristics of a human world where contraction has successfully occurred:

1. *A lower degree of stratification and social differentiation.*
I take this to mean that the social/political/economic hierarchy arising from World as Possession/Resource thinking is gone and replaced with a truly leveled playing field.
2. *Less economic and occupational specialization of individuals, groups, and territories.*
This means that with a more level playing field, individuals will be called upon to do more diverse work. The town mayor occasionally does carpentry work, etc.
3. *Less centralized control; that is, less regulation and integration of diverse economic and political groups by elites.*
With contraction, administration and enforcement of laws and other government functions will be primarily at the local level.
4. *Less behavioral control and regimentation.*
More individual freedom – and more individual responsibility and accountability.
5. *Less investment in the epiphenomena of complexity, those elements that define the concept of “civilization”: monumental architecture, artistic and literary achievements, and the like.*
Life will be simpler. Not so sure about less literary and artistic achievements – being an artist or writer will still be practiced, just at a more local level.
6. *Less flow of information between individuals, between political and economic groups, and between a center and its periphery.*

Nope. I disagree with the authors. Flow of information will for sure be localized, but information sharing is essential to any healthy community.

7. *Less trading, sharing, and redistribution of resources.*

Agreed. Commerce will happen within local communities.

8. *Less overall coordination and organization of individuals and groups.*

On a grand scale, yes, but on a local level, coordination and organizing are essential.

9. *A smaller territory integrated within a single political unit.*

Agreed, political units will be essentially local.

Robustness Vs. Resilience

As we look at the qualities of collapse versus contraction, it is also useful to include looking at the qualities of “robustness” versus “resilience”. A search on the internet defines *robustness* as the quality of being strong – designed not to break or fail. Something is robust if it is strong and unyielding. Think of the house of cards. What if you make it stronger by gluing the cards together? It would seem to make sense – you can no longer blow hard or brush your fingers against the structure and make it collapse. But what about hitting it with a hammer? Climate change is no gentle breath – it is a sledgehammer.

On the other hand, *resilience* is defined as the capacity to adapt to difficulties and setbacks and still survive. Instead of gluing the house of cards together, you dismantle the house and build something else that

makes more sense - you start from scratch and build something entirely different that will work much better.

The Dark Night of the Soul

The term “Dark Night of the Soul” came from a label adopted for an originally untitled poem written by John of the Cross in the 16th century²⁵:

In an obscure night
Fevered with love’s anxiety
(O hapless, happy plight!)
I went, none seeing me

Forth from my house, where all things quiet be

The meaning of the poem seems to be somewhat obscure, but there are vague references to darkness, anxiety, solitude, confusion, quiet, and purposeful plight. Most modern interpretations of these ideas assemble them into the theme of a person moving from a place of contentment or at least acceptance of their station in life to a state of mind where there is an existential crisis: What formerly was experienced as satisfying, purposeful, enjoyable, or at least tolerable now loses these qualities.

If you experience a *dark night*, you begin to wake up to the fact that none of the things that formerly seemed important to you carry any real meaning or are consistent with what you value. Another way of looking at it is that you suddenly wake up and realize that your place in *World as Possession/Resource* is not working. The Hole is still there. You fall off the ladder and crash onto the ground, wounded. As you pick yourself up off the ground, you find that the landscape is bleak, barren,

non-nourishing, and bereft of meaning. (Shall we label this “*World as Wasteland*”?) You then have a choice: Spend the rest of your life wandering around the wasteland in despair, or begin to engage in the difficult process of finding a new, heretofore unknown purpose and meaning. If the latter process is undertaken, then you are faced with a search. You either eventually find an answer (*World as Lover*), or you are destined to wander as an empty, lost soul.

The soul is either found and newly nourished or remains lost. Note: Use of the word “soul” is accepted here not as an immortal self which survives death, but rather as the engaged sense of “I-ness” which, during this lifetime, lets us know if we are genuinely in Wholeness, or if we are still psychotically maintaining the Hole. As a species we are currently “falling off the ladder”. There is no choice now, but for us all together to enter into a Dark Night. There is great hope, however, that we will find our way through to a new experience of Wholeness, beautiful meaning, and harmony. Section IV will be an attempt to come up with a recipe for doing so.

Section IV Healing the Hole

The discussion now (finally!) turns from descriptions of the Hole and how it is responsible for Climate Change to “What can we do about it?” In order to answer this question, I introduce three concepts that I believe will constitute a profound healing and recovery process:

- 1) Rekindling direct contact with the natural world,
- 2) Rekindling supportive contact with each other,
- 3) Engaging in healing contact with your own inner processes.

Together, these three healing processes make up a stable enough “three-legged stool” to support us as we heal the Hole and genuinely solve Climate Change. Each is discussed in detail below.

Section IVa Spending Time in Nature

Chapter 11 Nature Bathing

My wife and I drive up and enter the parking lot. Having been there many times before, I am already anticipating the experience. As we exit the car and walk toward the trailhead, I can see the towering tops of the trees – some almost 300 feet tall – the tallest living things on the planet. We walk onto the trail – the sight of these 1500-year-old redwood trees immediately fills me with a sense of wonder. We walk slowly, reverently. After a short distance, I stop and pull off my shoes and socks,

continuing with bare feet. My wife looks at me askance – I smile back at her – she shrugs and we walk on. The grove of giants is very quiet – no breeze, the only sound is a faint trickle from water in a nearby creek. Other people we encounter on the trail talk in quiet voices or even in whispers - it would seem somehow sinful to disturb the silence. I look at the forest floor and see that it is almost entirely covered with clover – *oxalis oregana*. Its bright green leaves look delicate and fragile next to the massive trunks of the redwoods. A now familiar feeling comes over me – I feel like I am in a *cathedral* – a magnificent place of worship and awe. I somehow feel like I am being blessed by the presence of these ancient, wise, and experienced beings.

Nature Bathing

In order to talk about the term used here - “Nature Bathing” - it is important to understand that it emerges originally from the term “Forest Bathing”. Forest Bathing began in Japan in the 1980s and was used as an eco-antidote to professional burnout and to inspire residents to reconnect with and protect the country’s forests. The practice quickly caught on, and by the 1990s researchers began studying its effects on humans, providing evidence to support what we should already know: time spent immersed in nature is good for us. Let’s expand the term from “forest bathing” to “nature bathing”.

So, what is Nature Bathing? Noooo - put the shampoo away, no fake microphone so that you can sing while showering under a waterfall! Nature bathing is practiced in any environment which allows you to consciously connect with the earth and its natural features. The practice

leaves behind any ambition, focus, goals, productivity, opinions, and even thoughts. If I am in an alpine forest practicing nature bathing, I am *simply there*.



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It is said that if you “accurately” practice nature bathing, you may walk as little as 20-30 feet in an hour (or not at all) through the natural setting. The whole point is simply to *be present*, and to be available to the experience. The more raw and unspoiled the natural environment the better.

Being in Nature is Natural

We were created and we evolved in nature. We are so tuned to be with the biosphere that our physical bodies literally react to the presence

of the natural environment. An example: When you are at the ocean shore you are exposed to negative ions (electrically charged particles found in the ocean air) which are beneficial to you – they provide and increase a sense of calm and groundedness. Similarly, when your skin is in physical contact with the ground, you will find that the earth has a slight negative electrical charge - same benefit. (The next time you are working in a garden, try doing so without wearing gloves. The next time you walk in nature, try doing so with bare feet.)

The more often and the longer the time with each exposure, the better. A recent study examined stress levels for people spending an hour walking in a congested urban environment versus those spending an hour walking in nature²⁶. The study concluded that those who walk in congested urban settings experience increased stress, those in natural settings experience less. This is not surprising – it simply illustrates and underscores two things: First, when we are away from nature, we are literally not taking care of our bodies and are effectively accumulating toxins and harmful elements. Second, being in nature helps to cleanse us of these toxins and allows us to take in the beneficial effects of natural exposure – over a length of time. Fifteen minutes of nature bathing once a month won't do it. It needs to be a regular practice, taken seriously.

In addition to all else, we find it to be beneficial to become rooted to a particular region on the surface of the planet – a place to call home. I was born in Northern California but spent much of my childhood and early adult life living in a variety of places – Northern California, Washington State, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and then back to Northern California. While I found that many of the places I was raised were beautiful and

offered nurturing natural environments, it was not until I returned to the North San Francisco Bay Area that I felt home again. Since settling in Sonoma County, I feel like I never want to move again. There is an inexplicable experience about living in one location for a long time which makes one grow roots – a good thing.

Disclaimer: Home is changing – Climate Change is literally altering all of our home environments. I have lived in Sonoma County for 20+ years now. When my family and I moved here we didn't worry about wildfires. Then the Tubbs fire of 2017 came to within 300 feet of our home. Now, every autumn we become fearful and vigilant, looking for wildfires. The linguist Glenn Albrecht²⁷ has invented a new word for the loss of the feeling of home: *Solastalgia* - the feeling of mourning or sadness accompanying the loss of what used to feel like home. Solastalgia includes feelings of love for what is being lost.

Fighting for the Natural World

We fight for those who are important to us. If a family member becomes ill, or is treated unjustly by others, or experiences some other misfortune, it is the job of loved ones to come to the aid of the family member. Many parents (including myself) state genuinely that they would give their life to save one of their own children. This is how it is supposed to be.

What does this have to do with Climate Change? Everything. The earth is our mother. She created us, nurtures us, provides all that we need to be alive. The love that we feel for our children, for our parents, and for those who are in our inner circles should also be there for the earth. The

planet should be part of everyone's inner circle. In reality, there is no difference in the deep caring we are capable of experiencing for each other and the profound love and caring we should be offering up for the earth.

One needs to be careful however, in how the word "fighting" is used in this context: We are enculturated to assume that if we fight, we are therefore enlisted in *World as Battlefield* consciousness. This is not appropriate here and will in fact deepen our experience of the Hole, ultimately making everything worse. (Remember that in *World as Battlefield*, the earth *is* the battlefield and is expendable.) We are not fighting an external (or even necessarily internal) enemy. There is no good versus evil here. What there is, instead, is the need to activate, sustainably marshal resources (both external and internal), focus, and unite in our love, care, and willingness to sacrifice old ways of thinking in order to care for the planet. Nothing less will suffice.

Nature Helps Us to Get Out of our Own Way

The concept of "getting out of one's own way" is vitally important to nature bathing. As discussed throughout Section II, we have had thousands of years to develop expertise in inventing and using "artificial fillers" – we use them literally everywhere in our lives. Nature bathing does not require artificial fillers – using them while nature bathing will interfere with and block the experience of filling your self with genuine contact with the planet.

Put the cell phone on airplane mode. If you are with someone, don't talk about anything other than what is literally in front of you. To the maximum extent possible, empty your mind of *all* thoughts, even

thoughts about what you think you should be experiencing while nature bathing. *Just be.* Allow there to be space inside of yourself. Allow emptiness to exist. Open that emptiness to the environment. That is all.

If you master nature bathing, you're doing it wrong. There is no mastery. There is no getting good at it. If I boast that I am better than you, then I am missing the whole point of it. Everyone who engages in the practice will have their own experience of it, including times when they are able to be amazingly present for the experience, and other times when they struggle.

Getting out of one's own way to be with nature essentially becomes a feedback loop: The more you are able to be open and present, the more you will experience the feeling of being filled with what the natural world provides. The more you become filled with nature, the easier it is to become present. This explains why the process needs to become repetitive and be given significant time: When you first start, the feedback loop is small and weak – it will become stronger over time. Go practice!

Internal Conflict

While nature bathing you inevitably will experience internal conflict. How do you reconcile what you feel and experience in your body with what you think? Turns out that it is all the same thing – just viewed from different lenses and from different viewpoints.

When I was in school studying psychology, I was enrolled in a course with a professor who was doing research on the use of ayahuasca for enhancing consciousness and awareness. He would often make

statements in class regarding how he believed in the spiritual world and in the potential for human evolution that can come from embracing that which is beyond our ordinary existence. At that time, I found the concept to be very difficult to embrace – I was still freshly estranged from my career as an engineer and still had “engineer thoughts”. After class one day I went to him and told him of my difficulty, stating “I don’t like what you’re saying. How can I reconcile the need for scientific proof with beliefs and experiences that seem to be beyond science?” He looked at me directly with his piercing gaze, and said, “What’s your problem? *Of course* the need for scientific proof and the need to believe in what’s beyond science are completely compatible!” I was dumbfounded. Years later, I’m still trying to figure this out. What I have been able to come up with, so far, is that just because I can’t logically and rationally explain something, that does not mean that it’s not true. For any particular conception of reality, perhaps what you know in your brain has not yet caught up with what you know in your body, using all of your senses.

This applies to our relationship and conceptualization of the planet. So far in this book I have clumsily attempted to explain the truth of how we relate to each other and to the planet. There is still much yet to discover. The blind man continues to encounter the elephant.

Being in Nature with Others

This chapter is about spending time in the natural world. Later, the healing value of being genuinely connected with others will be explored. What about the combination of the two? We are a species that came from nature, but we are also a social species. We experience Wholeness most

deeply when both core aspects of who we are can be satisfied. Why not at the same time? When I am in a natural setting – nature bathing – and I am also alone, I feel deeply connected with the planet – but something still feels missing. When I nature bathe with someone who is important to me there is no longer anything missing.

A couple of suggestions regarding nature bathing with a partner: First, ideally your partner should be someone who is like-minded regarding your desire to be in nature. I know a number of people who inexplicably appear to be “city folk”, who fear and avoid being in nature, and feel uncomfortable if they are too far away from the amenities of civilization. If I truly want to nature bathe, this type of person is not the right person to be with while in the process. (I welcome, however, the prospect of introducing others who are uncomfortable with nature to the natural world – to serve as a guide for them. That, however, is not nature bathing – it serves another purpose.)

Second, while in nature with another, it is vitally important to focus on the experience of being *in* nature. Don’t talk about your job, politics, what you had for lunch, or feeling sad that you had to leave the shampoo and fake microphone in the car. (again, sorry...) Don’t even talk about Climate Change. Keep the conversation to what your senses are exposed to. “Wow, look at how tall that tree is.” “The air feels cold.” “Walking on this trail makes my feet feel unsteady”. Etcetera. Focusing interactions on what is present helps to facilitate *being* present.

Overpopulation

A final note on nature bathing is with regard to the population of the world and how it has been increasing. This topic is included here because considering overcrowding leaves us with a conundrum: There are now eight billion of us. If we all take the day off tomorrow and go nature bathing, the ecosystem will be devastated by the experience. There are simply too many of us to all go out into nature together at one time and commune with the biosphere.

An example: I live not too far from the town of Fort Bragg, on the California coast. About fifteen years ago my family and I discovered “Glass Beach” – a natural/man-made anomaly where an abundance of “marine glass” can be found mixed with natural pebbles on a beach. The result is strange and ultimately unnatural, but somehow still beautiful. (A long time ago municipal garbage was dumped off a cliff into the ocean near Fort Bragg, and over time glass waste became broken up, tumbled by the ocean waves and washed ashore, leaving an unusually colorful effect on the beach.) The beach was open to the public, and because the glass was unnatural, people were allowed to remove it for souvenirs. Over time the beach became known and became a tourist attraction. Over the next fifteen or so years, so many people visited the beach and removed glass that the glass is now mostly gone. (Not such a problem for me, as the glass was unnatural to begin with.) The problem: The beach has become so popular that the entire area of the seashore around the beach now has a trampled, damaged, abused sense to it. It is the only ocean beach I go to and no longer feel the healing power of nature – a huge loss.



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So, we have a problem: If we all visit these naturally beautiful areas, we may ruin them by our presence. The only answer I can come up

with is that when you visit nature, be careful! Stay on the trails. Respect the delicate balance of the biosphere. Take only pictures. Leave behind nothing (not even footprints).

Expose Yourself to Climate Change

A final-final note on spending time in nature – especially for those of us who live with privilege: Turn the air conditioner off. If the weather is hot, be hot – don't insulate yourself from Climate Change. When there are more and worse heat waves, we turn the air conditioning up. During droughts, we continue to water our lawns. We continue to eat non-sustainable food. We continue to buy products made in ways that intensify Climate Injustice. This is all part of a process of denial. The unpleasant answer is to be willing to (assertively, if necessary) expose our bodies, our minds, and our consciousnesses to what is happening on the planet and to each other. This all needs to become very real to us. It will not be real (until it is too late) if we continue to pretend and insulate ourselves from the physical, meteorological, social, political, and bodily reality of what is happening. So, I know that it is difficult, but – during the next heat wave go out and experience the heat – make it real for yourself.

After writing the above paragraph, my hometown of Santa Rosa experienced its hottest day ever – 115 degrees F! I decided not to ride my bicycle to work that day (thus avoiding heat stroke), but I drove my car with the air conditioning off and the windows open. Very unpleasant (and frightening, if I am honest), but it enhanced my awareness of what is happening with the local climate. Another example: In my household I

now collect grey water from showers to use to flush toilets. I do this to save water, of course, but perhaps for another, even more important reason. Doing so takes time and effort, and when I lug five-gallon buckets of water across the house I am very aware of my water use. It makes me *think* about drought and water. My consciousness shifts by doing this, where otherwise it would not. Of course, be safe! Discomfort is one thing, putting yourself in danger is another thing entirely.

Section IVb Interpsychic Healing

Chapter 12 Healing With Others

I have discovered something about being in nature – I seem to get much more out of it when I am with another person rather than being alone. I can be out in the most naturally beautiful place, taking in the wonders of the earth, but if I am there alone something is still missing. Being in nature with someone from my inner circle is the best. If not my inner circle, a close friend will do. If not a close friend, then an acquaintance. If not an acquaintance, then I'll go on my own to a place where I will be in the presence of others – even encountering strangers on a trail is better than being alone. I am a part of the earth, but I am also a part of the human community.

Humanity

This book is about Climate Change – “Climate Crisis” is in the title - duh. But not really - this book is *really* about human beings – about humanity. Fixing Climate change will be the *result* of what we do together as a species, not the other way around. The suffering that we are experiencing that created Climate Change is, at its core, not yours or mine – it is ours. The ultimate answer for how we deal with this suffering will come from learning how to deal with it *together*.

A few years ago I attended a professional conference (remember me sitting alone around hundreds of other people?) and listened to a variety of researchers present their findings on topics in psychology. One

of the most memorable was put on by Toni Antonucci, Ph.D.²⁸, who presented research findings on the benefits of social engagement. She found that for children, healthy social engagement improves their ability to relate to peers, makes them more competent, improves their ability to achieve in school, makes them more responsive, and increases their interest in seeking challenges. For adults, good social engagement correlates with better physical health, less experience of pain, less susceptibility to disease, increased psychological well-being, and better labor and delivery outcomes for mothers. For older adults, adaptive social engagement increases lifespan – social engagement will literally make you live longer!

The research cited above helps to underscore that we are wired for contact with each other. Separation from each other has left us deeply broken and damaged. We desperately look for love, acceptance, and connection. We have, however, forgotten where to look - toward each other.

I desire. I want. I suffer. I feel separate and alone. We are together. We belong to all of humanity and to the earth. We are an integrated, indivisible, connected, giving and taking part of the Whole of the planet. Our healing path is to heal together. It has been said that “The mind is a dangerous place – never go there alone.” Literally true.

Survival of the Friendliest

At the same conference where I listened to Toni Antonucci’s presentation, I also listened to Brian Hare, Ph.D.²⁹ talk about having studied differences in species who behave cooperatively within

community groups, versus those who exhibit aggression, dominance seeking, and competition within groups. He cited two primate species as examples: bonobos and chimpanzees.

Hare described observing bonobos - he found them to be very within-group cooperative. There is almost no within-community seeking of dominance; members of the community work cooperatively to find food and other resources, and there is overall virtually no aggression between individuals. Hare then described this social structure as being very productive, useful, and beneficial to the species, as they work together for the benefit of each other and their community.

Hare then described Chimpanzees (who, like Bonobos, share 97% of their genetic make-up humans) as exhibiting competition and dominance-seeking by males. Unlike bonobos, there is considerable within-group aggression, indeed resulting in occasional homicide (“chimpicide”?) within groups.

Within-species cooperation is preferable to within-species competition and aggression. Hare’s research showed that aside from the effects of human encroachment (which has been destructive to both species), Bonobos do better in a natural environment than Chimpanzees. This seems to be logically obvious even without Hare’s research – it seems that a group that works explicitly for the benefit of its members will benefit more than a group where the members are fighting each other.

Note: It is worth mentioning that Bonobos live in a matriarchal structure – females are in charge of the colony. Chimpanzees live in a patriarchal structure – an aggressive male is in charge.

Hare then went on to describe how humans have selectively created an entirely new species, based on intentionally selecting members of the species for breeding who exhibit more friendliness toward humans – this was done to turn wolves into dogs. The result is that humans and dogs enjoy close bonds with each other.

Finally, Hare then described what he called “self-domestication” – wherein a species consciously works on improving the ability of its own members to exist in harmony with each other, thus increasing the species’ ability to survive and thrive. Hare described the human race as being on a knife-edge between, on the one hand, creating a mutually beneficial social system that ensures our survival and helps us to thrive, versus, on the other hand, moving further into competitive, internally aggressive, and internally exploitative ways of living which will cause our extinction. We share genes with both Chimpanzees and Bonobos. We get to choose which way we go.

Communal Wisdom

The process of writing this book is steeped in the experience of community and social contact. It is true that I write as an individual - I sit here alone in a room typing these words in solitude. (OK, not in complete solitude – sometimes I’m with my new cat, who helps me out on the computer keyboarrrrrdlkfjodjnnkajsd) Nonetheless, everything that goes into this writing is deeply and fundamentally informed by my contact with others. This book is a synthesis. In addition to being an internal combination of my linear (engineer) and nonlinear (psychologist) thought processes, my feelings, aspirations, and fears, it has also received and

incorporated impressions from my family, friends, psychotherapy clients and interns, professional associates, teachers, and many others.

Even with the great sources of wisdom listed above, this book is certainly flawed – it has errors, lapses of judgment, inaccuracies, and misses insight. Guess where the needed wisdom to revise and improve this book will come from? You, the reader, of course! As we heal the Hole and find solutions to climate change, we will need each other to provide course corrections and to steer ourselves onto the correct path.

Unfortunately, the opposite is also true: Our social connections and communal momentum, if applied in a maladaptive manner, can push us over the cliff to extinction. We need to be wary of hopelessness, apathy, denial, and factionalism – these destructive forces can also gain communal momentum and be passed from one to another like a virus. How can this be avoided? Simple – each of us must focus on the humanistic ideals of empathy, unconditional positive regard, compassion, and the expression of being genuine and vulnerable with each other.

Staying Plugged In – To Each Other

Just as important as putting distractions (artificial fillers) aside for nature bathing is putting them aside for being in contact with others. This becomes somewhat complicated with social media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. are viewed by many as means to be socially interactive. This is ultimately not the case: Our brains and nervous systems evolved without computers, televisions, cell phones, and social media – we evolved for literal face-to-face interaction. The need to be socially

connected is only *truly* satisfied when we are in physical proximity to each other.

In my psychotherapy practice, I prefer face to face interactions with my therapy clients, as there is more actual interaction and information available. I can more clearly read the person's facial expressions and vocal intonations. I can see their body language. If a person is saying something while nervously tapping their foot, then I know something is off with what they are saying. Also, strangely enough, I can *feel* their energy. My psychotherapy clients are free to sense the same from me. Then COVID-19 hit. Everything went to teletherapy for a while - telephone and video sessions. I was surprised to discover that even with video sessions, it was not the same - although I could view the other person's video image, it was as if there was some sort of gauze or veil partially obscuring our connection. As the pandemic receded, I found that I deeply looked forward to returning to in-person contact.

I am noticing a generational pattern with this. Older adults such as myself tend to prefer in-person interactions, while younger adults feel very comfortable and seem to prefer virtual communication. I feel very worried about this, because this seems to be a symptom of the younger generations missing out on *true* social connection.

I know that it can be inconvenient and logistically challenging, but it is worth the effort to be face-to-face and more intimately in contact with each other. Just as seeing a picture of a waterfall does not qualify as nature bathing, seeing an image of another person does not qualify as genuine social contact.

Homelessness

As a resident of the West Coast, I have observed that the number of homeless people in cities has exploded over the last couple of decades. I have had the privilege of volunteering for homeless advocacy organizations during this time. Through my experience I have become aware that the homeless population is divided into two groups: One group is willing and capable of accepting help and using it to raise themselves out of homelessness and return to mainstream society and culture. The other group appears to be hopeless – any help offered is only valued for what it can do at the time it is offered. People in the second group appear to be incapable of or unwilling to move themselves out of their situation into a better living environment. I propose a label for the second group: “Throw away humans” - they are useless in supporting *World as Possession/Resource*, so they appear to have no value. It seems that as a society we send a message to the homeless: “If you are willing to reenter the *World as Possession/Resource* game, we’ll help. If not, you’re on your own.”

Regardless of which group they fall into, it seems that the homeless have something to teach us. They are living examples of the ultimate of what happens when we do not support each other – when we don’t embrace human life for the miracle it is.

When I was going to school to study psychology in San Francisco, I made a daily commute into the city, which took me down almost the full length of Van Ness Avenue. At every intersection there would be homeless people standing in the end of the center strip of boulevard, asking for handouts. Encountering this every day made me feel

uncomfortable. One day, on my way out of Santa Rosa to go to school, I stopped at a grocery store and loaded up on fresh fruit – apples, bananas, grapes, etc. As I drove down Van Ness Street, whenever I stopped at a stop light I rolled down my window and offered fruit to a homeless person. I was shocked to find that *without exception* each recipient expressed gratitude, smiled, wished me well, and wanted to exchange kind words with me. What had been an uncomfortable and awkward experience transformed to joy and pleasure! Turns out that offering a piece of fruit was just an excuse to make meaningful contact. Rather than being isolated and closed off, our interchanges with each other provided substantial mutual benefit, and I arrived at school in a state of relative *joy*. This became a daily practice and taught me in no uncertain terms that we are meant to be in meaningful contact with each other - doing so is healing for all participants. Everyone benefits from contact with others.

Storytelling

Perhaps the most important topic of the current discussion is concerned with answering the question, “How should we reconnect? What should we do to rekindle being with each other in a healing manner?” Perhaps the best answer is in the telling of stories to each other – our stories of our own lives.

Traditionally, stories have been a powerful mechanism for building and maintaining cohesiveness within families, communities, and cultures. Before the written word became ubiquitous, oral stories were a way to pass down communal knowledge and history. Even in modern culture, storytelling is a way for adults to connect with children. When an adult

shares a story with a child (or visa versa), there is a real sense of bonding that occurs.

While any form of storytelling will be useful and have benefits, there is a specific form that is recommended for healing the Hole: Individuals telling the stories of their own lives, the lives of their family members, and the lives of those in their community. These stories should be shared with family members, those in their own community, but also, and perhaps most importantly, with those who are outsiders. In this manner we truly need to learn about each other. If I were to travel to Alabama, for example, and talk with local residents, I would then have the opportunity to learn about what life is like for those who live in the local community. I have never been to Alabama – I have never talked with anyone from there. I have no real idea what it is like to grow up in Alabama, to live there, to raise a family there. I feel like there would be much for me to learn. Likewise, if the person(s) I talked with were open to it, they could learn from me what it is like to live in Northern California. By sharing stories, several vitally important things happen: First, people learn about others who may be different - or the same, as it may turn out - as them. The perspective of everyone becomes more informed and broader. Second, communication lines are opened – we are no longer guessing about each other or making uninformed judgments of each other. Third and most importantly, we bond with each other – we reconnect. If I get to know a person and they get to know me, now there is something shared. Remember the metaphor of the race, where everyone is competing (hopefully from the same starting line)? Now the race is

cancelled – everyone is invited to leave the racetrack and share time, knowledge and stories with each other.

There is no pretending that this will be an easy process. The stories may contain suffering, misery, anger, and even feelings of animosity toward the one listening. The stories need to be told and listened to anyway.

Volunteerism

In my practice as a psychotherapist, I often find myself working with people struggling with depression. I have found that most people who are depressed experience a kind of inward collapse of the self – it is as if their ego shrinks inward. The person usually experiences this as focusing more and more inwardly with their suffering – their world becomes smaller and smaller until all that seems to be left is their experience of their own pain and anguish.

I have discovered that if the person is able to establish any kind of outward focus, their suffering finds some level of relief. I often help my psychotherapy clients accomplish this by urging them to volunteer in their local community. By doing so, the person focuses in an outwardly explicit manner, makes contact with other people, experiences a sense of useful purpose, and finds that they are doing something that has genuine healing value to others. I am continually impressed by how important this last feature is – *doing something valuable and healing for others*: Somehow, when we exert energy, focus, intent, and thought toward the benefit of others, our own suffering decreases – it works every time. The benefit of

volunteering is not just for those who are depressed or have other mental disorders – it is available to anyone.

Volunteering should be focused on something you find meaningful and enjoyable for you specifically. I know an older adult who is very socially isolated, depressed and who suffers deeply, but is also socially phobic and has a difficult time tolerating interacting with other people. It turns out, however, that this person loves dogs, and finds great pleasure and benefit from volunteering at the local animal shelter. There is some kind of volunteering activity which will be perfect for any particular person, including you.

When we volunteer, we are making the world a better place – we are participating in the healing of the Hole through mutual interaction with others. This becomes a win-win and exemplifies the importance of how healing with others is essential to what we all need to accomplish.

Imago Therapy

One potential opportunity for interpersonal healing can come from intimate partners working together. In his book *Getting The Love You Want*, Harville Hendrix³¹, Ph.D. describes what has been labeled as *Imago Therapy* for couples. Imago Theory states that when two people fall in love with each other (remember the discussion regarding romantic love presented earlier?) and then move into a long-term relationship, something strange happens: Each partner's unresolved personal wounds – from childhood and earlier adulthood neglect and trauma – become activated by being in contact with each other. Somehow the romantic partner seems to be perfect at “pushing buttons” so that all of the hurt, sadness, anger, and

any other unwanted, repressed, and buried feelings are flushed out to the surface. What started out as “You complete me!” becomes “You are so irritating!” This happens in both directions – each partner seems to trigger the other. What is even more strange about this, according to Imago theory, is that each partner initially subconsciously selected the other as a mate precisely for the other’s ability to provoke the old, buried, hidden wounds! It seems ridiculous: Why would I seek out a partner that brings to the surface all of the things in myself that I want to keep hidden?

The answer is amazing: Apparently, the wisdom of our subconscious mind demands that we seek out healing, and knows that the best way to initiate the process is to “trick” the conscious mind into seeking out those we end up falling in love with.

The problem with all of this is that many (perhaps most) couples remain non-conscious of this process. This creates the disastrous result that each partner blames the other for their own unwanted feelings. Rather than engage in a genuine healing process, the partners take on *World as Battlefield* with the other as the enemy. This accounts for the relatively low success rates of long-term intimate relationships in the United States and in other western cultures.

On the other hand, if each partner can become conscious of what is happening and make a commitment to a genuine healing process, the couple can mutually support each other for real, authentic healing. If, instead of blaming my partner for my bad feelings, I own them for myself and enlist my partner as an aid for my healing process, a profound healing experience can result.

What does this have to do with the Hole and Climate Change? The Imago process comes from unhealed and unaddressed wounds. These wounds ultimately can be traced back to the creation, existence, and perpetuation of the Hole in all of us.

Spreading Healing Across the Planet

Much of this chapter has concerned itself with healing on a relatively small scale – couples, families, communities. How do we make the healing process spread to eight billion people?

The answer seems to be to start the process on a small scale, then as healing momentum builds, get it to spread to more and more people. Imagine a virus – transmitted from person to person, until it becomes an epidemic, then a pandemic. Not too hard to imagine - we have all just gone through COVID-19. Now imagine that there is a virus that is not destructive and deadly, but instead is a healing virus, mending and genuinely spreading healing of the Hole into Wholeness. One way this can occur is if a small group of people, who embody strength, resolve, and inner conscious awareness embody the spirit of this healing process. Then, they spread it outward – slowly at first, to those who can readily embrace the experience and absorb it for themselves – then to others, who perhaps start out as a little less conscious than the initial group. The healing process continues to spread more and more outward. At some point a critical mass is achieved: The number of people becomes large enough that the spreading momentum becomes unstoppable. At this point the “healing virus” will spread with great speed and momentum. Once this happens, the momentum will move toward solving Climate Change

and we will ensure our survival. This is tantamount to you, I, and everyone evolving to a new level of being – as individuals and as a species we will, at this point, literally view reality differently, to the benefit of all.

Chapter 13 Healing Together and as Individuals

Forty years ago I was a young man in my twenties. I was self-sufficient, capable, independent – and alone. I had what psychologists would label “avoidant attachment” – at core I was only willing to look to myself for care and support. Other people were seen by me as frightening and scary – better to keep my distance. I became an expert at “self-care” – for me that meant becoming really good at keeping to myself. At the same time, however, I also had some inkling of awareness that by being alone I was missing out on something important. Then, one day I had an accident – I almost cut my finger off with a table saw. Emergency room, surgery, physical therapy, etc. Thankfully, virtually full recovery - ten good fingers. But something had been shaken. With great reluctance I began, for the first time, to see a therapist. By being connected to her, I began to see that maybe being connected to others could also be helpful. Over the last forty years I have worked toward understanding, accepting, and deeply knowing that connecting with other people is essential to me. In this process, something weird and unexpected has happened: As I become more social and connected, my sense of my *self* as an individual has become *stronger* and *more confident*! Having ten good fingers is important for reaching out.

Preservation of Individual Identity

After reading Chapter 11, you may be left with the impression that, in order to heal the Hole and solve Climate Change, you will be required to give up your identity as an individual and utterly merge with others and

with the planet. After all, isn't that what *World as Self* looks like? Even if this was the desired outcome of the work (it is not), achieving it would be impossible, as you, I, all of us exist at core as individuals. As described earlier, we may be cells of a greater being, but even a cell maintains individual identity.

Embracing Wholeness does not mean utterly merging with the planet. Maintaining individual identity is *essential* to the healing process – you are being called to dedicate and apply your *self* to healing. Remember the “programming error” described earlier? Correction of this error is done on an individual basis – the error is experienced in a subtly different manner by each of us – the correction or healing of that error will also be experienced uniquely by each of us.

Whatever happens, there will still be differences between individuals. I will still be me. You will still be you. Your next-door neighbor's annoying cat will still be your next-door neighbor's annoying cat. Everyone will receive the gift of sustainable connection with each other and with the planet and will receive and experience this gift differently.

Free Will

You have free will. You have the ability, right, and responsibility to decide what you are going to do regarding Climate Change. Do you want to ignore it? Do you want to deny its existence? Do you want to be hopeless and apathetic? Or do you want to take it seriously and become part of solving it? It is up to each of us to decide.

How each of us decides individually will form an agglomerate which will determine how our species reacts to the challenge. Just as each cell of the body performs its own function, the combination of cells together will determine health, disease, life or death for the body as a Whole. We are being called as individuals to make a commitment which poses a paradox: We are being called commit to exercising our free will as *individuals* to join *together* into a unified collective which will serve a purpose greater than any individual need: The survival of our species, and the well-being of the planet.

You may very well argue that you don't really have free will – after all, like all of us you are deeply and profoundly embedded in the *World as Possession/Resource* (or *World as Battlefield* or *World as Prison/Trap*) way of life. You are called upon daily to feed a cancerous being who demands your time, energy, devotion, and spirit. You might ask, “How am I supposed to commit to genuine Wholeness, when virtually everything I have to offer is being gobbled up by this ravenous and insatiable beast?” Very difficult question indeed. The only answer I have to offer is for you to make genuine contact with what you *authentically value* for yourself and then let these values guide your actions as an individual. (More on this later with the discussion of the ACT healing process.)

Correction of the “Error Code”

While the overall aim of this discussion is to provide assurance that you are not being asked to sacrifice your individual identity, it is important to face the fact that the “error code” is embedded at a

fundamental, core level. Doing this work will be very difficult and arduous: While individual identity is retained, a basic characteristic of your self will need to be re-written. *I* will remain after this work is done. Many the experiences that *I* have in my life, however, will have a different quality.

We are wired to preserve our individual identity. Our fear of death is not so much that the physical body ceases to exist, but rather that the experience of “I” ceases to exist. Each of us is afraid that if a basic characteristic of who we are changes, then there will no longer be a recognizable self present afterward. This is natural – who wouldn’t be afraid of such a fundamental change in their life?

Let’s be clear: While correcting the error code will make your life seem very different on the planet, other core aspects of self-identity will stay intact: Every emotion you experience – joy, sadness, love, anger, fear, compassion, contempt, surprise, and all other innate human experiences will still be there. The difference is that each of these fundamental and genuine human characteristics will be experienced in a different field – a field of you being Wholly connected with others and with the planet. What will be missing are all of the experiences associated with living according to *World as Battlefield*, *as Prison/Trap*, and *as Possession/Resource*.

World as Lover, World as Self

Much of the focus of this book so far has been on describing *World as Battlefield*, *as Prison/Trap*, and *as Possession/Resource* levels of consciousness. The healing practices described in Section IV are designed

to move you, me, us into the higher levels of consciousness – *World as Lover* and *World as Self*. It is important here to make a distinction between these two higher levels. Recall that *World as Lover* happens when you essentially fall in love with your life on the planet and you move toward having a tantric experience of being alive. Your life is to be savored, tasted, explored, and experienced to the fullest extent possible. At *World as Self* consciousness you will experience life fully aware of and embracing the deep knowledge that while you exist as an individual, it is a deeper truth that you exist as a fully embodied part of the Whole of existence.

As it turns out, if all of us “merely” advance and embrace *World as Lover* mentality, we have done enough. Doing so will allow us to save ourselves and live in harmony with the planet and each other. If I am in a loving embrace with my life, with others, and with the planet, it would be psychotic for me to wish for or act on anything that would cause any harm to myself, another, or to the earth. Because of this, I am not required to fully advance to *World as Self* consciousness (although to be sure, if that happens, so much the better!). Any advancement in consciousness which takes us far enough beyond the lower three levels will be enough. Each of us is still allowed to be unenlightened, to suffer, even to experience remnants of the Hole – just so long as we move forward enough not to cause our own destruction and extinction.

Section IVc Intrapsychic Healing

Chapter 14 Self-Care

For me, self-care requires constant vigilance. Eating healthy food, getting good exercise, being in healing contact with others, remembering to nature bathe, all require me to mentally stay on top of the process. Without constant awareness (and, frankly, vigilance) I find it remarkably easy to fall into bad habits. I have to constantly *hold* myself to be accountable. Something is shifting, though, which amazes me and fills me with hope: As I write this book - a year plus-long process - I am finding that my self-care is coming more and more online and is slowly becoming more and more natural. No processed sugar (my main addiction) for the last ten months. Fingernails no longer being bitten - needing trimming from time to time. Losing weight. Less mental stress. Physical conditioning improving – bicycle riding is easier and I’m stronger. It seems that by doing something that moves me toward higher consciousness, self-care becomes better and easier. Is it the writing? Is it the awareness and vigilance? A combination of the two? Or are these just other forms of artificial fillers? Time will tell.

As you “shop around” for intrapsychic (within) healing it is easy to become confused, as there are many branches of psychotherapy and self-help techniques to choose from. Many of the approaches are very effective, some have little or no value, and a small subset can cause harm. The following is a very limited selection of topics on self-healing that I

find to be particularly useful. Please keep in mind that these are the result of this blind man exploring limited aspects of the self-healing elephant.

The Burning Hallway

Most of the people I have known in my life fear and avoid the experience of introspection - it seems that it is just too painful. Freud (oh God, not *him* again...) even discovered (or, perhaps, invented) a series of “defenses” which we all use, and which are implicitly designed to protect us from inward examination. I will not describe these in detail, but you may have heard words such as *projection, denial, rationalization, regression, displacement*, etc. These are all designed to keep you away from your inner experiences of suffering.

The problem, of course, is that the route to healing and Wholeness involves making contact *with* suffering. Before I can know what to do in order to move toward Wholeness, I need to experientially know about where I am *now*.

Imagine you are in a room in a house. The room is very familiar – you know everything about it – the color of the walls, the shape of the ceiling light, what’s in the closet, the view out the window, etc. What you also know is that you don’t like being in this room – it is a room where you suffer. In order to avoid your suffering, you sit in the middle of the room, wrap your arms around yourself, close your eyes, put your hands over your ears – all to shut out and protect yourself from your own suffering. You are also vaguely aware, however, that there is another room in the house which is *very* different: This other room has exactly what you need to feel Whole, alive, vibrant, and happy. The problem: If

you open the door from your room into the hallway leading to the other room, you discover that the hallway is on fire. You realize that in the process of traversing the hallway, you will certainly be singed by the heat of the flames. You may decide (as is your right) to stay in the safety of the old room, or you may decide to go into the hallway, feel the heat of the flames, and move toward the new room. Difficult choice.

What makes the choice even more difficult is that while you know that the new room has more aliveness and less suffering, it is very unfamiliar and unknown – you are not really sure what you will encounter there, other than it will be very unlike the room you are in now.

A final thought on this visualization: If you decide to traverse the burning hallway, don't go alone. Go with someone you trust - an intimate partner, family member, friend, or professional helper. As a psychotherapist, I tell my clients that my job is not to keep them from feeling the flames. Rather, my job is to hold their hand and guide them as they walk through the hallway. This chapter is my attempt as a psychologist, author, ex-engineer, and human being to help hold your hand and provide guidance for such a courageous act, if you choose to undertake it.

ACT

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is a specific therapeutic process that makes use of radical acceptance, values assessment, and then commitment to action to move from suffering toward the experience of Wholeness and aliveness. It was developed in the 1980s by Steven Hayes³². The process generally consists of three elements, as

described in detail below. (Note: The number and arrangement of ACT steps found in most places in the literature is dissimilar to what is presented below. I have rearranged and combined them in a way that works better for this book.)

Step 1a: Radical Acceptance. Have you ever experienced a bad feeling, suffering, or hurt? Of course you have, you're human! When you experience these feelings, do you want to run away from them? Again, of course – human. In this step of ACT, you are asked to bravely NOT run away, but to be present with and accept your own suffering. Remember the initial, familiar room described above? Open your eyes. Uncross your arms. Unblock your ears. Look at the room. Take in the experience of being there. Let go of the avoidance that comes from trying to escape your suffering. Steven Hayes stated, “Acceptance undermines experiential avoidance”. This means that you no longer deny anything. Do so without judgment of yourself or others. This is guaranteed to be a heart-wrenching process. There may be a desire to move quickly through this, as it goes against the American and Western cultural ideals of independence, strength, and “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps”. Allow yourself to be in it. Research on ACT has revealed that the more a person avoids this step, the poorer the outcome of the process.

Step 1b: Control as the Problem - Identifying Ineffective Control Strategies: Let's look at the old, familiar room again. What if, instead of crossing your arms and closing your eyes, you become active, but still within the old room. You re-arrange the furniture. You repaint the wall. You put a new, stronger lock on the door to the hallway. From within the room, you try to become active and solve the problem of being in the

room. This compulsive and ultimately delusional exercise of control is, in reality, simply a mechanism of avoiding acceptance. It is as if you are trying to somehow make the old room into the new room - or at least make it tolerable - by trying to control it and/or control how you experience it. This is ultimately futile, as the old room is still in essence the old room and not the new one. It is important to become self-aware of any such strategy, and to step away from it and toward experiential acceptance.

Step 1c: De-fusing Language: As described earlier, your process of thinking is a miracle of evolution, but it also poses limitations and dangers to your being able to move through and out of suffering. Hayes said, “Human suffering is created by entanglement with the cognitive networks made possible by language”. What this essentially means is that you are likely to fuse your personal sense of identity and construction of reality with what you think and believe. You *become* what you *think*. The answer to this is to become mindful - bring your attention to the present moment without evaluation, judgment, meaning-making, or the need to make anything in particular happen during that moment. If you are in a mindful state, you become *de-fused* with your own thoughts. Otherwise, the fusion leads to a rigid and inflexible state that perpetuates suffering. You are a being who experiences thought. You *are not* your thoughts.

Step 2: Values Assessment: Once you have accepted your suffering, then you are ready to reach out with your mind’s eye and explore - or, more accurately, *design* - the new room in the house. What is important to you? What do you want? Who do you want to spend time with? What is your purpose? What would make you happy? What is your dream or vision? If you are going to walk through the burning

hallway, where do you want to end up? Values assessment serves two vital purposes: First, it gives you clarity regarding who you truly are if you are closer to Wholeness. Second, while you are being singed in the flames of the hallway, a vision of the destination can be very valuable in keeping you motivated and focused to go through with the journey.

As you assess your own values, the topic of *creativity* is worth taking a quick sidebar: There have been numerous psychological studies which have concluded that in American culture, creativity is not valued. One study found that it ranked 36th out of 36 values that Americans take seriously. This needs to be changed: In order for us to solve the Climate Crisis and move toward Wholeness, we need to think technically, socially, politically, and artistically outside the box.

Step 3: Committed Action. The final step of ACT is very simple: Once you have found radical acceptance for your suffering and clearly mapped out what you value, then open the door, step into the hallway, and make the journey! (Again, preferably with someone who will genuinely support you.) At this step it is time to commit to and engage with change.

Motivational Interviewing/Stages of Change

The Stages of Change model of healing was originally designed to be used for those who struggle with substance addiction, but I believe that it applies here in two different ways: First, anyone who struggles with substance dependence will benefit from the Stages of Change process - recovery from substance abuse helps in the process of moving from the Hole into Wholeness. Second, our common experience of the Hole leaves us all addicted to artificial fillers that go along with *World as*

Possession/Resource. Recovering from these addictions fosters

Wholeness. The Stages of Change Model has five stages:

Stage 1: Precontemplation. At this stage, you have no real consciousness regarding the fact that you are in an addictive process, or that the substance being used has any harmful effect. If I were to challenge you while you were in this stage, you would very likely utilize denial: “What are you talking about, I’m fine!”, “I’m not addicted, I am fully in control.”, “I can stop any time I want to.”, etc. There is usually nothing that can be done to convince an addict who is in this stage otherwise, even though to the outside observer it may be obvious that the addict is in trouble. If this is applied to a person embedded in *World as Possession/Resource*, he/she/they are fully vested in that level of consciousness, and will vigorously defend that way of life, even to the point of denying that Climate Change is real.

Stage 2: Contemplation. At this stage, you might still be fully abusing the substance, but now you have woken up to the realities of your addiction and are able to see that there is a problem. A substance abuser may now be seeing that they are ruining their family life, that their job is in danger, and/or that they are experiencing physical/medical problems. There may be attempts to curtail use of the substance, but they all end in failure. The substance abuse continues, as the addict feels powerless and helpless to do anything to change. Regarding Climate Change and the Hole: As a society we appear to overall be in this stage. Most of us have woken up to the reality of Climate Change, but so far all of our attempts to solve it have missed the mark – carbon levels in the atmosphere are still rising.

Stage 3: Planning. At this stage, for any of a variety of reasons the addict has decided that something must change – whatever it takes. This stage may be brought about by a “bottoming out” experience. The addict has lost their job and family. Their health may be failing, etc. The addict actively researches and looks for real solutions to their addiction and moves into a state of genuine readiness to make necessary changes. Regarding Climate Change, this lies in our (hopefully near) future. The effects of Climate Change are worsening around the globe, and people are beginning to actively suffer from these effects.

Stage 4: Action. At this stage, the addict is ready to take action to give up the substance. Substance use stops. The addict goes into a treatment program or begins to attend a 12-step meeting. This is where the problem truly begins to be solved, as it can be seen by an outside observer that changes are occurring. Regarding Climate Change: We will know we are in this step when carbon levels in the atmosphere begin to decrease.

Stage 5: Maintenance. At this final stage, the addict is substance free, detoxified, and is living a new life reliably free of the substance. Being an addict is not over, however. The person will need to accept that they are a recovered addict for the rest of their lives. This means that the person will need to be actively vigilant and continue to be involved in their recovery process. Alcoholics who have been sober for decades still go to AA meetings. Climate Change: Once atmospheric carbon levels have fallen to safe levels, we will need to spend the rest of our existence as a species ensuring that carbon levels continue to stay low.

SEEDS

A colleague of mine introduced me to the acronym SEEDS, which stands for Social, Education, Exercise, Diet, and Sleep. As it turns out, these five features of self-care constitute the core of healthy living. If you faithfully commit yourself to optimizing these characteristics of self-care, you will be living the healthiest life possible. Each is described in detail below.

Social: You are literally wired to be in relational contact with others. To not be goes against the core of who you are and will inevitably result in suffering and disease. It is obviously important, however, that the contact be prosocial – contact with another person should be mutually supportive, uplifting, healing and enjoyable. For some who are naturally outwardly oriented and extraverted, this is easy. For others who are severely introverted or experience social phobia, this may be very challenging. For the latter group, it is important to try anyway. Spend time with family or friends. If you can't manage that, go take a class or get involved in a group activity, such as volunteering, community activism, etc. If you can't manage even that, then at least get out and be with people - town square, park, grocery store, etc.

Education: The term “education” is a bit awkward here – let's replace it with “learning”. (“SLEDS”??? Really? What is that supposed to mean? Ok – back to “SEEDS”.) Use your brain to learn something – anything. It can be taking a class, it can be reading about something new, it can be allowing a friend to teach you something, it can be playing a well-designed computer learning game, etc. The one vitally important

feature of this is that learning is only useful if it is challenging. Things that take little effort to learn do not make much of a positive difference for your brain. Challenge yourself. Once you have mastered something challenging, either take it to a new, even more challenging level, or find something new and different that is challenging. This constitutes a kind of “use it or lose it” theme for your brain.

Exercise: Obvious – move your body. Get up out of your chair. Go for a walk. Stretch. Do yoga. Do something that increases your heart rate. Along with your brain, the “use it or lose it” principle applies here - our bodies were designed for movement, not stasis. While any kind of exercise is very beneficial, the best exercise is experienced outdoors, in sunshine, fresh air, and while in nature. At this point you may be thinking, “Didn’t he write earlier, “don’t do much while nature bathing – maybe walk 50 feet in an hour”?? Touché. Do both – go out one day and nature bathe, go out another day and take a vigorous, heart rate increasing hike.

I ride my bicycle to work most days. When I ride, I feel more alive because my body is moving, I am breathing fresh air, and I am out in the world – not entombed in an automobile. (And, admittedly, riding a bicycle through town is a little dangerous – my mind and senses are required to stay sharp – this experience adds to my sense of aliveness.)

Diet: Nutrition is a huge topic in both professional and popular literature, mainstream media, social media, etc. It is important to stay up to date on this topic, as scientific, psychological, and popular knowledge surrounding nutrition is currently in the midst of a kind of revolution. So... keep yourself up to date regarding nutrients, dietary toxins, and

which kinds of foods contain either. Knowledge that came out as recently as ten to fifteen years ago is already obsolete.

There is, unfortunately, a subtopic here which demands attention: Where to buy your food is becoming increasingly important: Virtually all forms of commercial agriculture are now at the point where commercially produced food is relatively low in nutrition and may contain agricultural toxins. This is even true for foods found in health food stores. To counter this, whenever possible shop for food grown locally and sold at farmer's markets.

Sleep: Sleep is vitally important for your brain and bodily health. It seems that with the demands of *World as Possession/Resource* we are all stressed and sleep deprived. This is disastrous for health. When asleep, our bodies physically recover from the stress of the day - purging toxins and recovering. We also experience dream sleep which is essential to brain health. Get enough sleep!

Taking SEEDS seriously is, admittedly, not at the exact center of the healing process that we need to go through. Rather, it is the mental and physical foundation our bodies need to engage in the process. Healthy, well cared for bodies and minds will heal much more effectively than those which are fatigued, toxified, and otherwise not well cared for.

The Inner Critic

Did you know that you have an “inner family” living inside of you? Yes! OK, I know what you're thinking, but Nellie gets to stay out of the barn this time – let's allow him to romp in the pasture. What??

Who says that a *boy* can't be named Nellie??? But I digress... Believe it or not, a group of imaginal beings reside inside who each make up distinct aspects of your personality. The idea of an "inner family" comes from the field of Transactional Analysis, which states that we embody a particular sub-personality whenever we are actively communicating outwardly with another person. Carl Jung independently referred to these as "archetypes". Subpersonalities/inner family members/archetypes might include the mother, the father, the infant, the hopeless romantic, the cynic, the aggressor, and many, many others. The inner being that will be discussed here is the *inner critic*.

Everyone, without exception – including you – has an inner critic. Your inner critic is relentlessly judgmental of whatever you feel, think, believe, or do in your life. It will constantly vocalize - in an inner manner, of course - its disapproval of you. According to the inner critic, you are not smart enough, resourceful enough, dedicated enough. You have inferior character, and you will ultimately fail at anything you ever try to do. The nasty voice of the inner critic is ever-present in your inner world.

Until very recently I have been puzzled by the existence of the inner critic for a specific reason: All others of the inner family ultimately have some purpose that at some time in our lives we found to be useful or essential. If you look hard enough at virtually any inner aspect of yourself, you will eventually find that it served some adaptive purpose at some time in your life. (Remember the inner guard dog discussed earlier. If needed, it can save your life!) The inner critic, however, appears to serve no useful purpose whatsoever, either in the past or present. It seems that everyone would be much better off without it.

If your inner critic has never served any good purpose, then why is it there? A potential answer is that it is related to (indeed, has arisen from) your subscription to *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness. We have, for much of our history as conscious beings, been conditioned and enculturated to accept that our main purpose in life is to dedicate our energy, intelligence, purpose, and passion to servicing those who reside above us on the social/economic ladder. As history shows, one very effective way to enforce these roles is for those higher on the ladder to foster a sense of inadequacy, inferiority, and powerlessness in those who are “below”. As a result, we have internalized the voices of those who demean us, which in turn effectively “keeps us in our place”.

Before I made the association between the inner critic and *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness, I believed that the way to deal with the inner critic was to go to war with it (*World as Battlefield*). According to this way of thinking, the inner critic is to be given no quarter, and is to be constantly fought against, yelled at, ridiculed, and told to “shut the fuck up and sit in the corner”. Now, having discovered its association with *World as Possession/Resource*, my recommendation is very different: Simply submit a letter of resignation: “Effective immediately, my life energy, my resourcefulness, my spirit, my intelligence, and my soul are no longer available to you. These qualities are now back under my control and direction, and I fully commit to using them in whatever manner that I choose. Goodbye and good riddance.” Time to move on to *World as Lover/World as Self*. Meanwhile, engage unreservedly with the inner child, the inner artist, the inner wise person, etc.

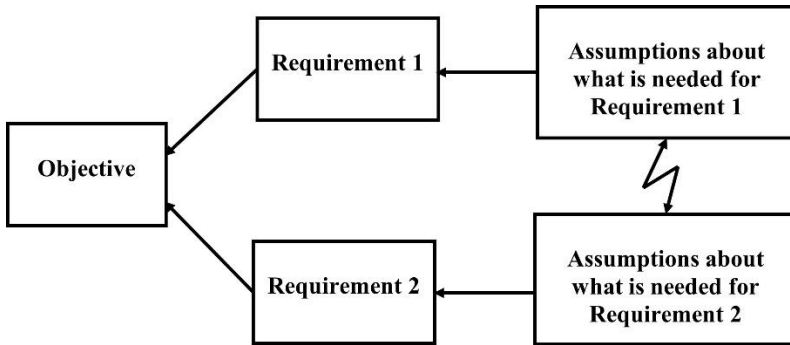
The Core Conflict/Conflict Cloud

Ok, so you have an inner family inside. Just like in *outer* families, sometimes there is discord and they don't all get along. A "core conflict" arises when you have two different needs, both of which are very (perhaps vitally) important, but if one need is met, the other will most certainly not be, and visa versa. Everyone experiences core conflicts - usually more than one. A core conflict can be paralyzing, as not finding a resolution can leave you with no direction or course of action regarding getting your needs met.

An example illustrates: A man (let's name him Ernest) is in love with his husband (we'll call him Frank) – the relationship is extremely important to Ernest, as being with Frank makes him feel loved, secure, and validated. Over time, Ernest has "given himself over" to Frank, allowing Frank to take charge of their finances, daily affairs, vacation plans, what to eat for dinner, etc. After some time, Ernest begins to feel resentment - this situation has left him with little autonomy, power, or authority in his own life. A core conflict develops: On the one hand Ernest needs to feel loved, secure and safe. On the other, Ernest needs to feel a personal sense of power, autonomy, and authority in his own life. Both needs are perfectly legitimate but, according to Ernest, incompatible with each other. Ernest feels trapped between the two needs and becomes effectively paralyzed. How can this be resolved?

The answer comes from the field of engineering. (My "inner engineer" is all of sudden extremely happy – I will try to keep him from *completely* taking over.) What the field of psychology labels as a core conflict, engineering calls a "conflict cloud". The idea of a conflict cloud

was originated by Elyiahu Goldratt, an Israeli scientist who was an expert on making supply chain systems work optimally. Much like the core conflict, the conflict cloud (illustrated below) diagrams the structure of the conflict:



While the illustration above was designed specifically for manufacturing systems, it also applies to human needs: Simply replace “Objective” with “Happiness”, “Satisfaction”, “Wholeness” etc. Similarly, replace “Requirement” with “Need”. According to the conflict cloud model, there are two needs which are seemingly incompatible with each other. What has to happen to resolve the conflict is for you to examine and challenge all of the assumptions associated with each need.

In the example of Ernest and Frank, it would be useful for Ernest to look unflinchingly at all of his assumptions. Ernest would start by asking himself, “What am I assuming about my need to feel safe, secure and loved?” He might surface the following assumptions: “In order to feel safe and secure, I must give up my independence. I must fully enmesh with Frank. I cannot feel safe and secure on my own.” Regarding

the need to be Independent: “If I embrace autonomy and independence, I will have to leave Frank, destroying the relationship and hurting him.” After doing the inner work of challenging these assumptions, Ernest might come up with alternative assumptions, such as “I can be intimately bonded with Frank and not have to lose myself in the process.” Once the old assumptions are challenged and revised, then Ernest becomes free to inject something new, which causes the conflict cloud to evaporate. Ernest begins to assert his own needs (both on his own and with Frank) without sabotaging the relationship, but rather with fostering interdependence with Frank. This becomes a win-win scenario.

Now let’s apply this to Climate Change: The objective is Wholeness. Requirement 1 is that we need to come together in unity as a species, with common objectives, goals, and purpose. Requirement 2 is that we must retain individual identity, liberty, and freedom. What are the assumptions associated with each requirement? How are these assumptions seemingly incompatible with each other? What can be injected into the assumptions that evaporates the conflict? I leave it to you to work this out. No, there won’t be a quiz...

Dreams

Sigmund Freud (Really? *Again?*) labeled dream interpretation as the “royal road to the subconscious”. I believe he was right. As described earlier, the subconscious is a vast reservoir of wisdom and knowledge that we have virtually no conscious access to – except for the experiences of our dreams (and through intuition, fantasies, mindfulness, etc.). Everyone dreams at night while in REM sleep – not dreaming eventually leads to

psychosis and death. The problem with dreams, however, is that, for an unknown reason, the content of dreams is presented as a coded puzzle. Dreams are never exactly about what appears to be happening in the dream. Instead, dreams provide metaphorical symbols in a story, which when interpreted will give you important information about what is going on with yourself. A guide for dream interpretation follows.

The first step in understanding a dream is to remember it. This can be quite challenging - when you wake up from dreaming the memory of the dream can fade within seconds. It is often necessary to keep a dream journal next to your bed. This can be managed either through pad and pencil or a hand-held voice recorder. When recording the dream, it is important to provide as much detail as possible – the more detailed your account of dream, the more you will get from the interpretation.

Once you have recorded a thorough and detailed account of the dream, the interpretation begins. This can happen anytime, but it is preferable to engage in the process within 6-12 hours of having had the dream. Re-read or listen to the account of the dream. Make a mental note (or, even better, write on a notepad) every *thing* that was in the dream – every person, every object (no matter how small), every detail that can be described using a noun. This becomes the “cast of characters” for the dream. This list should be complete and comprehensive.

Now, the interpretation: The cast of characters is, in reality, a list of aspects of your *inner* self, in metaphor. For example, you may have had a dream about your automobile. Your automobile is likely to symbolize your inner “vehicle” - how you are able to psychically “move around” in your life – your ability to move forward - to go from one

“place” to another, etc. Let’s say that your dream also had a large boulder, blocking the path of your automobile. The boulder may represent feelings of impenetrability and immobility - some kind of barrier. When assigning a symbolic meaning to an object, it is important to allow your emotions to guide you – different objects may have a different felt sense to them.

Once this process is completed, then re-assemble the objects back into the dream, but now as the *symbolic meaning* of what they represent. Your dream was *really* about your ability to psychically move forward in your life being blocked by a barrier.

Now, look at the story or plot of the dream. If you look at the plot with the symbolic meanings of the objects in mind, then the inevitable result will be a story about something that is important for you to know about your life, which I guarantee will be highly meaningful. Let’s say that in your dream your car ran into the boulder and became disabled, needing repair. This means that some inflexible inner barrier halted the forward progress in your life and made it so you can’t continue forward at present. Some kind of healing process (“repair”) is needed, following by dealing with the barrier (“boulder”) before you can resume moving forward. The story is now complete, with an important message about your inner experience of yourself.

I usually don’t like to think in absolutes, but I have *never* encountered a dream - mine or anyone else’s - that, once analyzed, doesn’t have some important message that shouldn’t be taken seriously.

A couple of final notes on dreaming. As you decode the symbols for the objects in the dream, the process will be very subjective - how you interpret the symbols is for you and you alone to take on. Different people

will interpret the same object differently. For example, my description above regarding an automobile as a symbol for internal mobility may not fit your experience of an automobile in your own dream. Avoid accepting external interpretations, unless you are absolutely sure that they *feel* right.

Finally, don't undergo this process unless you are interested in and willing to learn deeply about yourself, as doing so is a one-way trip to self-discovery. Once you have interpreted a dream, there is no unlearning what you have learned about yourself.

Change through Behavior

The field of behavioral psychotherapy is based on an “outside-in” approach. The idea is that if you change your outer behavior, then your life improves, and your suffering is reduced. This appears to be a very effective form of therapy – it shows positive results quickly and effectively, and there is a wealth of short-term clinical data praising its value. The problem, however, is that positive changes resulting from this type of work tend to be superficial and are not long lasting, unless the behavior is constantly reinforced. If left unattended, positive behavioral changes you experience will inevitably fade and revert to older, less healthy behavior. Nonetheless, if no other form of healing is available or is found to be effective, behavioral therapy is better than nothing at all.

The benefits and drawbacks of behavioral therapy apply similarly when scaled up to how we interact with each other and with the planet. If I *act* like I care about others and the planet, things improve. As described above, however, positive behavioral changes regarding how we treat each other and the planet are superficial – they tend to fade away and return to

old, Hole-based behaviors if not constantly reinforced. Behavioral changes alone do little to address the Hole and *World as Possession/Resource* mentality, as these wounds in our psyche are deep and fundamental. You don't put a band-aid over a cancerous tumor and expect all to be well. Understanding of the limitations of behavioral change helps us to understand that it will never be enough to *only* make the necessary technological, political, and legal changes. We need change at a deeper level in order to ensure our survival.

Letting Go – A Process of Subtraction

Most of the processes involved with healing begin with the process of letting go of something. This makes sense - in order to make room for Wholeness, one must first let go of what is occupying the space that Wholeness would otherwise occupy. This becomes the first step of a three-step essential healing process.

When you let go, what are you letting go of? According to the language of this book, you are letting go of artificial fillers. If I let go of my maladaptive thoughts, beliefs, attitudes – anything that constitutes my delusional and psychotic attempts to fill the Hole, I am left with emptiness – the Hole itself. This brings me to the second healing step: Direct experience of the suffering of the Hole. I make contact with the emptiness, the loneliness, the feelings of depression and unhappiness. This is the most difficult part, because if I am dedicated to my healing process, I refuse to move backward into artificial fillers – instead I spend time suffering with the Hole. This is important, as I *need* to know what

this feels like. It is important for me to make contact with my own suffering.

Once I have endured this, then I am ready for the third step – embracing Wholeness. I make contact with the planet – I nature bathe. I make healthy and affirming contact with others.

These three steps - letting go, being present with suffering, then embracing Wholeness, are nonnegotiable and must be done in sequential order. There is no side-stepping, substituting, denying or pretending. A very difficult process indeed, but one guaranteed to generate healing, Wholeness, and ultimately foster sustainable life on the planet.

Chapter 15 Neuroscience

What you are reading is heavily revised. The first draft had all the same information but had a very different feel for reading. Why? As a professional engineer and psychologist, I have literally done nothing but professional and technical writing for the last forty years of my life. The first draft of this book read like a Ph.D. dissertation – dry and technical. The first people who reviewed the book - trusted members of my own inner circle - all had the same thing to say: The book is too impersonal, dry, unrelatable. No one will want to read it. I was dumbfounded. How am I supposed to write in a relatable way??? My brain has literally been wired to write dryly and professionally! With great difficulty, I made contact with a very small part of my brain which is social, emotional, humorous and relatable. I forced my revisions of this book to come from that part of my brain. This is literal – not metaphorical: There is a small, developing part of my brain which knows how to write in a way that others will want to read. I am developing an increase in the number of synaptic connections between dendrites and axon terminals, using acetylcholine, dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine and other neurotransmitters, inducing them to migrate through synaptic clefts according to Fick's law of diffusion. What??? Oh crap - Sorry...

The following discussion of neuroscience is not, admittedly, an essential core feature required to understand the Hole and healing toward Wholeness. The topic is nonetheless useful if you are curious about how your mind (or the universe, for that matter) works.

Perception and Reality

When most people think of perception, they think about the five (or more) senses. It might all seem pretty straightforward, predictable and linear – after all our sensory nerves are just electrical signals in wiring. As it turns out however, the process of sensing and perceiving is incredibly complex and even subjective.

Let's use sight as an example. Your eyes are very much like cameras, where light comes in through an aperture, is focused by the lens, and creates an image which is sensed by the retina – simple, right? Turns out that what you see is highly variable. The image produced in low light versus sunlight is very different. In sunlight, your pupil (aperture) shrinks down to a tiny dot, letting only a small amount of light in, but the light is highly focused, and the image is very sharp. In low light, however, your pupil becomes relatively large, letting more light in, but the image is poorly focused. The image that you see is different in different levels of light.

Now let's take it a step further: If we look at the pupil of a cat's eye in sunlight (below), instead of being a tiny dot, it becomes a narrow slit. Sunlight coming in through a narrow, vertically oriented slit will produce a fundamentally different image than one coming in through a small circular opening. In sunlight, a cat literally sees a radically different image than a human. Now let's take it even further: Cat's brain versus human's brain: The two brains are designed differently, so not only are the images different, but how they are interpreted by the brain is fundamentally dissimilar. No doubt the other senses (touch, hearing,

smell, taste, a sense of balance) are also fundamentally different between cats and humans.



Jan Zwolinski/Shutterstock.com

The above example is provided to illustrate that what we label as “real” is fundamentally different than what another being would label as real. Regarding the Hole and Wholeness, this all poses an opportunity: If you, me, all of us - can somehow become flexible – become willing to explore radically different perceptions of reality - then there is virtually no limit to what we can do with ourselves – as individuals and as a species.

Oh, and by the way: Even though cats and humans have literally different views of reality, cats still love humans and humans still love cats!

Quantum Entanglement

From within the field of quantum physics comes *quantum entanglement*, which can be explained in the following manner: A researcher uses scientific equipment to create a group of one type of physics particles (protons, neutrons, electrons, etc.). The researcher then divides the group into two identical subgroups. One subgroup remains in the lab, while the second is transported a substantial distance away from the lab - thousands of miles away or more. Even though they were created together and at the same time, the two groups of particles are now very far away and isolated from each other. The researcher now does something to the group still in the lab to alter its energy state, causing the particles to react in some manner. Another researcher, observing the second group of particles that are far removed, will observe that the second group reacts in exactly the same manner as the first group, *even though nothing was done to them!* The two groups of particles are quantum entangled. While there is much controversy regarding how or why this happens, there can be no doubt that it *does* happen, as this experiment has been repeated numerous times with the same result.

Meanwhile, in seemingly independent research, neuroscientists and physicists are coming together to understand that human neurological processes are intimately affected by the quantum states of electrons in the human nervous system – it seems that neurological activity is dependent on quantum physics.

Put these two phenomena together – quantum neurology and quantum entanglement. Maybe someday we may discover that quantum entanglement plays an important role in biological systems. The potential

implications are foundation-shattering. For example, let's look at the psychological concept of empathy. Psychologically, empathy is defined as "feeling another's feelings as if they are your own". If I am empathically connected to you and you feel sad, I feel sad. If you feel joy, I feel joy, etc. Your emotional state (which is, after all, a neurological/quantum state) affects another's, even though you and the other are not in direct neurological contact.

In his autobiography *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Carl Jung³³ described an experience of having a nighttime dream where someone who was a close relation to he and his wife died. He woke up from the dream, noticing that it was three o'clock in the morning. Later, the next day, he found that his wife's cousin died at 3:00am – the same time as Jung waking up from the dream. It is certainly possible to explain this as a coincidence, but the odds of the coincidence are extremely small.

Quantum entanglement?

The point of bringing up quantum entanglement is to provoke you into considering the reality of *World as Self*. There is growing scientific evidence that we are deeply and intimately connected with each other, for better or worse. It is possible (for better) for us to use this connection to come together as a species for healing toward Wholeness.

The Donut Hole

As discussed earlier, you contain what I have labeled as "the inner family" – a constellation of subpersonalities, any of which you can embody as needed at any time. Let's take this concept further – to its ultimate root. Subpersonalities can be viewed as layers or masks that

surround the center of your own existence. Each mask serves a different purpose and is available for use for any situation. It is important to realize, however, that each mask represents something that was created for you to use in your own life but does not represent anything truly essential about who you are. In order to gain access to your true core self, you must set aside your masks one by one. This process is often attempted in psychotherapy. There is an ultimate result: Once *all* masks or subpersonalities are set aside, you are left with your true self: Nothing! For any of us, the true center is unoccupied. As it turns out, the very concept of *self* is an illusion. All subpersonalities/masks are, in reality, artificial fillers, surrounding the donut Hole.



New Africa/Shutterstock.com

Really, a photo of donuts? Ok... determination... stay on sugar abstinence....

This can be explained through neurological evolution. It is believed by a cadre of neuroscientists that the very concept of the self, the “*I*”, is an artifact of the brain’s evolution. According to this theory, *my* view of *myself* as an individual, a separate identity, even as a “soul” is a delusional neurological state, resulting from the accidental development of a structure in the brain that creates this belief. If this delusional belief is removed, then *I* no longer exist. For example: There is no *I* writing this book right now. Instead, there is a neurological process happening inside of the corporeal body sitting in front of a computer typing these words. *This* body, *this* mind, *these* fingers at the keyboard are creating this book. *I*’m not. *You*’re not reading these words – these words are being processed by neurons in a body whose eyes are taking in the image of this page.

The reality of there being no *I* present takes us firmly into the *World as Self* consciousness. If there is no *I*, but the planet and the universe do exist, then this cell exists only as a part of a greater Whole. This all poses a problem: The truth that there is no *I* present is utterly intolerable. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger is famous for the question/answer, “Of what is man most afraid? Nothing.” This does not mean that we are not afraid. We are deathly afraid of the “Nothing” which exists at the center. Nothing” with a capital “N”. (OK, Heidegger was a Nazi. In addition to other things, perhaps his statement was a non-conscious admission that Nazi beliefs are yet another -very malignant - hole filler.)

So, how do we deal with this? Regarding Climate Change, we don’t have to. If we advance from *World as Possession/Resource* to

World as Lover, that is enough. *World as Lover* still allows for the delusion of the self and facilitates healing the Hole into relative Wholeness. If you are in love with the planet, with humanity, and genuinely with yourself, you will be ready to do your part to solve Climate Change. At some point in the future, hopefully, we will be advanced enough to embrace *World as Self*, but being there is not required at present. “I” can still be allowed to exist, for each of us.

Neurotypical vs. Neuroatypical

The term *neurotypical* is a somewhat recently coined word that refers to what is normally accepted as non-mentally ill. Anyone who is not diagnosable with a DSM disorder may be considered neurotypical. Neurotypical thus refers to the neurological state of the majority. It should be clear by now that I believe that the neurological state of the majority of humans on the planet is *not* healthy – therefore I am revising the term “neurotypical” to refer to the maladaptive and diseased mental state of the majority of us, arising from life in *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness.

If “neurotypical” now refers to the maladaptive state of the majority, then what does “neuroatypical” refer to? My proposal is that neuroatypical refers to anyone who is not in the diseased state of the majority. Acceptance of this definition creates two neuroatypical groups:

The first group comprises those in a diseased state that does not match the diseased state of the majority. We can include mental illnesses such a schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, mental retardation, dementia and a

few others. (Admittedly, it can be argued that the origins of even these disorders are still related to *World as Possession/Resource*.)

The second neuroatypical group, however, comprises those who have been diagnosed with DSM disorders which are now increasingly becoming known to be non-pathological. Let's illustrate using an example, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): According to the DSM, symptoms of this disorder include failure to attend to necessary details, difficulty listening to others, difficulty with follow-through regarding tasks, difficulty in organizing information, easily distracted, etc. These symptoms make it hard for the individual to thrive in neurotypically designed academic, workplace, and sometimes interpersonal settings. What if, however, this isn't a disease or disorder? What if the symptoms of ADHD are the result of a person's brain being wired differently – not in a pathological manner, but simply in a *different* manner? There is growing evidence that those with ADHD suffer the symptoms not because of an inherent deficit, but because school, work, and social environments are structured to accommodate those with neurotypical brains and are improperly designed to work with those with what I refer to as “the ADHD brain flavor”. Viewed in this manner, ADHD is not pathological, but rather simply neurologically diverse.

We can take this even a step further: We are now beginning to discover that individuals with a number of different DSM diagnoses are capable of using their brains to do useful and needed tasks that those who are neurotypical are incapable of. As an example, there has been a recent study showing that people on the autism spectrum have superior ability to visually focus in detail. The US government has discovered this and is

now utilizing these individuals to analyze military reconnaissance images – those diagnosable with autism are able to pull more useful information from the images than those who are neurotypical.

Think back to a hundred thousand years ago – a pre-civilized human is hanging out at the edge of meadow taking it all in. The human doesn't have any particular mental focus, but is rather just enjoying a sunny day. Suddenly, out of the corner of her eye she sees movement. She quickly turns her head and sees a bear loping toward her in the distance. She reacts adaptively and makes sure that she and her children are safe. She wasn't able to do this because she is good at focusing on spreadsheets, keeping appointments, filling out tax returns or getting up on time for her commute to work. She was able to do this because her brain evolved to be “distractable” - to rapidly change focus when a new stimulus presents itself. ADHD?

What do those who are neuroatypical have to offer regarding moving us toward Wholeness and solving Climate Change? My guess is “a lot”. Answers that move us toward *World as Lover* or *World as Self* are more likely to come from neuroatypical thinking.

The Law of Attraction

The Law of Attraction (popularized in the movie *The Secret*) posits that there is a universal presence or force available to anyone, including you. Furthermore, this force or presence will respond to your thoughts – whatever you think about will become manifest as a result of your interaction with the universal force. You can kind of think of it as an accelerator pedal on an automobile: Simply by pressing down on the gas

pedal (generating a thought), you send a signal to the engine (universal force) to move forward. The further down you press the pedal (the stronger your thought) the faster and more powerfully the engine moves your vehicle.

In this manner, proponents of the Law of Attraction believe that anyone can manifest anything that they want. Want a new automobile? Think about it. Visualize it in your mind. Picture all of the features you want it to have. Then, let the universe go to work and manifest a new car for you. Simple as that. Of course, the Law of Attraction can work in a negative way also: Think of something painful or negative, the Law will manifest that for you also.

I have had the desire throughout my life to believe in the law of attraction, but my rational mind refuses to accept. It is far more likely that confirmation bias is at work. Confirmation bias occurs when you believe something, and then you only accept data or information which agrees with what you believe, leaving you to reject or ignore data which contradicts or refutes your belief. An example: I want a new mountain bike. I visualize it in my mind – the gears, the color, the tires, the sticker on the fender that says, “I break for caterpillars”, etc. Then it shows up in my life – great! What about the time I visualized it a year ago and it didn’t appear? What about all of the other stuff I want that didn’t show up when I visualized it? I am likely to ignore all those times where the Law of Attraction didn’t work, inventing some argument to explain why the thing I wanted didn’t manifest.

One of the dangers of putting all of one’s faith in the Law of Attraction is that it may encourage spiritual bypassing. This leaves you

without agency and power to engage with the world and those who inhabit it. I find that things that I manifest through planning, work, and engaging with others result in far greater satisfaction and enjoyment than something that is simply gifted to me.

A couple of concessions: First, one way that the Law of Attraction certainly does work is with regard to how our thoughts, visions, and desires affect how we interact with others. If I visualize my “I break for caterpillars” mountain bike, my having visualized it will affect how I communicate with others, potentially enlisting others to help to manifest it. Interactions with other people tend to wield power. Second (and related to the first), if some neurological manifestation of quantum entanglement is at work, the “universal forces and presence” may be created by a law of physics.

Bottom line regarding Climate Change: If I believe in the Law of Attraction and use it to visualize healing into Wholeness and living in harmony with the planet, there is absolutely no harm in the process, so long as I am willing to do the inner and outer work necessary to facilitate manifestation of the result.

Chapter 16 Spiritual Traditions and the Whole

A perfectly ordinary day. Riding my bicycle down a quiet residential street on my way to work. Familiar route – I’ve been down this street hundreds of times. Today, something seems different. I look off into the distance and see a grove of trees. Again, familiar – nothing new. And yet, something *is* different. I stop my bicycle and look at the trees. They almost seem to be *glowing*! Their green coloring seems somehow to be more vibrant, more alive. As I gaze at this view, I am filled with an indescribable sense of awe and joy. After a little while I resume my ride, my mood improved. This has happened before. Not often, but once in a while I will look at something (almost always a natural scene or another person or animal) and have this sense. Also, sometimes the opposite happens: I will look at something and the colors will be muted – somehow greyed out: The familiar thing will somehow look half-dead, causing my mood to die along with it. I know that the things I look at are not different – why would they be? Somehow *I* am different, for better or worse. Maybe these different perceptions of reality reflect something that is going on in me – maybe they serve as a gauge to help me become aware of something about my inner self?

Chapter 9 focused on how there are number of religious practices that ultimately serve as artificial fillers for the Hole and contribute to either *World as Battlefield*, *Trap/Prison*, or even *Possession/Resource*. Not all spiritual practices are inherently bad, however. In fact, any spiritual practice that moves you toward *World as Lover* or *World as Self* has the potential to show high value. The subsections below provide

detail on a limited (and, admittedly, somewhat random) selection of such practices. You are strongly encouraged to search for and engage in *any* practice that moves you toward genuine Wholeness.

Nature as Cathedral

One of my favorite places on the surface of the planet is a grove of old growth redwood trees. One such place is Armstrong Redwoods California State Preserve (see below). While standing or walking in this environment, I feel a sense of awe, spirit, and belonging. Your cathedral may not be a grove of redwoods – it may be an ocean shore, an oak forest, a gently rolling vista of prairie grass or even a swamp on the bayou. Or it may be a gathering of true friends. Go out and explore. Nature bathe. Be in a true community with others.



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Naikan

Tricycle.org defines *Naikan* as a Japanese word that means “looking inside”. According to the website, *Naikan* is a structured method of self-reflection that can help you to understand yourself, your relationships, and the fundamental nature of your existence. *Naikan* was developed by Ishin Yoshimoto, a devout Buddhist who practiced *mishirabe*, an arduous method of meditation and self-reflection.

Naikan reflection is based on three questions:

What have I received from ____?

What have I given to ____?

What troubles and difficulties have I caused ____?

These questions provide a foundation for reflecting on all relationships, including those with parents, friends, teachers, siblings, work associates, children, and partners, living things, or even inanimate objects. You can use *Naikan* to look at any period of time in your life.

The practice of *Naikan* allows you to gain a realistic view of your own conduct and the give-and-take that has occurred in a relationship. The depth of experience, insight, and realization that can come from the practice of self-reflection is not a result of intellectual analysis nor complex theories, but rather to just see reality as it is. These questions are simple inquiries for your investigation of your life’s mysteries and miracles.

What have I received from ____? Begin by looking at what you have received from the other. An example: Today a therapy client provided new insight regarding the nature of suffering. He/she/they

demonstrated trust for my insight. He/she/they gave me the satisfaction of purpose from being a therapist. I was paid for the session, enabling me to support my family. Etc. Often we take “ordinary” things for granted. We hurry through our day giving little attention to all the things we are receiving. All too often, while we are being supported our attention is elsewhere.

Listing what you have received from another person helps you to become grounded in the simple reality of how you have been supported and cared for. A deeper sense of gratitude and appreciation may be naturally stimulated. Without a conscious shift of attention to the abundance of ways in which the world supports us, we risk our attention being trapped by problems and obstacles, leaving us to linger in suffering and self-pity.

What kind of food did you eat? Where did you go this past day? How did others support you? Did someone open a door? Did someone wash your dishes, or was there hot water and soap available to you for washing your own dishes? What made it possible for you to brush your teeth or drive a car? Take ten minutes and make as thorough a list as possible.

Now move to the second question: *What have I given to ____?* Considering this second question (along with the first) is what Yoshimoto calls “life reconciliation.” When you examine, in detail, what you have given and received, you can gain awareness of a balance. This process is both a practical and spiritual reconciliation of your relationships with others.

Often we resent it when people do not fulfill our expectations, (when they fail to provide the desired artificial fillers for the Hole) and we live as if we deserve whatever we desire. When people do support us, we often take their efforts for granted, living as if we were entitled to their support. As you reflect on your life you begin to see its true reality. Once you have answered the first two questions, you have a preliminary picture of your life over a period of time.

The third and final question is the most difficult: What troubles or difficulties have I caused ____? This question is important, because usually we focus on how other people cause us inconvenience or difficulty. When someone makes my day more difficult, it is easy to focus on that, but when I make someone else's life harder, I often don't notice it at all – perhaps I simply dismiss it as “not such a big deal.” Yoshimoto stated that when we are not willing to see and accept those events in which we have been the source of others' suffering, then we cannot truly know ourselves or the grace by which we live. We think we know our own life, but what we know is only an edited version, colored by our emotions and narrow vision. How close can you come to the original draft? Doing so brings you closer to Wholeness.

Tarot of The Spirit & A Prayer for Transformation

If you were to look into the history of the Tarot deck, you might find a surprising transformation from it originally being used simply as a deck of cards for playing games, to (beginning in the late 1700's) it being used for divination purposes. Tarot is currently often viewed as a tool for the occult.

Other uses for the Tarot deck have also been explored: In her book *Tarot of the Spirit* and beautifully illustrated Tarot deck, Pamela Eakins, Ph.D.³⁴ describes a unique and particular use of the Tarot deck, where each card in the deck signifies some aspect of the reader's mind, emotional state, and experience of inner healing. Rather than being a tool for divining the future or for other occult purposes, Dr. Eakins advocates for using any card in the deck (drawing randomly) to provoke the participant's awareness of how that card relates to some aspect of the reader's inner self or process. As Dr. Eakins put it, "Any card of the Tarot applies equally to any human problem or endeavor.... Suffice it to say that whatever card you draw, that card would give you an idea as to how to stop the spinning ideas and focus your mind."

For example, just before writing this I randomly drew the card "Mother Wind". "Wind" symbolizes intellect and "Mother" signifies the emotional qualities of care, compassion, nurturing, and healing. I might interpret this card as being a reminder for me to focus my writing energy on an integration of mind, emotion, and the motherly qualities described above. Obviously, any interpretation of the Tarot deck will be subjective, but if you approach the process with an introspective and open mind, you will find some kind of benefit.

Note: After drawing the Tarot card and writing this paragraph, I felt compelled to review notes I had written on the topic six months ago. Upon doing so, I found that I had randomly drawn the exact same card – Mother Wind – six months ago! Divine intervention? Or was it me subconsciously remembering where I had re-inserted the card in the deck

six months ago and picking it from the same location? Random chance? Somehow, it seems intuitively important *not* to answer these questions.

In addition to her work with the Tarot, Dr. Eakins has involved herself in many other processes as a healer. From her website pamelaeakins.net³⁵ Dr. Eakins offers what she calls “A Prayer for the Transformation of the Universe”. I have included this prayer here because it seems to beautifully embody the message of what I try to write.

Where there is fragmentation, may I sow evolving creation

Where there is alienation, may I sow communion

Where there is competition, may I sow collaboration

Where there is condemnation, may I sow enlightened
integration

Where there is bondage, may I sow liberation

Where there is desolation, may I sow compassion

Where there is anger, may I sow a wider path

Where there is hatred, may I sow a wider view

Where there is violence, may I sow the methods of peace

Where there is fear, may I scatter the seeds of hope

Where there is hopelessness, may I sow inspiration

Where there is devastation, may I seek to raise aid

Where there is illness, may I sow the healing arts

Where there is death, may I sow soulful observation
and the intentional mourning

that redeems despairing hearts

In the field of transformation, may I sow cosmological

initiation

In the field of transmutation, may I sow cosmological

jubilation

Through the wide field of the Universe,

may I sow the Blessing of Love and Light

Through the field of evolving Universe,

may I sow the Blessing of Delight

May I witness universal resplendence in every blade of grass

May I walk lightly, sow Original Blessing

and leave Beauty where I pass.

Chapter 17 Meditation

Set the timer for ten minutes, sit quietly. Breathe, in and out. Pay attention to the sensation of breathing. The new kitten jumps up on my lap and insists on biting the buttons on my shirt. Play with him for a while, put him in another room. Reset the meditation timer. Sit back down. Breathe. A thought comes up – acknowledge it, let it float away tethered to a balloon. Back to paying attention to breathing. Another thought – another balloon. Another, and another. By the time the timer signals the end of the meditation, I have literally released about 100 thoughts. OK, meditation’s now done (thank god!). It’s difficult to feel like I have gotten anything from this, so I go outside for a walk. I spontaneously find myself walking at a relaxed pace. I look around. Trees, gardens, squirrels, dogs, people. After walking for 20 minutes I feel relaxed and peaceful. Maybe *this* is my meditation???

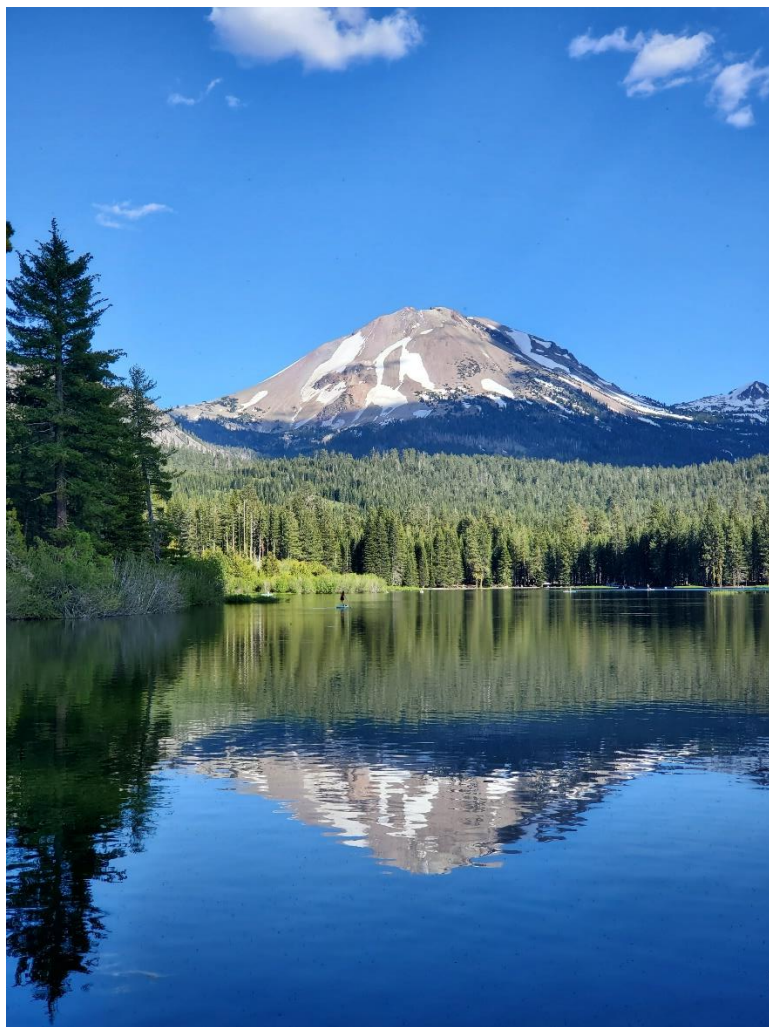
General Thoughts on Meditation

An internet search will reveal that there is much written about meditation and that there are a wide variety of them available to anyone who wishes to engage in the practice. Meditation is usually practiced in order to train attention and awareness, and/or achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm and stable state.

There is a particular way I might suggest thinking about meditation, consistent with the language and ways of thinking of this book: Meditation is very much like forest or nature bathing but is practiced inwardly – we could call it *mind-bathing*. Like nature bathing,

you are not focused on doing. You are instead focused on *being*, making contact with what's there on the inside. Through the process of meditation you turn your attention inward – slowly, carefully, and intentionally, making contact with your inner landscape.

The point of the meditation is not to get good at it, but simply to stay engaged with the practice. When I am able to mindfully meditate, I notice something: It is as if there is a small clear lake inside of me, which can become quite turbulent during stormy weather. When I meditate, my inner lake becomes mirror smooth with calmness.



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When you meditate, you're not necessarily healing or curing the Hole, but it helps you to see the Hole more clearly and may even help you to make contact with Wholeness. Meditation does not have to be focusing on your breath, nor guided, nor anything else. You are not even required to be sitting alone quietly. Nature bathing itself qualifies as a meditation.

Walking slowly through your neighborhood noticing your environment is meditation. Meditation is any practice which genuinely connects you to your inner experience.

Meditation is also a way to make contact with your inner creativity. By releasing thoughts associated with the lower levels of consciousness, you open a conduit for creativity, insight, and new understanding (what the Japanese sometimes refer to as *Satori*, a moment of awareness which occurs when the true nature of one's own self or the world comes into focus).

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Meditating in a World of Suffering

Suffering is ubiquitous. Everyone has some level of suffering going on all the time. Suffering is natural and is an integral part of being alive. Buddhists embrace this concept, including the statement “Life has suffering” as an interpretation of one of their four noble truths. If you deny or run away from suffering, you are not Whole.

This leads to a conundrum: How can Wholeness include suffering? Isn't wholeness all about healing suffering and finding happiness, contentment, and peace? I once heard a quote (I no longer remember from whom): “I would never want to live in a world without suffering.” When I first heard this, I was confused. Whoever said this seemed to be communicating that they would choose a world with

suffering over one without. I originally thought, “That’s crazy! Whoever said that must be a psychopath!” It has taken me many years and a lot of soul-searching to realize the truth: Living in a world without suffering would be the same as living in a world where no human beings are present. Sounds very lonely. Turns out Wholeness is not only the experience of happiness, contentment, groundedness and bliss. For sure it can include these beautiful qualities, but a more accurate definition of Wholeness is that it is Whole – it includes everything that is natural and real about being alive. If I am Whole, I am not necessarily happy – I am *alive*.

Thich Nhat Hanh³⁶ wrote, “Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering by all means, including personal contact and visits, images, sounds. By such means, ...awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world. If we get in touch with the suffering of the world, and are moved by that suffering, we may come forward to help the people who are suffering.” I take this to mean that in order to foster Wholeness for myself or for others, I must not avert my eyes. This is a painful process, but it is very real and fosters Wholeness.

Why include this discussion in a chapter on meditation? Being in a clear, grounded and calm state can make contact with suffering bearable where it otherwise may be too much. If my inner world is like the calm, serene lake described above, I will be more able to clearly see all that there is to see – the beautiful vistas across the lake, the flowers growing on the shore, the clouds in the sky, and, if necessary, another person (or

myself, for that matter) in distress across the lake. If the lake is whipped up by a thunderstorm, all I am likely to be willing to do is to find shelter. We were not meant to be in a world without suffering, but we were meant to face it with clarity, groundedness, purpose, compassion, and love.

Tonglen

Tonglen was originally developed as a Buddhist form of meditation, which focuses on the development and exercise of one's own compassion. The essence of the meditation is for you to visualize that as you exhale, you are sharing healing and Wholeness with everyone or anyone who needs it. Tonglen stands in contrast to the "I need to focus on myself first" paradigm of meditation. Tonglen embraces the reality that the most powerful form of self-healing is to develop an eagerness and ability to help others.

The word "Tonglen" is a Tibetan term that translates as "sending and taking." Engaging in Tonglen requires a willingness to acknowledge the existence of suffering in your own life, in the lives of those you care about, and in general. Our usual response to unpleasantness is, "How do I avoid it?" or "How can I help those I care about escape it?" This form of meditation is radically different: When you practice Tonglen you are accepting the presence of suffering.

As has been discussed, the urge to escape the pain and suffering of the Hole is deeply engrained. Instead of reacting with "fight, flight or freeze", however, we can use our meditation practice to accept the present moment as it is, and to open our hearts and connect with others.

Here is a description of the process of Tonglen meditation³⁷:

- Sit comfortably and settle in.
- Begin with mindfulness meditation, maintaining your focus on the breath. As you breathe in, be present with breathing in. As you breathe out, be present with breathing out. Acknowledge distracting thoughts and emotions as they arise, let go of them, and return to connecting with the breath.
- Now link intention to the breath. On the exhale, breathe out the light of basic goodness: your wish to help alleviate pain and suffering. On the inhale, invite the darkness of negativity and suffering to enter your heart where it will be transformed into light.
- Imagine that your initial object of compassion is a frightened stray dog cowering in a cage. Begin the exchange by breathing in the darkness of her fear, isolation, and bewilderment so that she is relieved of it.
- As you breathe out, your affectionate heart radiates soothing, gentle light beams that touch, reassure, and comfort her. She becomes confident and happy, cared-for and loved.
- Extend your meditation to other scared dogs, other caged animals, all beings stuck behind bars, and so on. Breathe in the darkness of their distress, breathe out the light of freedom and peace; imagine their relief and allow it to touch your heart.
- Expand the circle of goodwill—the scope of your imagination is the only limit. Breathe out happiness and its causes; breathe in suffering and negativities. Allow your heart’s natural goodness to shine unreservedly and touch the world with its grace.

- Finally, relax into open meditation and sit within that for a few more minutes.

As the web blog states, “Acknowledging and accepting what we and others are struggling with does not equal resignation. The practice gives us a sense of agency and takes the factors that compound distress—a sense of isolation, lack of connection, self-focus, and rejection of what is—and turns them around. It helps us realize that pain is not necessarily a mistake or a problem that needs solving; it’s simply part of the human condition. Every situation is workable and can be folded into the path. That’s the radical beauty of Tonglen.”

Meditation for Conflict or Confrontation

I recently learned of a meditation that can be used to calm feelings of conflict and/or confrontation with another. I have found through personal practice that this meditation serves the dual purposes of providing grounded calmness as well as release from the conflict. The meditation is relatively simple:

- As with any meditation, sit comfortably and settle in.
- As with Tonglen, begin with mindfulness meditation - focus on the breath. Be present with breathing in and out. Acknowledge distracting thoughts, etc.
- Once you feel grounded, visualize the person you are in confrontation or conflict with. Generate a clear, detailed image of the person in your mind. Think of how you relate to the person in

general, but then also think of what is happening that is generating conflict with him/her/them. Allow yourself to make full contact with the experience of the confrontation or conflict.

- Now, the weird part: Think of what you would like to experience most in your life. Think of all of the feelings you would love to experience, the quality of relationships you would like to have with others, what your place in the world would be like, etc. What, if you had it, would make you the most satisfied and happy in your life?
- Now, return to the image of the person you are in conflict with. Imagine *him/her/them* having everything that you would wish for *yourself*. Try as much as possible to hold this image in your mind – the person you are angry at, feel betrayed by, are frustrated with, now has in their life all that you would want to for yourself. (Be careful *not* to imagine what you think he/she/they would want for *themselves* – imagine he/she/they having what you would want for *yourself*.)
- Repeat as necessary.

As bizarre as this meditation seems to be, it works surprisingly well. I have used it several times, and have found that in each case I seem to experience *release* from the other that I am in conflict with. It seems that when we are in conflict with another, we somehow are bonded to the other (in a destructive and maladaptive way). This meditation somehow seems to clear the karma and allows you to return to your own self – your own being. You are now free of the other and of the conflict. I don't have a

clue regarding how or why this meditation works. I only know that it *does* work.

The Power of Group Meditation

Any kind of meditation which fosters calm, healing, and Wholeness will be beneficial. Take any such meditation and place it in a group of like-minded people, and the power of it will be amplified in an amazing fashion. Whenever I find myself in a group of people meditating, my own experience of the process feels much stronger and vivid, and I feel a sense of power co-created by the group that seems to fill the space - both the physical space that is created by the group and the psychic “energetic” space created by the existence of the group.

This is perhaps explained (either metaphorically or literally) by the phenomenon in physics of *resonance*. Imagine a tuning fork: When you tap a tuning fork, it vibrates at a particular tone. Now imagine a second tuning fork, manufactured to vibrate at the exact same tone as the first. If you tap the first tuning fork, then hold the second tuning fork near it (without tapping the second fork) the second tuning fork will seemingly magically begin to vibrate and emit the same tone. This happens because the two forks have the same *natural frequency*, and sound waves at that frequency which go across the air from one fork to the other will impinge on the second fork, causing it to vibrate.



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Resonance also happens in group meditation. When everyone in the group is experiencing the same meditation, there is a particular “frequency” of energy generated by the group which causes each member’s experience to intensify. It is also important to note that this energy spreads outward from the group. The larger the group, the larger the energy. Now imagine a very large group (hundreds, thousands, millions of people) emanating healing meditative energy – the whole planet would be affected by it! As stated earlier, a single individual may be relatively small and powerless in the world. A large group of people is unstoppable.

Section V Hope and Commitment

Hope is the expectation that something good will happen in the future. We all hope that Climate Change will be solved and that we can continue our existence on the planet.

There is something vitally important to consider about hope that cannot be forgotten: Hope cannot be passive – it must be active. Jane Goodall said, “I do have reasons for hope: our clever brains, the resilience of nature, the indomitable human spirit, and above all, the commitment of young people when they’re empowered to take action.” When hope is active, things happen - things change. When hope is passive, it has no power. Passivity is synonymous with hopelessness.

We easily have the technology, resources and power to solve climate change. Do we, however, have the will and commitment to do so? This all depends on whether we have hope and are willing to be active. The protest sign below says it all. Perhaps it should also contain the message, “Know Nature, Know Future”.



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It is important also to understand that hope is not just an individual experience. We affect (infect?) each other with hope or with hopelessness. Jonathan Belle³⁸ wrote in an essay, “The most important impact we have on each other is through how we affect each other’s hopes. Hope breeds hope. When hope exists, we engage with our environment more. We devote more of ourselves to what we do – as does everyone else around us. Hope engages our creativity and our problem-solving skills. Sometimes, we may be called upon to help someone keep their hope alive. That is a noble thing to do; when we help others remain hopeful, we in turn see that we are constantly motivating ourselves to stay hopeful as well.” Ann Frank wrote, “Where there is Hope, there is life. It fills us with fresh courage and makes us strong again.”

There are a number of important reasons to have hope. This section lists a few of them. If you think of more, then certainly allow them to become part of your awareness and communicate them to others!

Chapter 18 The Experience of Hope

No personal story here ... let's get right to business!

(Im)perfection

The healing process which moves us toward Wholeness will not be done perfectly – far from it. Turns out that all of us – you, me, that piece of fuzz on the rug that you keep vacuuming over and over (you know that you're allowed to pick it up with your fingers, right?), nature, the planet, and the universe are all very imperfect. Remember the discussion earlier about evolution and genetic mutation? Mutation is essentially random – just as likely to create a useless or bad change as it is to create a good change. That means that perfectly creating Wholeness and perfectly solving the problems that led to Climate Change are not possible – the achievement of perfection *is* truly hopeless.

It doesn't really matter, though. Any change that we create which causes the levels of carbon in the atmosphere to decrease will be good enough. After we figure all of this out and solve it, the Hole will still be there. That's OK – again, good enough. The process of reducing carbon levels will be messy; there will be setbacks, hurdles, politics, arguments and confrontation, and difficulties of all sorts. Still, it's OK.

In my career as an engineer, I worked with a mentor who insisted that I and my coworkers follow what he called the “80% Rule”. He taught that when you are carrying out a task or working on a project, once you have achieved 80% of what you want to achieve, then call it “done” and consider it to be a success. My coworkers and I were aghast - we had all had the American work ethic hammered into us: “Anything that is worth doing is worth doing right and worth driving to 110% completion.” The way my mentor explained it, however, was that the last 20% of what you are trying to do (100% being perfect) will double the cost, time, and resources. I have found this to be true. Think about it: The first 80% of a project takes 50% of the resources, while the last 20% takes another 50%. You can save half the time, effort, and expense by stopping at the 80% mark.

A caveat regarding the 80% rule: Application of this rule only works with Climate Change if 80% means that carbon levels in the atmosphere are falling. Perhaps for Climate Change, the term “80% Rule” should be renamed “Falling Atmospheric Carbon Rule”.

Regarding social, political, personal, and communal healing, the 80% rule should apply to how far we come in creating Wholeness for ourselves. While for Climate Change the rule now reads “falling atmospheric carbon”, for us collectively and as individuals striving for Wholeness perhaps it should read “*World as Lover*”.

Commitment

A recent Pew Research poll³⁹ conducted with citizens of 17 advanced economies revealed that 72% of the people surveyed believe that

the effects of climate change will harm them personally at some point in their lifetime. 80% of the respondents additionally indicated that they are willing to change how they live and work to help reduce the effects of climate change. These numbers would seem to indicate that as a species we are primed for action – if 80% of the world’s population takes the necessary action, the rest will follow. What, then, is holding us back?

There are two concepts that come from the world of chemistry that may give us a clue. The first is something called “activation energy”. In order for most chemical reactions to occur, there needs to be some kind of energy input into the system which kick starts the reaction. Once this energy is provided the reaction will take off and the change will happen. As an example, think of starting your automobile: You need energy from the car’s battery to start the engine. Once the engine is started, it runs on its own using its own fuel. The second useful concept in chemistry is the phenomenon of a catalyst. A catalyst does not take part in the chemical reaction, but draws the ready-to-react chemicals together so that the change can happen. Regarding climate change and kick-starting the healing process leading to *World as Lover*, it seems we need both. People are ready. Something or someone just needs to be inserted into the human system to get it moving.

What, then, is this catalyst or energy source? I honestly don’t know. Maybe it is a charismatic individual who appears on the scene who draws people to him/her/them who is so irresistible that people can’t help but flock around him/her/them. It has happened in the past (Jesus, Mohamed, Ghandi, MLK, etc.) On the other hand, maybe it will take things getting bad enough that a spontaneous reaction occurs without a

catalyst (per the definition of “collapse” provided earlier). You’ve probably heard of the “frog in the pot” story – if the water in the pot gets hot enough fast enough, the frog will take action and jump out (versus staying in slowly heating water and ending up getting boiled to death). So far, the identity of the catalyst or activation energy is unclear.

Perhaps another way to motivate people comes from psychological learning theory. We are motivated by Reward, Punishment, Relief, and Loss. Psychological research has found that Reward and Relief are the most powerful of the four motivators. This leads to the question: How can I be rewarded (or find relief) from taking action? The more immediate and concrete the reward or relief, the better. From a surface point of view, we will all get relief from environmental disasters, and we all get to live in a healthier manner on a healthier planet. From a deeper perspective, we get to find healing from the Hole and experience love with the planet and with each other.

Marianne Williamson seemed to sum it up best, in her book *A Return to Love*⁴⁰: “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... The world is in trouble. Many have prayed. God sent help. God sent you.”

Hopelessness

What if this is all wrong? What if it is truly hopeless? What if, as a species, we are fucked? There are three ways of answering these questions:

First, we don't know that it is hopeless. For sure, we are in the stage of the Climate crisis where we are now beginning to feel the effects of global temperature change. Hurricanes are more frequent and severe. The western US now appears to be in a permanent drought, spawning devastating wildfires every summer. Where there is flooding, it is more severe and frequent. People are now dying directly from the heat. None of this, however, is for sure a death sentence for us or for the planet. Climate Change can still be reversed if we can become motivated and take the necessary action. The Hole can be healed toward Wholeness. We haven't reached a point of no return *yet*. The frog in the pot isn't dead yet.

Second, what if it really *is* hopeless? What if "collapse" is already happening (it is) and we are beyond the point of being able to fix it? Same answer! I would rather die knowing I had spent my life and personal resources trying to make a positive difference than to give up and spend the rest of my life in despair. As stated earlier, hopefulness is active. Activity is life. I will spend the remainder of my life alive and active, no matter what. When it is time for me to take my last breath, I want to do so knowing that I did everything I could to help. Nothing less will be good enough.

Third – let's look at chaos: If you look up chaos in the dictionary, you will find the definition "formless matter", or "a mixed mass, without form or order". There is no doubt in most minds that we are moving as a species into increasing chaos. Social systems are breaking down. The economy is faltering. The ecosystem is becoming disordered. The severity and prevalence of mental illness is increasing. Climate Injustice

is becoming worse. Overall, what we have created in the world is not working – it is finally falling apart. Pretty frightening. But, also, something else altogether: Darkness, disorder, and chaos are very difficult to tolerate, but they are also evidence of a process which generates the conditions for creativity, new life, new growth, and the bringing into existence of something new and better in the world. The rubble left behind as things fall apart becomes the fertile soil of something new and amazing. Hopefulness is very appropriate with this in mind, because you, I, all of us can actively anticipate, plan for, act toward, and look forward to something that currently doesn't exist – the experience of Wholeness with ourselves, with each other, and with the planet.

The Right to the Work

A quote from the Bhagavad Gita⁴¹: “You have the right to work, but for the work's sake only. You have no right to the fruits of work. Desire for the fruits of work must never be your motive in working. Never give way to laziness, either. Perform every action with your heart fixed on the Supreme Lord. Renounce attachment to the fruits. Be even-tempered in success and failure: for it is this evenness of temper which is meant by yoga. Work done with anxiety about results is far inferior to work done without such anxiety, in the calm of self-surrender. Seek refuge in the knowledge of Brahma. They who work selfishly for results are miserable.”

This seems to imply that while it is important to engage in the work of solving Climate Change and healing toward Wholeness, it is just as important for you not to fixate or focus on the goal. It would seem that the work is about the work – not about the end result. This is a very

difficult concept to accept, as we all want to live in a healthy, sustainable manner with the planet – that is the goal, the end result. Or is it? I have stated in this book a clear goal of atmospheric carbon reduction and living in *World as Lover* consciousness. These are not, however, goals to achieve and then go back to the way things were. These goals represent changes in how we live with each other and with the planet that must be practiced every day, for the rest of our lives – indeed for the rest of our existence as a species. Therefore, the work is about the work – not about achieving a goal and then calling it done.

This is especially true given that the “error code” which originally created the Hole is deeply programmed into us. Life is about overwriting the code over and over again. Think about it this way: For thousands (or millions?) of years we have been heading down a highway created by the error code. We have practiced *World as Battlefield*, *Trap/Prison*, and *Possession/Resource* thinking for much of our existence as humans. The metaphorical highway created by these levels of consciousness is by now an eight-lane wide superhighway. Now we are being asked to exit the superhighway to make a new path in unmapped territory – a barely discernable path in the woods, which will at times, difficult to see at all. For a while - a long while - it will be easy to fall back onto the superhighway and continue life as it has been. In order to stay on the new path, however, we must stay focused, vigilant, alert, and mindful. It matters not where the path leads. It matters that we stay on the path, explore it, and get to know it. Over time the path will widen and become more familiar, but at first it will be difficult and “unnatural”. One foot in front of the other.

Technology

Much of what you hear in the news regarding how to solve the Climate crisis is focused on how we can use technology to reduce carbon in the atmosphere. Scientists and engineers are hard at work inventing cutting-edge technology to do so. There is little doubt that if enough resources are put into this type of work and if it is applied worldwide, we might actually achieve atmospheric carbon reduction. Problem solved.

Not so! (Don't worry, I'm *done* talking about Nellie...)

Technology is not the ultimate source of Climate Change. We are. Regardless of what technology did to create increased atmospheric carbon or how it may be utilized to reduce it, it should be clear by now that the problem, in essence, has to do with the creation and existence of the Hole. Therefore, placing all of our hope in technology and engineering as the ultimate fix of this problem misses the point. Without working toward Wholeness, the implementation of technological solutions has no depth or permanence. Without moving toward *World as Lover* we will still go on abusing the earth and each other. Bottom line: The essence of hope lies in what we are able to do internally, and with each other. If we are able to do the right kind of work, there is great hope for the future. If not, it is truly hopeless.

The Earth will Heal

There is one way of looking at the Climate Crisis that is inescapable and undeniable: The Earth will recover. Absolutely. Guaranteed. It is estimated that if humans cease to exist, the Earth will need up to 50 million years to erase any trace of human habitation,

including atmospheric carbon. Given that the expected lifespan of the planet is approximately 8 billion years, 50 million years of recovery time is about one half of one percent of the lifespan of the planet. If you compare that to your own lifespan, one half of one percent would be less than six months of your life. A serious illness of six months would be painful and represent significant suffering, but then you would recover, and life would go on. And so it would be for the Earth. This scenario for the earth represents worst case, where we do nothing and abjectly fail at saving ourselves as a species and erase ourselves from the planet.

The above scenario represents an extreme and pessimistic view of our future. In actuality, it is likely that if the human race does nothing, we wouldn't be entirely wiped out. More likely that there would be a small number of survivors who continue to represent *homo sapiens* after the ecosystem has collapsed. Revised worst case: The survivors continue living and procreating in a much less than ideal manner, but as the Earth recovers we would also have the opportunity to recover with it. If we cannot evolve into *World as Lover* before the ecosystem collapses, maybe the experience of the collapse would provoke us into this evolution?

The above discussion is very graphic and painful to imagine. Obviously, there is much hope that we can all do much better. The experience of Wholeness is simply waiting for us to embrace it. It is my deepest hope and wish that we all move forward in this evolutionary process, avoid the above scenario, and live with love and harmony with each other and in harmony with the Earth.

A Ridiculously Simple Summary

Sometimes when looking at a book for the first time, a person will immediately go to the ending of the book to see what's there. This is for those:

- You are an inseparable part of the Whole of Planet Earth.
- You have lost awareness of your connection with the Earth, with other humans, and with your inner self, leaving a Hole.
- Stop using artificial fillers and allow yourself to feel the Hole.
- Resign from *World as Possession/Resource* consciousness.
- Embrace the Wholeness that comes from being in intimate contact with the Planet, each Other and with your inner being.
- Experience Being Alive! Go explore more of the elephant!



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You and I are made of earth. Literally.

Appendix: Climate Change Evidence

This section of writing is relegated to an appendix, not because of it being of peripheral importance – evidence of the existence of Climate Change is extremely important and central to solving the problem – but simply because arguing the existence and consequences of Climate Change is outside the scope of the main message of this book. The information provided in this appendix is simply provided to underscore the reality of what we all face.

There are two excellent sources of information regarding the existence of Climate Change. The first is The Climate Report, first published by the US Government Printing office in 2018. This report is a meta-analysis of 67 research projects which generated Climate Change data. The second is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, released in 2022. The findings of each report are presented below.

Note: As per the definition of scientific causation described earlier, all of the information presented here is based on the current scientific paradigm of measuring something specific so that you can understand something in general. While this paradigm is, as has been discussed, very limited and prone to errors, at this point there has been a sufficiently large and varied volume of data collected such that we can have some confidence of what the Climate Change elephant looks like, at least in general.

The Climate Report

The Climate Change Report begins by listing a summary of evidence of Climate Change in the US. Highlights:

- The average annual temperature across the US has increased by approximately two to three degrees F - mostly in the Southwest, Northwest, Northern Great Plains, and Alaska.
- Since the 1960s, the number of days per year with heat waves has increased from around 20 to approximately 65 – a factor of three increase.
- In the mountains of the Western US, amount of winter snowpack has decreased by 40 to 80 percent, depending on specific location. That means that some mountain areas of the Western US are getting just 20% of the snowpack that they formerly received.
- Arctic sea ice has decreased from just under 3 million square miles of ocean surface in 1975 to less than 2 million square miles currently.
- US sea levels have increased by about nine inches since 1920.
- US marine species have migrated an average of 35 miles to cope with environmental changes resulting from Climate Change.
- Ocean pH around the Hawaiian Islands has decreased (meaning the ocean is more acidic) from 8.12 to 8.07, causing marine life die-off.
- Warmer climate has resulted in growing season length in the US increasing by as much as two months (especially in the Western US).

- Annual acreage destroyed in wildfires in the US has increased from around 2 million acres in 1980 to around 10 million acres currently.

The report then moves on to provide a number of “Key Messages”:

1. Global climate is changing rapidly compared to historical natural variations in climate that have occurred throughout Earth’s history. Global temperatures have increased by 1.8°F from 1906 to 2016. Observational evidence does not support any credible natural explanations for this phenomenon. Instead, evidence consistently points to human activities as being causal.
2. If nothing is done to remediate Climate Change, global temperatures will increase by 9°F or more by the end of this century. If the problem is addressed, the temperature increase could be kept to 3.6°F.
3. The world’s oceans have, so far, absorbed 93% of the excess heat from human-induced warming since the mid twentieth century, and are currently absorbing more than 25% of Carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitted into the atmosphere. As a result, the oceans are becoming warmer and more acidic. This, in turn, results in declining oxygen levels in many locations.
4. Global sea levels have risen by 7-9 inches since 1900, with almost half of this rise occurring since 1993. At current rates, sea level is likely to raise another 1 to 4 feet by the end of this century, with a rise of 8 feet being possible.
5. Annual average temperature over the contiguous US has increased by 1.2°F over the last few decades (1.8°F since 1900). An additional 2.5°F increase is expected over the next few decades regardless of any

Climate Change remedial efforts, and with as much as 3-12°F increase possible if we do nothing.

6. Annual precipitation across the US has increased in the northern and eastern US and decreased in the southern and western US. Observed increases in the frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation events in most parts of the US are projected to continue. Surface soil moisture in the western US is likely to decrease, along with continuing decline in snowpack in the mountains of the Western US, leading to increased drought conditions in this region.
7. In the Arctic, average temperatures have increased twice as fast as the global average. By mid-century, it is likely that the Arctic Ocean will be virtually free of ice during the summer months. Permafrost will decrease, releasing additional methane and CO₂, which will exacerbate the effects of Climate Change.
8. As a result of Climate Change the Atlantic hurricane season continues to strengthen, with a longer season and more severe storms. “Atmospheric River” storms bringing infrequent heavy rainfall to the west coast will intensify. (Note: In October 2021, my hometown of Santa Rosa received more than 7 inches of rain in one day. This was a new record for rainfall in one day. This was followed by a virtually dry rainy season – we received nearly one third of our rainfall for the year (a drought year) in that one day!)
9. Since the 1950s, sea level rise has already accounted for an increase in high tide flooding in coastal areas by a factor of 5 to 10. The frequency, depth, and extent of tidal flooding is expected to intensify with higher sea levels.

10. Climate Change resulting from human activity will persist from decades to millennia. Self-reinforcing cycles within the climate system have the potential to accelerate Climate Change. As a result, computer models are more likely to underestimate the future effects of Climate Change than to overestimate them.

The Climate Report described the effects of Climate Change on different specific regions of the United States:

Northeast, including Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia and District of Columbia:

- Less distinct seasons with milder winter and earlier spring are altering the environment in ways that affect the rural economy, tourism, farming, and forestry.
- Warmer ocean water and acidification are affecting ocean commerce, tourism, and recreation.
- Climate change is affecting infrastructure, nationally historic sites, and economies in urban areas.
- Climate change is affecting human health, leading to increased medical costs, increased emergency room visits and hospitalizations, and a lower quality of life.

Southeast, including Virginia, Kentucky, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Florida:

- Climate Change induced heat, flooding, and increase in vector-borne disease are already affecting the health and quality of life of those in urban areas.
- The tourism industry, critical industries, and important cultural resources of the coastal plain and inland low-lying regions are vulnerable to climate impacts. The combined effects of extreme rainfall events and sea level rise are already increasing flood frequencies, which impacts property values and infrastructure viability.
- More frequent extreme heat episodes and changing seasonal climate are projected to increase exposure-lined health impacts and economic vulnerabilities in the agricultural, timber, and manufacturing sectors. By the end of this century, more than one half billion labor hours could be lost from heat-related impacts.
- Changing winter temperature extremes, wildfire patterns, sea levels, hurricanes, floods, droughts, and warming ocean temperatures are expected to redistribute species and greatly modify ecosystems.

US Caribbean:

- Climate Change is expected to reduce rainfall in this area, affecting freshwater availability, while extreme rain events are expected to result in increased flooding. Saltwater intrusion from sea level rise will affect freshwater availability.
- Marine ecosystems (which support commercial and recreational fishing) are threatened by ocean acidification, surface temperature

increase, and sea level rise, and changes in intensity and frequency of storms.

- Sea level rise, along with stronger wave action, higher storm surges, will worsen coastal flooding and increase coastal erosion, diminishing beach area, decrease tourism, and negatively impact the economy.
- Continued increases in temperature will negatively affect agriculture, change wildlife distribution, and negatively affect human health.

Midwest, including Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio:

- Increases in warm season humidity and rainfall have eroded soils, created favorable conditions for pests and pathogens, and degraded the quality of stored grain.
- Climate Change has increased tree mortality and reduced forest productivity.
- Climate Change has impacted natural ecosystems, including habitat loss, increased pollution, lower nutrient levels, and nonnative species invasion.
- Poor air quality days, extreme high temperature events, heavy rainfall, extended pollen seasons are all expected to negatively impact human health.
- Storm water management systems, transportation networks, and other critical infrastructure systems are already experiencing negative impacts from Climate Change.

Northern Great Plains, including Montana, North and South Dakota, Wyoming, and Nebraska:

- Paradoxically, agriculture has benefited from longer growing seasons and other recent climatic changes. Continuing rising temperatures and changes in extreme weather events, however, are likely to erase these short-term benefits and result in net negative effects.
- Recreational activities and the production of valuable goods and services are likely to suffer as a result of Climate Change. Stream runoff from winter snow is likely to decrease, affecting fishing and ecosystem diversity.
- Fossil fuel and renewable energy production in this region of the US will suffer as a result of Climate Change, negatively affecting the energy supply and the US economy as a whole.
- Climate change is affecting the regional Native American economy, individual livelihoods, and cultural practices.

Southern Great Plains, including Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas:

- Quality of life in the region will be compromised as result of population increase, including climate-caused migration of individuals from rural to urban areas, which will affect food production and consumption, energy production and use, and water resources.
- Along the Gulf Coast, sea level rise that is twice the global average will put coastal infrastructure at risk.
- Regarding ecosystems, some species can adapt to Climate Change, while others cannot.

- Human threats, including diseases transmitted through food, water and insects will increase as temperatures rise. Weather conditions supporting these threats are expected to be of longer duration, higher intensity, and occur at times of the year when they normally wouldn't be expected.
- Tribal and indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable due to water resource constraints, extreme weather events, higher temperatures, and other likely public health issues.

Northwest, including Washington state, Oregon, and Idaho:

- Climate Change and extreme weather events are already endangering the well-being of a wide range of wildlife, fish and plants, negatively affecting tribal life and recreational activities.
- Existing water, transportation, and energy infrastructure already face challenges from flooding, landslides, drought, wildfire, and heat waves. Continuing effects of climate change are expected to affect reliability of water supplies, hydropower, and transportation across the region.
- Organizations and volunteers that make up the area's social safety net are already stretched thin with current demands. Healthcare and social systems will likely be further challenged in the future. Increased likelihood of hazards and epidemics, disruptions in local economies and food systems are projected to result in more chronic health risks.
- Frontline communities which are affected most include tribes and indigenous peoples, those who are the most dependent on natural

resources for their livelihoods, and the economically disadvantaged.

Southwest, including California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico:

- Fresh water for people, agriculture, and nature has declined due to Climate Change driven droughts.
- The integrity of forests and other ecosystems and their ability to provide natural habitat, clean water, and economic livelihoods have declined as a result of droughts and wildfires.
- Sea level rise, ocean warming, ocean acidification and reduced ocean oxygen content have negatively affected coastal infrastructure and marine fauna and flora.
- Traditional foods, natural resource-based livelihoods, cultural resources, and spiritual well-being of indigenous peoples are increasingly affected by drought, wildfire, and changing ocean conditions.
- The ability of hydropower and fossil fuel electricity generation to meet growing demand is decreasing, resulting from drought and rising temperatures.
- Food production is vulnerable to water shortages. Increased drought, heat waves, and reduction of winter chill hours harms crops and livestock, and exacerbates competition for water among agricultural, energy generation, and urban demands.
- Heat associated deaths and illness, vulnerabilities to chronic disease, and other health risks increase in extreme heat, poor air quality, and conditions that foster pathogen growth and spread.

Alaska:

- Alaska's marine fish and wildlife habitats, species distributions, and food webs, all of which are important to Alaska's residents, are increasingly affected by retreating and thinning arctic summer sea ice, increasing temperatures, and ocean acidification.
- Alaska residents, communities, and their infrastructure continue to be affected by permafrost thaw, coastal and river erosion, increasing wildfire, and glacier melt.
- A warming climate brings a wide range of human health threats to Alaskans, including increased injuries, smoke inhalation, damage to vital water and sanitation systems, decreased food and water security and new infectious diseases.
- Climate change is causing damage to infrastructure that will be costly to repair or replace, especially in remote Alaska.
- Subsistence activities, culture, health, and infrastructure of Alaska's indigenous peoples and communities are subject to a variety of impacts, many of which are expected to increase in the future.

Hawaii & Pacific Islands:

- Dependable and safe water supplies for Pacific island communities and ecosystems are threatened by rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, sea level rise, and increased risk of extreme drought and flooding.
- Pacific island terrestrial habitats and the goods and services they provide are threatened by rising temperatures, changes in rainfall, increased storminess, and land use change.

- Sea level rise is now beginning to threaten critical assets such as ecosystems, cultural sites and practices, economies, housing and energy, transportation and other forms of infrastructure.
- Fisheries, coral reefs, and the livelihoods they support are threatened by higher ocean temperatures and ocean acidification.
- Indigenous peoples of the Pacific are threatened by rising sea levels, diminishing freshwater availability, and shifting ecosystem services.

IPCC Report

The IPCC report released earlier this year is an exhaustive account of the effects of climate change, including input from the following resources:

- 70 authors from 67 countries
- 47 coordinating authors
- 184 lead authors
- 39 review editors
- 675 contributing authors
- Over 34,000 cited references
- A total of 62,418 expert and government review comments

The following is edited from the IPCC press release:

Human-induced climate change is causing dangerous and widespread disruption in nature and affecting the lives of billions of

people around the world, despite efforts to reduce the risks. People and ecosystems least able to cope are being hardest hit.

The world faces unavoidable multiple climate hazards over the next two decades with global warming of 1.5°C (2.7°F). Even temporarily exceeding this warming level will result in additional severe impacts, some of which will be irreversible. Risks for society will increase, including to infrastructure and low-lying coastal settlements.

Urgent action is required to deal with increasing risks. Increased heatwaves, droughts and floods are already exceeding plants' and animals' tolerance thresholds, driving mass mortalities in species such as trees and corals. These weather extremes are occurring simultaneously, causing cascading impacts that are increasingly difficult to manage. They have exposed millions of people to acute food and water insecurity, especially in Africa, Asia, Central and South America, on Small Islands and in the Arctic.

To avoid mounting loss of life, biodiversity and infrastructure, ambitious and accelerated action is required to adapt to climate change, at the same time as making rapid, deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. So far, progress on adaptation is uneven and there are increasing gaps between action taken and what is needed to deal with the increasing risks. These gaps are largest among lower-income populations.

Safeguarding and strengthening nature is key to securing a livable future: There are options to adapt to a changing climate. The report provides new insights into nature's potential not only to reduce climate risks but also to improve people's lives.

“Healthy ecosystems are more resilient to climate change and provide life-critical services such as food and clean water”, said IPCC Working Group II Co-Chair Hans-Otto Pörtner. “By restoring degraded ecosystems and effectively and equitably conserving 30 to 50 per cent of Earth’s land, freshwater and ocean habitats, society can benefit from nature’s capacity to absorb and store carbon, and we can accelerate progress towards sustainable development, but adequate finance and political support are essential.”

Scientists point out that climate change interacts with global trends such as unsustainable use of natural resources, growing urbanization, social inequalities, losses and damages from extreme events and a pandemic, jeopardizing future development.

“Our assessment clearly shows that tackling all these different challenges involves everyone – governments, the private sector, civil society – working together to prioritize risk reduction, as well as equity and justice, in decision-making and investment,” said IPCC Working Group II Co-Chair Debra Roberts.

“In this way, different interests, values and world views can be reconciled. By bringing together scientific and technological know-how as well as Indigenous and local knowledge, solutions will be more effective. Failure to achieve climate resilient and sustainable development will result in a sub-optimal future for people and nature.”

Cities: Hotspots of impacts and risks, but also a crucial part of the solution: People’s health, lives and livelihoods, as well as property and critical infrastructure, including energy and transportation systems, are

being increasingly adversely affected by hazards from heatwaves, storms, drought and flooding as well as slow-onset changes, including sea level rise.

“Together, growing urbanization and climate change create complex risks, especially for those cities that already experience poorly planned urban growth, high levels of poverty and unemployment, and a lack of basic services,” Debra Roberts said.

“But cities also provide opportunities for climate action – green buildings, reliable supplies of clean water and renewable energy, and sustainable transport systems that connect urban and rural areas can all lead to a more inclusive, fairer society.”

There is increasing evidence of adaptation that has caused unintended consequences, for example destroying nature, putting peoples’ lives at risk or increasing greenhouse gas emissions. This can be avoided by involving everyone in planning, attention to equity and justice, and drawing on Indigenous and local knowledge.

A narrowing window for action: The report clearly states Climate Resilient Development is already challenging to achieve at current warming levels. It will become more limited if global warming exceeds 1.5°C (2.7°F). In some regions it will be impossible if global warming exceeds 2°C (3.6°F). This key finding underlines the urgency for climate action, focusing on equity and justice. Adequate funding, technology transfer, political commitment and partnership lead to more effective climate change adaptation and emissions reductions.

“The scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and the health of the planet. Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a livable future,” said Hans-Otto Pörtner.

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