

2019-2020 Chronicle 10

On the Journey to a Climate Change Culture

In my last chronicle I laid out the need to develop a climate change culture. I noted that our current culture is, in effect, an economic culture and it is dominating Earth. Because it is ravaging Earth's resources it is the major cause of our climate change crisis. We need a different kind of culture, one that will help us deal with this crisis on a long term basis. So how do we go about creating a climate change culture?

I don't know. I don't think anyone knows how to do it. We have never had to do this kind of thing before. But we do know something about the issues that have put us into this kind of predicament, and we do know some of the potential solutions.

In this chronicle, as the title indicates, I am going to use the analogy of going on a journey.

First, we have to decide that we really want to make this journey. What are some of the obstacles we will be facing? What are the potential benefits for us, our families and our community?

Second, we need to prepare for the trip. We need to be sure of our destination, what we need to take with us, who we are going to travel with, and how we can be sure that we are going in the right direction.

And, third, it is going to be a long and rough trip. There will be disappointments, perhaps many of them. We need to find some psychological or spiritual practices that will motivate and strengthen us along the way.

So let's map out the approach to this journey.

Obstacles on the Journey

The need for the journey is clear enough. But knowing our reason for the journey and finding the will to start may be two different things. There are a lot of obstacles to getting involved.

Since we have never consciously created a culture, we may find the idea too daunting. It may seem easier just to hang tough and wait to see what happens.

Then there is the temptation to see the journey is a waste of time....that there is absolutely nothing we can do about climate change. This attitude may leave us in the position of the guy in the cartoon who hears a knock on his door, opens it and stands horrified. In front of him is the Grim Reaper. The Reaper is handing him a note and says to him, "Now don't freak out. This is just a save the date."

There may be many other reasons for not getting involved. You may be up to your teeth doing a job, earning a living, and caring for your family. You just can't take on another responsibility. You believe in climate change, you are worried about it and may even feel some guilt around your inaction. You just don't think you have the time or the skills to commit to something.

But for many a time comes when they decide they have to participate in some way. They have friends who have gotten involved, they are concerned about the future of their children and grandchildren, or they are shocked into action. This leads us to the next step.

Levels of Involvement

There are a wide variety of reasons to take the journey. Since climate change affects all life as we have known it, there is no end to the ways that you can play a role. Some of these may be very personal and lifestyle related. You may decide to change the food you are eating, or limit the number of flights you take, or get rid of the gas guzzlers and switch to an electric vehicle, or provide funding to a community group you think is making a contribution.

One of the things we have to do when we decide to go on this journey is look at our own skills and experience. It is unlikely that we will stay the course if the work we are doing does not give us some kind of satisfaction and a feeling of making a real contribution.

Join a community group.

When you decide that you want to get more involved you should join forces with others. It goes without saying that what we can do as individuals to deal with climate change is limited. For greater impact we need to work with others in an existing group or help develop our own group. Here are some suggestions in making your choice.

First, the group should keep focused on change at the local level. Most significant changes come from the bottom up, not from the top down. As I noted in previous chronicles, most groups "up there" are well established within the economic culture. They have the money and the political power to stay at the top. However, folks at the community level can influence and change the situation "up there" if we can provide more viable options.

Second, focus on the systems. Learn how the current systems are causing the problems—but focus on the new kinds of systems that are desperately needed. I'm talking about living systems that can live within a living Earth. Fortunately some of these kinds of systems are beginning to emerge. The most prominent at this time is the so-called Doughnut Economy proposed by Kate Raworth. Another encouraging model is the Green New Deal. There are many articles about these systems online.

Third, it is essential that you help your group develop a vision. A vision is critical because it helps your group members work together to pursue a common goal.

In terms of requirements we need a vision that will provide a viable alternative to the economic vision that is destroying the Earth. We need a vision that will protect Earth and at the same time protect us who are dependent upon Earth for our continued existence. One such vision was developed by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme: “*To create a mutually enhancing relationship for our species and for Earth.*”

Finally, we must develop transitions. We can't just jump from the world we have today to the world we need tomorrow. For example, we can't decide one day to end the use of fossil fuels and the next day expect to depend upon wind and solar power. We need transitions and transitions require time, money and political leverage.

I remember what Donella Meadows, author of the concept of *Limits to Growth* said about the obstacles we experience in making transitions. “*Challenging a paradigm (e.g. our current economic culture) is not part-time work. It is not sufficient to make your point once and then blame the world for not getting it. The world has a vested interest, a commitment to not getting it. The point has to be made patiently and repeatedly day after day. (The Global Citizen p. 8)*

Help for the Journey: Resilience

The road to a climate change culture is a difficult one. It will take a great deal of resilience because there will be some successes but there will also be failures. That is the case when we are not sure how to proceed. We keep facing obstacles blocking our journey. It helps if we anticipate what some of these obstacles will be.

Margaret Wheatley has spent a lifetime translating science into practical application at the local level. In her most recent book, *Who Do We Choose To Be: Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity*, she talks about the need for resilience. She sees that we must help create “Islands of Sanity”

Recognizing that significant change must come from the bottom up and not from the top down, Wheatley notes that success will come from groups joining together to develop a common vision

We must have the courage to open up and share our thoughts, feelings and frustrations with one another. A community, as the term suggests, is an expression of oneness. Given the hurdles we will be facing, we must have confidence that our companions on this journey will help and support one another.

But Wheatley also notes the importance of a psychic/spiritual component. We must have a personal practice –some time set aside each day for reflections, meditation, prayer—whatever helps us to stay the course. Many of us find the source of our

practice in the Earth itself, gardening or walking in the woods to experience the many gifts Earth shares with us day after day.

Finally, because developing a climate change culture forces us inevitably to look into the future I think we must develop and share with others a sense of hope.

Unfortunately the word “hope” is often rejected. It is seen by many as something airy-fairy, pie in the sky or wishing upon some kind of imaginary thing in the future that will come to save us. But for me and for many others hope is a realistic down to earth concept.

I like Saint Augustine’s version of hope. He was the bishop of Hippo in Africa and like us he lived in a time radical change. It was the final days of the five century reign of the Roman Empire. Hippo was under siege. The barbarian hordes were pounding at the gates of the city. In the face of all this, Augustine the radical said, *“Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.”*

Given that community groups, especially those which involve young people, are now beginning to deal with climate change, I think we are coming to the end of the road for the Economic Culture. Many communities around the world are already on the journey to create Climate Change Cultures.

I have hope....St. Augustine’s kind of hope. I see that it will also take Anger and Courage to bring new Climate Change Cultures into being.

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