

Chapter Two

Keeping It Together Personally

I've been an organizer and an activist for progressive social change since 1968. I can put a specific date on when this happened for me. It was evening of April 4th, the day that Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. It was on that April 4th date in 1968 that I moved from concern about war and injustice to activism against them. His violent death motivated me to compose and post a petition to Congress calling upon them to take action to address the conditions that Dr. King had been working to change. The petition was signed by about half of the students at the college I was attending, Grinnell College in Iowa. I've been active ever since on a wide range of issues including, for the last six years, the climate crisis.

King's activism, his willingness to take risks and continue going despite death threats and public criticism from others, was deeply grounded in his Christian faith. And his view of what that faith called for was deep and profound. He once wrote, "Jesus didn't get bogged down in a specific evil. He didn't say, now Nicodemus you must not drink liquor. He didn't say, Nicodemus you must not commit adultery. He didn't say, Nicodemus you must not lie. He didn't say, Nicodemus you must not steal. He said, Nicodemus you must be born again. Nicodemus, the whole structure of your life must be changed. What America must be told today is that she must be born again. The whole structure of American life must be changed."

King was not the only revolutionary—and this is what he became and how he saw himself—for whom a religious background was an essential aspect of their commitment. Mahatma Gandhi in India, Fidel Castro in Cuba, Ella Baker in the USA, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, even Karl Marx in his early adult years—all took the best of religious beliefs seriously. Indeed, for the civil rights movement of the '50s and '60s that Dr. King led, critical to its morale despite serious repression was the knowledge that they were on the side of Justice and Right, that their struggle was part of an historical continuum going back thousands of years.

They took heart from the Old Testament book of the prophet Habakkuk, who cried out, "O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and thou wilt not hear? Or cry to thee 'Violence!' and thou wilt not save? Why dost thou make me see wrongs and look upon trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. . . And the Lord answered me, 'Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end-it will not lie. If it seem slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith.'" (1)

And there are the words of Jesus in the New Testament when he said, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did

it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (2)

I have personally experienced many times the power of spiritual reflections and teachings to restore my hope, to restore a "right spirit within me," to use religious terminology. As I wrote about in the first chapter, I became very depressed for at least two months during the spring when it became clear that, despite Henry Waxman's chairmanship of the key House Energy and Commerce Committee, the coal and other fossil fuel interests were having a major impact upon the legislation-writing process in the House of Representatives.

I remember the way that I talked to people after that committee voted out a very problematic climate bill on May 21st. When I saw someone I knew and they asked me how I was doing, there was bitterness in my voice as I told them about how I had just ended a long climate fast but that it had had no impact on its target, Congress. This went on for weeks.

Looking back on this period of my life, I can see that I was looking for someone or something to help get me out of this emotional funk. And I finally got it, beginning with a challenge from my father, an 88 year old retired Christian minister. Visiting him during this time, he responded to my despondency and feelings of being let down by forthrightly saying, in effect, "so you expected the powers-that-be to do the right thing?" He spoke about the centuries-long battle between good and evil, the reality that often evil wins, but that we have to keep doing what is right no matter what. This is our job if we are taking seriously our human and, for him, religious responsibilities.

I meditated on his words for the next couple of days. And then, on a three-hour train ride a few days later, I read from beginning to end, for the first time, a book that I have been using as my own personal bible, "God Makes the Rivers to Flow: Sacred literature of the world," edited by Eknath Easwaran.

As the title implies, this book brings together writings and reflections from a broad range of spiritual and religious traditions—Native American, the Old and New Testament, Lao Tzu, the Bhagavad Gita, Jewish Liturgy, Swami Ramdas, many others. I have been reading it off and on for a number of years. When my spirit needs rejuvenation, when I'm struggling to keep going, I eventually turn to this book for the inspiration and sustenance I need. One of the passages I often turn to is a meditation by Chief Yellow Lark, "Let Me Walk in Beauty:"

O Great Spirit,
 whose voice I hear in the winds
 and whose breath gives life to all the world,
 hear me.
 I am small and weak.
 I need your strength and wisdom.

Let me walk in beauty

and let my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.
 Make my hands respect the things you have made
 and my ears grow sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so that I may understand the things
 you have taught my people.
 Let me learn the lessons you have hidden
 in every leaf and rock.
 I seek strength not to be greater than my brother or sister
 but to fight my greatest enemy, myself.
 Make me always ready
 to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes
 So when life fades as the fading sunset
 my spirit may come to you without shame.

For myself and I know for many other people, it is in the natural world--in the woods, in the mountains, by the sea, in the desert, by rivers and lakes, in urban parks—that we can feel connection to something much greater than ourselves, gain perspective and strength for struggle. As John Burroughs wrote, “Familiarity with the ways of the Eternal as they are revealed in the physical universe certainly tends to keep a man sane and sober and safeguards him against the vagaries and half-truths which our creeds and indoor artificial lives tend to breed.” (3)

But can we count upon the natural world to maintain our spirits when we know that there will be, and when we experience, significant changes to it as the earth continues to heat up—which it will do for a long time no matter how strong our efforts? Yes, I think we can.

It’s not as if the natural world as we have known it is going to completely change within a few years, or even a few decades. The sun and the moon will still come up; waters, by and large, will continue to flow; green things will grow and woods and forests will continue to exist. But there is no question that the news about what is happening in the world, to the world, as the heating process unfolds, is very overwhelming. It is very easy to feel that it is too late to do anything that is going to reverse our accelerating drive towards the cliff. It is one of the occupational hazards of being a committed climate activist.

The Plague

I recently re-read “The Plague,” by Albert Camus. It is a novel written right after World War II about a medium-sized city, Oran, in Algeria that experiences, for a nine-month period of time, a plague which at its height is taking the lives of close to 200 people a day. Within the context of the book, it is uncertain until just before its sudden end if or when the plague is going to end.

The book is clearly analogous to the situation in Europe under the domination of Hitler’s fascism. In many ways it is analogous to the world’s situation today, but in our case the plague is

not a bacteria spread by rats or an evil political movement but the result of conscious decisions—and a lack of decisions—by the world’s governments and dominant economic powers.

Over this nine-month period, the lives of virtually everyone in Oran are affected by the disease, but in many ways life goes on as best it can despite it. It’s not that there is denial of what is happening, once it is clear what is taking place, but “the really remarkable thing was the way in which, in the very midst of catastrophe, offices could go on functioning serenely and take initiatives of no immediate relevance.” (4)

This is how it often feels about the response to our looming civilizational crisis. That is why a growing number of people, thank God, are stepping up their commitment on this issue and risking arrest to dramatize the urgency of our crisis, people like James Hansen or the thousands of less prominent people who have risked arrest at coal plants, government agencies, the American Petroleum Institute, Chevron headquarters and elsewhere over the last several years.

The main characters in *The Plague* struggle to keep going in spite of the death and suffering all around them. At one point in the middle of the nine months a doctor and a journalist who are leaders in the effort to overcome the disease discuss how they keep themselves going. The discussion turns to the question of belief in God. The doctor expresses his lack of belief in an all-powerful God and, instead, his belief that by fighting against sickness and disease in “creation as he found it” he was doing the right thing with his life. (5)

The journalist explains the leadership role that he has taken: “I only know that one must do what one can to cease being plague-stricken, and that’s the only way in which we can hope for some peace or, failing that, a decent death. This, and only this, can bring relief to men and, if not save them, at least do them the least harm possible and even, sometimes, a little good.” (6)

At another point Camus refers to “fledgling moralists going about town proclaiming there was nothing to be done and we should bow to the inevitable.” (7) This reminded me of the attitude of far too many people, including some people who are activist-oriented, who understand the seriousness of our situation but refuse to get involved in the climate movement because they see it as just too big of an issue. In essence, they are doing the same as these “fledgling moralists,” even if they are quiet in their acquiescence to our modern-day plague of fossil fuels, deforestation and unsustainable development.

As the plague finally ends, Camus, through the thoughts of the doctor, summarizes the main lessons learned as a result of the long struggle against the plague/against fascism: “What we learn in times of pestilence is that there are more things to admire in men than to despise. Nonetheless, he knew that the tale. . . could not be one of a final victory. It could be only the record of what had had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts, despite their personal afflictions, by all who, while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilences, strive their utmost to be healers.” (8)

Those who take up the struggle to slow, stop and reverse global heating, if they are to stick with it for the many years more that it will take to prevent, I hope, climate catastrophe, need to consciously develop their emotional and spiritual staying power. We need to provide an example for others, especially young people, that they can learn from as to how to live, day by day, year after year, with full knowledge about what we are facing, what is happening to our ecosystem, but with the strength to continue to keep taking action.

We need a growing and visible movement of people all throughout society which advocates for and works toward climate solutions at the scale of the problem. We also need a movement made up of people who can give leadership to help human society grapple with the wrenching decisions that may have to be made if it turns out that we are unable to prevent the climate tipping points from being reached, and runaway climate change ushers in a truly terrible future.

Facing Up to Our Reality

I was meeting with a young Indigenous climate leader from Alaska toward the end of my 2007 climate emergency fast. We were having an intense discussion about the kind of a movement we needed if we were to have a chance of coming out on the other side of the climate crisis with a new and different world. As we discussed what we saw being needed going forward, at one point my Indigenous brother stated that he could see a possibility that there could come a time when people in a particular community would need to discuss who should live and who should die as the effects of climate change made it impossible for all to live. I agreed with him that, yes, this could be part of what our future holds.

Indeed, the kind of future which Lovelock believes is likely is one in which much worse things than this will be happening on every continent. Warlords come into existence when conditions are so bad, so desperate, that those who are most physically strong, those most willing to kill and steal from others to keep themselves alive, become dominant. We must do all in our power to limit, if not prevent, this terrible “solution” to a hotter world.

One thing which we need is an appreciation for those who have come before us who have also faced very long odds. Indeed, many of our ancestors have faced much more immediate difficulties than the climate movement faces right now. One relatively recent example is the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s,

The individual people who made up the civil rights movement in the segregated South were up against centuries of the most brutal and violent oppression, lynchings, beatings, disenfranchisement and dehumanization on a scale that many of us in the 21st century just don't appreciate. It took a great deal of personal courage for black people who had this oppression in their bones to find the strength to rise up against it, not knowing what the ultimate results would be.

More than once, many times really, I've heard climate activists talk about how hard it is to work on this issue because it's so big, so overarching, so urgent. And, without question, one of the

difficulties in building this movement is that it's easy to feel despair that we'll be able to overcome in enough time the fossil fuels and the political systems aligned with them which seem so powerful. But in comparison with what the nonviolent revolutionaries of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, SNCC, experienced throughout the deep South as they worked to get black people to register to vote—murders, beatings, arrests, deep fear, brutal racist intimidation—our present situation is nothing like what they faced.

On the other hand, they and movements before and after them were not facing the near-certainty of a worldwide, mass die-off of much of humankind and the devastation of the world's ecological systems if they were unsuccessful.

More than once over the last several years I have talked with people who understand the deep hole humankind has dug for itself and who have difficulty seeing a way that we will ever get out. Intuitively, they see little hope that we can avoid climate catastrophe. They ask me why I'm doing what I'm doing given that likelihood.

What I say to them is, OK, let's assume the worst. Let's accept that it is likely that we will not be able to overcome the power of the fossil fuel interests and those allied with them and enact a clean energy revolution in enough time. Let's accept that throughout this century billions of people will die and the world's population is reduced to several hundred million people. What then? What does that mean for those of us alive today who want to do the right thing with our lives?

First of all, what we do today can increase the odds that those who come after us will be both greater in numbers and in a better situation than would be the case if we just give up or half-step it. The stronger, the bolder and the qualitatively better a climate movement we build, the sooner we can expect the U.S. government and other governments to get serious about the changes urgently needed, and the greater the chances that future generations will be able to rebuild human society on a firmer and sounder foundation.

Secondly, perhaps we will find an inner peace that will give us the strength we need if we accept, if we just accept, that just as each of us individuals is going to someday die, life on earth as we have known it—a world dominated by injustice, war and exploitation, in the main, for millennia—may also have to die in order for a qualitatively higher form of civilization to have a chance of evolving.

This is a strange thing to write. It can be interpreted as my saying that humankind deserves what is coming down the pike, even the most catastrophic version of it. And given that it will be overwhelmingly the poor people of the world, those who have done the least to cause global heating, who will suffer and die first and the most, this seems very insensitive.

And yet I know from my own personal experience, the experience of someone who has fought as best as I've been able for over 40 years against injustice, war and exploitation and who intends to do so until I die, that what I am saying is true. I am in no way suggesting that people can or

should find “inner peace” by withdrawing from the struggle for change, concentrating solely on qualitative personal change (as important as that is), accepting our human and societal limitations and the likelihood of the Great Catastrophe. But if a person engages in the movement for climate and social justice, giving it their best, taking care of themselves along the way, one’s spiritual and emotional life will improve.

We feel better, we are better, if we connect with and follow our conscience no matter what the odds.

Finally, we just don’t know what the future may hold as far as potential new discoveries that could be game-changers. As one example of a number of “geoengineering” ideas that are being seriously investigated, research has been underway for years to come up with a way to take carbon dioxide out of the air. It can be done, changing it into solid form of a consistency similar to sea shells. But there are two huge problems associated with this process. One is the problem of what you do with the mountains of “solid CO₂” that are the result. The other is the tremendous cost of this process if done on the scale necessary. However, these problems might be overcome if the political will for strong action grows among the U.S. population and among the peoples of the world as the crisis unfolds and more and more catastrophic weather events take place.

And there could be other technological breakthroughs, other game-changers, that as of now we have no knowledge of.

In “Our Final Century,” a book by Martin Rees, former President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, he refers to a 1937 study by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences aimed at predicting coming breakthroughs. “It came up with some wise assessments about agriculture, about synthetic gasoline and synthetic rubber. But what is remarkable is the things it missed. No nuclear energy, no antibiotics (though this was eight years after Alexander Fleming had discovered penicillin), no jet aircraft, no rocketry nor any use of space, no computers; certainly no transistors. The committee overlooked the technologies that actually dominated the second half of the twentieth century. Still less could they predict the social and political transformations that occurred during that time.” (9)

Some words of hope there, for sure.

Finding Strength in Nature

As mentioned above, and as I have certainly experienced too many times to count, regular personal interaction with the non-concrete, non-technological world of nature is critical to our ability to be the kind of people the world needs.

Why is this so? Why does a walk in the woods, or time by the ocean, a lake or a river, or a mountain hike, a desert adventure or an afternoon in a nearby park—why do these experiences usually “get our heads together,” restore our soul, give us the strength to keep grappling with life’s daily challenges?

It is clearly something that runs deep in our genetic makeup. And, indeed, for most people alive today in the world, even those who were born and have grown up primarily in an urban environment, you don't have to go back too far to find grandparents or great-grandparents, if not a father or mother, who grew up in the country or on a farm. In the United States less than 100 years ago half of the population still lived in the country and for the world as a whole that is the reality today. Given that homo sapiens as a species has existed for upwards of 200,000 years, this puts our rapid transformation into city-dwellers as a result of the industrial revolution into a revealing context.

Bill McKibben, in *The End of Nature*, addresses this question. He refers to the natural world displaying a “lovely order, an order comforting in its intricacy. And the most appealing part of this harmony, perhaps, is its permanence—the sense that we are part of something with roots stretching back nearly forever, and branches reaching forward just as far. . . The earth and all its processes—the sun growing plants, flesh feeding on these plants, flesh decaying to nourish more plants, to name just one cycle—give us some sense of a more enduring role.” (10)

My wife and I just spent two weeks in the mountains of West Virginia, renting a cabin at the end of a road seven miles back from the main highway. We arrived in the midst of a dry spell, and the stream which ran next to the cabin filled only about ¼ of the stream bed. As a result I was able to look for interesting rocks along the dried-up portion of it, and I found one, an oval-sized, reddish-brown rock about a foot long and several inches deep. On both sides were circles, a lot of them, about 50 in total, scattered around the rock, some going a half-inch or so into it. My wife and I were stumped trying to figure out what could have made those circles, so one day we went to a National Forest Ranger office 30 miles away to see if they could help.

Here's what the staff geologist told us: the rock was about 300 million years old, from the Devonian period. The circles used to be, 300 million years ago, the stems of plants.

Amazing stuff to ponder.

It's like looking at the sky on a clear night when you are out of the city, away from bright lights, and you can see the stars in all their fullness. To know that these represent the billions of galaxies within the universe and that many galaxies have billions of stars is almost incomprehensible. It can only make us more humble, more aware that we as human beings on the earth are but one part of a much, much bigger picture about which we still know very little.

Albert Einstein wrote about a sense of awe and wonder about the natural world that he considered to be at the heart of what makes us who we are: “the most beautiful experience we can have is that of the ‘mysterious.’ It constitutes the fundamental emotion that lies at the origin of true art and science. Anyone who does not know this and is no longer capable of asking questions, anyone **who is incapable of wonder**, is as if dead, with eyes covered by a blindfold. An understanding of the existence of something that we cannot penetrate and our primitive perceptions of the most profound reason and the most radiant beauty—**this understanding and this emotion are what constitute true religious sentiment.**” (11)

Many people who are religious would say that this sense of the unknown, the mysterious, is really a path to belief in God. I am not necessarily saying that, even though I personally believe in what I prefer to call a Great Spirit. What I am saying is that I find it very difficult to see how individual human beings will find the inner peace, the strength to struggle day to day and for years to come, if they do not take time to connect with the natural world wherever they are. And it can be found in urban settings too, in parks, in open green spaces, along rivers. Indeed, one of our responsibilities as citizens of the world is to increase the amount of green space available to city-dwellers to help all of us make the connections to nature that are so essential to emotional and spiritual health.

There is no doubt in my mind that the conscious development of a deeper connection to nature is an essential component of what the human race needs so that we will come to appreciate that we are a part of nature, not lords over it, and that our powers are limited and finite. This appreciation, this consciousness, is absolutely essential if we are to have a chance of avoiding the Great Catastrophe.

Also essential is the deliberate work of building community, wherever we are.

Connection to Others

Spiritual leaders down through recorded time have taught that all human beings, all life forms, are connected to one another. And there is a material basis for this understanding.

Teilhard de Chardin was a person who believed that all of not just human history but earth history is grounded in love. To Chardin, love was a material force that can be detected scientifically. Chardin was a Catholic priest, but he was also a noted paleontologist who spent many years traveling the world to investigate the origins and development of life on earth. In his widely-acclaimed book, *The Phenomenon of Man*, he traces the evolution of the earth to the point at which life begins with the appearance of the cell. The cell multiplies; cells associate with each other; the various branches of life come into being, eventually leading to the emergence of the species *Homo Sapiens* 200,000 years ago.

“In a matter of ten or twenty thousand years man divided up the earth and struck his roots in it. . . Agriculture and stock-breeding, the husbandman and the herdsman, replaced mere gathering and hunting. From that fundamental change all the rest followed. . . communal and juridical structures. . . property, morals and marriage, every possible social form.” (12)

As we evolve to the modern world, the emergence of radio communication links humanity to one another simultaneously across the world. Unification of the world emerges as an objective to be desired and worked for. “But why should there be unification in the world and what purpose does it serve,” Chardin asks. (13)

He answers his question: “Really, I can see no coherent, and therefore scientific, way of grouping this immense succession of facts but as a gigantic psycho-biological operation, a sort of

mega-synthesis, the ‘super-arrangement’ to which all the thinking elements of the earth find themselves today individually and collectively subject.” (14)

He goes on: “Love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfill them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in themselves. . . Mankind, the spirit of the earth, the synthesis of individuals and peoples, the paradoxical conciliation of the element with the whole, and of unity with multitude—all these are called Utopian and yet they are biologically necessary. And for them to be incarnated in the world all we may need is to imagine our power of loving developing until it embraces the total of men and of the earth.

“It may be said that this is the precise point at which we are invoking the impossible. . . To that I would answer that if. . . a universal love is impossible, how can we account for that irresistible instinct in our hearts which leads us towards unity whenever and in whatever direction our passions are stirred? A sense of the universe, a sense of the **all**, the nostalgia which seizes us when confronted by nature, beauty, music—these seem to be an expectation and awareness of a Great Presence. . . A universal love is not only psychologically possible; it is the only complete and final way in which we are able to love.” (15)

We can see people acting upon this need for human connection to others everywhere: membership in social clubs, churches, mosques and temples, amateur sports leagues, hiking clubs, bird watcher societies, neighborhood gangs, motorcycle gangs, boy and girl scouts, and on and on. You can see it with the spectacular growth in social websites like Facebook and My Space.

We are social beings. When we are cut off from others for a long time, serious emotional and psychological trauma usually takes place.

I experienced this as a young adult when I was in prison during the Vietnam war. I was there for 11 months because of my participation in disruptive, nonviolent actions against the Selective Service draft system which was feeding young men my age into the U.S. Army. A number of times during those 11 months I was in a single cell, including time spent in solitary confinement for a hunger strike. I remember clearly how hard those times were. I had to consciously work at keeping my spirits up, pacing back and forth in different rhythms to help the time pass, trying to focus my thinking on something important to me, listening for the sound of the person bringing me food that I would then eat, or not when I was on the hunger strike, and waiting for him to return to pick up the tray and dishes. I am certain that if I had stayed in that isolated state for a much longer period than I did that I would have needed some help afterwards to recover.

There is a special kind of connection, a deliberate community-building connection, that is absolutely necessary if we are to have consistent personal strength and if we are to build a massive popular movement that can win. It is not enough that we are intellectually convincing with our articulation of the facts which show that we need a clean energy revolution and a fundamental transformation of our society. We need to show by example, by the way our climate and progressive movement functions, that we have grown beyond the competitive,

individualistic, power-seeking ways of social interaction that are the reality for much of the dominant capitalist cultural patterns.

We must learn from the best of the women's movement and reject the hierarchical and self-centered styles of leadership that far too many men and some, mainly white middle- and upper-class, women often display. We need to learn how to work in a cooperative way, a listening way, a way which is distinctly different than the aggressive, me-first corporate culture. When one of us has a serious personal problem, an injury, an illness, a death in the family or emotional distress, others must be there to provide support and assistance. We must be known not just for our good ideas about how to avoid climate catastrophe and our work on issues of importance to people but by the way we interact with each other and with other people on personal levels.

Rosa Luxemburg, a Polish woman who was one the leading European socialists in the late 1800's and the first two decades of the 20th century, had some appropriate words to say along these lines:

“Unrelenting revolutionary activity, coupled with a boundless humanity—that alone is the real life-giving force of socialism. A world must be overturned, but every tear that has flowed and might have been wiped away is an indictment, and a man hurrying to perform a great deed who steps on even a worm out of unfeeling carelessness commits a crime.” (16)

If only many more socialists, especially socialist leaders, of the 20th century had taken these words to heart, we would certainly be living in a much more hopeful world!

Learning from the weaknesses and errors of past efforts at social change, how do we do this? What are some of time-proven techniques, methods and activities that make the connections and build community?

Building Consciousness and Community

George Friday, a woman of African American and Native American ancestry, has written about this from the perspective of how white people can build relationships of integrity with people of color, an absolutely essential need if we are to build a better world:

“In developing consciousness, white folks want to have a one-day workshop or a weekend thing and think it's finished, or two hours of conversation and think they're cool now on oppression issues or race issues. That's just arrogant. It's crazy and arrogant!

“Consciousness can be developed and raised in an effective way in an hour and a half or two hours or a weekend, but **practices** that people have to employ/use on a regular basis to maintain that consciousness and act accordingly within the context of relationships with people, **that's the ongoing work.**

“It starts by developing consciousness. It continues by practicing that consciousness in a daily way in context of relationships with people, and it results in being able to have effective decision making with shared leadership, and genuine working processes for building the kind of world we want.” (17)

In building organizations—something which absolutely and completely must be done, and they need to keep growing and new ones need to be built—it is essential that they be developed in a participatory and democratic way, a community-building way. As I outline in chapter four, there are a variety of internal processes within an organization that strengthen the members of the group, help develop their emotional/spiritual staying power and leadership skills.

There is great power in this kind of political process within an organization. It is “democracy for the 21st century.” It often disarms those whose style of operating is much more macho, racist, sexist or individualistic and can help to get such people on a path of personal change.

History has shown that movements for social change can have an impact on those working for the established powers-that-be. Former Christian-persecutor Saul of Taurus is but one of the most famous examples. A positive internal political process can only accelerate this process.

One example from my personal experience comes from a long, 42-day, water-only fast I was a part of in 1992. A group of 14 of us fasted to make a statement, as strongly as we could, that we needed to “go another way” in connection with the U.S. government’s celebration of the October 12th, 500 year anniversary of Christopher Columbus being discovered in the Caribbean in 1492. We were saying by our fast that after 500 years, it’s long past time to turn away from a history of environmental destruction, racism, colonialism and war.

One of the people fasting with me was a former FBI agent, Jack Ryan, a man who left the FBI after 23 years, a couple years short of the time he needed to get a pension. He did so because he had been personally changed as a result of carrying out his FBI assignment, which was to conduct surveillance on the peace movement during the Vietnam War. As he did so, he came to realize that the peace movement was doing the right thing and, over a period of years, his conscience gave him no choice but to switch sides.

Going beyond the building of our organizations and movement, there are ways to live hour-by-hour which are community-building, which break down emotional walls, which bring out the best in other human beings.

There is a famous poster, How to Build Community, which lists a number of ways that this can be done. Some are more obvious than others; some seem to me more significant, more impactful, than others. But taken together, they present a way of being, a way of living, that unquestionably will make each of our lives much more consistent with what we profess to believe. Here’s the list:

Turn off your TV—leave your house—know your neighbors—look up when you are walking—greet people—sit on your stoop—plant flowers—use your library—play together—buy from local merchants—share what you have—help a lost dog—take children to the park—garden together—support neighborhood schools—fix it even if you didn’t break it—have pot lucks—honor elders—pick up litter—read stories aloud—dance in the street—talk to the mail carrier—listen to the birds—put up a swing—help carry something heavy—barter for your goods—start a tradition—ask a question—hire young people for odd jobs—organize a block party—bake extra and share—ask for help when you need it—open your shades—sing together—share your skills—take back the night—turn up the music—turn down the music—listen before you react to anger—mediate a conflict—seek to understand—learn from new and uncomfortable angles—know that no one is silent though many are not heard—work to change this

Ultimately, however, as much as we practice community-building behavior that breaks down barriers between people, we have to remember that we need to take action and recruit growing numbers of people to do the same. There’s a whole arsenal of tactics that we can and must use, which I discuss more fully in chapter six. But there is one that I consider to be of unique importance for the climate movement, the tactic of fasting, the refusal of solid food for days or weeks.

Why do I believe this, and what have been my experiences?

FOOTNOTES

- 1) Habakkuk 1, 1-2 and chapter 2, 1-4
- 2) Matthew 25, 41-46
- 3) Quoted in Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*, p. 125
- 4) Albert Camus, *The Plague*, p. 108
- 5) *Ibid*, p. 127
- 6) *Ibid*, p. 252
- 7) *Ibid*, p. 133
- 8) *Ibid*, p. 308
- 9) Martin Rees, *Our Final Century*, p. 13
- 10) Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*, p. 62
- 11) Quoted in Sergio Arce, *The Church and Socialism*, p. 109
- 12) Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, pps. 203-204
- 13) *Ibid*, p. 243
- 14) *Ibid*, pps. 243-244
- 15) *Ibid*, pps. 265-267
- 16) Quoted in Paul Frolich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, p. 189
- 17) George Friday, found on www.ippn.org