

2022 Climate Change Chronicle 2

Going Down the Off-Ramp

In a

Climate Changing World.

Many of us have had the experience of driving down a highway and suddenly realizing that we are going in the wrong direction. We immediately start looking for an off-ramp to turn around and go in the right direction. The analogy could help us deal with our present situation.

We are travelling down the road into a new world that began at the time of the Industrial Revolution. Our scientists have named this new world the Anthropocene. It is replacing the world that has existed since the death of the dinosaurs sixty–six million years ago.

But here is the problem. As our advances in science and production of goods have accumulated, we have taken over from Earth the process of evolution. So how are we supposed to deal with it— this new world that is wreaking havoc around the planet?

We need an off-ramp—a change of direction in order to find a new way to live on this Earth—a way that will benefit ourselves, all species and the Earth we depend upon for our continued existence.

Taking Our Off-Ramp

It seems like there are three steps in deciding to take our off ramp. First comes the realization we are riding in the in the wrong direction. As Marshal McLuhan, the Canadian media systems guru put it, “*We are driving into our future looking into our rear view mirror.*”

Second, once we realize that we are moving in the wrong direction we have to find our off -ramp that will help us deal with our present problems and will lead us in a new direction.

Third, we need to find a new road into the future that will help us move forward with some degree of confidence. We also need to anticipate the hazards that may lie ahead as we explore unfamiliar territory.

The Obstacles

Let us assume that we need to find a road to our future. Unfortunately we really can't find a road because it has not yet been created. There are clues that a few insightful scientists and others have given us but we have to create the road. So what are the obstacles to making this new road?

The first one is climate change itself. We are trying to develop a road forward at the same time that climate change is wreaking havoc all over the world. It reminds me of that great song of Brandi Carlile, *Dance in a Hurricane*. "*You may dance in a hurricane but only if you are dancing in the eye*". How can we both mitigate and repair at the same time?

The next real obstacle comes from systems we have created, particularly our economic system. We have developed a dominant economic culture that has helped shape all other systems, particularly the political and judicial systems. The irony of this situation is that we are depending upon our existing systems to help us deal with this dilemma. Talk about being in a tough spot!

The third obstacle is the immediacy of the climate change problem. Scientists are continually telling us that we have thirty or fifty years to turn things around and save our bacon. But despite the number of large political conferences we don't seem to be making much progress.

The Way forward

So what is the way forward? Here are some suggestions:

First we need to visualize a world that deals with our current problems and helps us provide a different kind of future. We need a vision. Many thinkers are putting out possible scenarios. The one that I'm attached to is that of Thomas Berry and Brian Thomas Swimme. Its goal is *A mutually enhancing relationship with our species and Earth*.

Second, we need to build a new culture...a social environment that will help us, our children and grandchildren and their descendants for generations to come. To be more specific we need to help one another develop a climate change culture.

Third, we can't do all of this alone. We need to share our ideas with others and welcome their ideas. This must be a ground-up approach evolving in and among local communities. But, a warning. Given the present control of the current economic culture and its leaders we can expect strong opposition. This will come from wealthy individuals and institutions that have most benefitted from the current economic culture and will do everything in their power to maintain it.

Fourth, we can't just wait around until the right people show up. We must develop training programs that will help people, younger people in particular, acquire the skills they need for this monumental task. An essential part of this training will be to help them develop personal skills that foster resilience.

Recently I was reading about COP 23, the 2017 International Conference on Climate Change. One of the participants was invited to share her insights. She is a Buddhist nun, Sister True Dedication. When asked about changing the world she noted that what we need is not more facts, information or even technology. Borrowing an insight from her Zen mentor, Thich Nhat Hanh, she said, "*We can't hope to change the world if we can't change our way of seeing things*". So how do we do it? "*One step at a time.*" She spoke about the art of Mind-full Walking, a meditative practice.

The word "meditation" makes many folks think of religion. But it is not exclusive to religions and there are many kinds of meditative practices.

Many business authors have promoted the benefits of meditation. One example is MIT's Peter Senge, the author of *The Fifth Discipline-The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.

The great benefit of regular meditation is that it allows us to “get outside ourselves” and learn to see the world in a different way. And that, as Sister True Dedication indicates, is precisely what we need.

That’s it for this time. I thought it would be appropriate to end with a link to Sr. True Dedication’s seventeen minute Ted Talk.

https://www.ted.com/talks/sister_true_dedication_3_questions_to_build_resilience_and_change_the_world?language=en

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