

## Chapter Three

### Fasting for Our Future

Fasting is a simple yet profound way of combining the spiritual and the political. Mahatma Gandhi, the most famous nonviolent revolutionary of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, called it “the sincerest form of prayer.” It communicates seriousness and urgency without violence, thereby making it easier for those who hear about a fast to think about the issues of the fast; it focuses peoples’ attention.

Cesar Chavez, leader of the farmworkers’ movement, explained one of his fasts in these words: “This fast is first and foremost personal. It is something that I feel compelled to do. It is directed at myself. It is a fast for the purification of my own body, mind and soul. The fast is also the heartfelt prayer for purification and strengthening for all of us, for myself, and for all those who work beside me in the farmworkers’ movement. It is a fervent prayer that together we will confront and resist, with all our strength, the scourge of poisons that threatens our people, our land and our food.”

Fasting is a way of connecting, of remembering, of feeling the pain of those who “fast” involuntarily. In the case of climate fasts, it is a way to remember that a seriously warmer world will lead to serious disruption of agriculture, more widespread famines and rampant hunger. Pax Christi leader Marie Dennis, who fasted for 42 days on water only in 1992, spoke in a statement of those who “cannot choose to stop when it gets overwhelming; rather, theirs is the daily, grinding hunger of simply being too poor to find enough food; it is a hunger that is ever-present and gnawing, that consumes their children slowly or quickly; it is a hunger for a more than minimal existence—for education and health care and housing.”

Fasting brings you face to face with yourself and what is really important to you, what you believe and how deeply you believe it. You cannot help but think about the **why** of your not eating, **what** it is that is most important to you and **how** you can be more consistent so that your beliefs and your actions are one on a daily basis. It is a way to stay centered and focused and clearer, which in turn makes the cause about which one is fasting more understandable and of greater significance to others.

Fasting and hunger strikes have become increasingly popular within peace/justice/clean energy activist circles over the last 15-20 years. Students, health care organizers, workers, the President of Bolivia, peace and hunger activists, Indigenous people and others have all undertaken many-days-long fasts as part of their organizing efforts.

I consider fasting to be particularly appropriate for the clean energy/climate justice movement. Voluntarily going hungry is a way to draw attention to the looming threat of much more extensive mass hunger and famine that will undoubtedly occur worldwide if we pass the climate tipping points and global heating takes on a runaway character.

And on my 107-day climate emergency fast in the fall of 2007 I saw the potential political impact that it can have. That fast helped to secure passage of a federal energy bill that was a mixed bag but which, in general, represented the beginnings of a turn away from the seriously problematic energy policy of past decades.

Below is an edited version of the blog entries I made at [www.climateemergency.org](http://www.climateemergency.org) during this long fast.

### ***The 2007 Climate Emergency Fast***

**August 27, 2007** : As I prepare myself mentally and spiritually for the long fast I will be undertaking on September 4<sup>th</sup> I find myself thinking back to the first time I consciously and deliberately went without food because of an issue I felt strongly about.

It was in the summer of 1971. I was being held at Danbury federal prison, serving what turned out to be 11 months behind bars for my anti-Vietnam war, draft resistance activism as a member of the “Catholic Left,” or what J. Edgar Hoover called, in the words of Time magazine, a “terrorist conspiracy involving radical Catholic priests and nuns.”

Two of the leaders of that “terrorist conspiracy,” Fathers Philip and Daniel Berrigan, were in prison with me, and they had just heard from the Federal Bureau of Prisons parole board that they had been denied parole and likely would have to serve out their entire six year sentence. They had received this sentence after burning pieces of paper, Selective Service draft files taken from a Catonsville, Md. draft board, with homemade napalm just outside that draft board in the spring of 1968. They waited for the police to arrive, were arrested, tried and sentenced.

Phil was concerned about whether his brother would survive 3 ½ more years in prison. He also clearly saw the potential for a hunger strike, a fast, to contribute to the anti-war cause. And so, under his leadership, a group of eleven of us stopped eating on August 6<sup>th</sup>, the 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima. There were three basic demands: a fair and reasonable review of the Berrigans’ parole turndown; various reforms in the way the parole board dealt with all prisoners; and a shutting down of the “tiger cage” prison on Con Son Island in what was then South Vietnam. Con Son Island prison was to Vietnam as Abu Ghraib prison was to Iraq.

Five of the 11 of us began the Danbury hunger strike by passing out leaflets on August 6<sup>th</sup> announcing it, and calling for other prisoners to engage in a work stoppage and hunger strike starting on August 9. We had surreptitiously printed up the leaflets on a mimeograph machine in the prison library. Within minutes we were arrested by the prison guards and put into solitary confinement, “the hole.”

When the remaining six of us passed out leaflets the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>, almost the entire prisoner population stayed away from work for about a half an hour. Only 100 out of 800 prisoners ate lunch, and 40 were taken to the hole for refusing to go to work when the prison administration mobilized and threatened serious punishment for any who didn’t do so.

Two days later the 11 of us were whisked away from Danbury out to the federal prison in Springfield, Mo., one of the institutions where they send trouble makers. For 34 days, confined together apart from the other prisoners in one wing of the prison, we drank only water, juice and, mistakenly, milk before finally ending this fast. And it had results. There were, for a time, some changes in the way the parole board functioned, and Phil and Dan were released from prison about 16 months after our hunger strike ended.

I've fasted many times since. There have been two major ones. In the year following the Danbury action I was part of a 40-day, water-only fast calling for an end to the Vietnam War. And 15 years ago, at the age of 42, I participated in a 42-day, water-only fast organized by Brian Willson, Karen Fogliatti and Scott Rutherford at the time of the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus arriving in the Americas. The purpose of that fast was to oppose the planned, official government celebrations of Columbus, to make a statement about the depth of the changes needed in this country and world to turn away from the many negative things that Columbus represented which were, and are, still very much at work.

Humankind's relationship to our Mother Earth, the environment, is high up on the list of those negative things. And time is running out, without a doubt. The model of economic development built upon, dependent upon, coal, oil and natural gas, the carbon-emitting, greenhouse gases that trap the sun's heat, is a model of economic development that is literally destroying our ecosystem. I am convinced, based on study, observation and the opinions of independent scientists who know much more than I do, that the changes in our climate we are seeing all over the world are not temporary and will only get worse, potentially catastrophically worse, unless and until we take dramatic steps to enact a deep and wide, justice-based, clean energy revolution.

And I don't think we can wait for our federal government to pass strong legislation toward this end until 2009.

Given the reality of who's in the White House, it may be that we can't get much of what is needed before then, but those of us who appreciate the urgency of the climate crisis cannot accept that.

I remember a discussion we had during the 40-day fast against the Vietnam War in 1972 about the Presidential elections. At the time Richard Nixon and George McGovern were campaigning for the Presidency. Dave Dellinger, one of the fasters, said that he wasn't going to get involved with supporting McGovern, the peace candidate. Explaining himself further, he said that he had learned that whether a Democrat or a Republican is elected, what is most important is what happens independent of the government and the two dominant parties, the strength of movements for justice or people's rights. And half a year later, surprisingly, following Nixon's re-election and the shooting down of many planes by the Vietnamese during a Christmas U.S. bombing campaign, the Nixon administration negotiated a withdrawal agreement.

Does this mean that it doesn't make any difference who is in the White House come Jan. 20, 2009? No, I don't believe that. There are differences between the two major parties, and among

the candidates for President in each party, and certainly with the Green Party and other “minor” parties. But I’ve come to appreciate what I think Dave was getting at. I think what he meant was that if the bulk of the movement for peace and justice, for a clean energy revolution, gets caught up primarily in direct work supporting Democrats (or Republicans), and we don’t keep organizing independent of and outside of that corrupted political system, we will be weakened. Our movements will be less vital, less out there focusing on the issues, less about movement building, less about forcing candidates and elected officials to respond to and be accountable to us.

I don’t feel weak as I think about going for weeks without food again, although I know I’ll be physically weaker as it goes on. I’m feeling very strong, very gratified by the response to the call for this Climate Emergency Fast. It looks like there will be close to 1,000 people fasting for at least one day, possibly more, and close to 100 fasting for more than one day. As of today there are 45 states and eight countries where people will be taking part in this action, and those numbers will grow in the nine days left before September 4th. Even before it has begun, there is interest from several non-movement press outlets, a hopeful sign.

I think of the words of an Ojibway prayer I carry around in my wallet:

“Grandfather, look at our brokenness. We know that in all creation only the human family has strayed from the Sacred Way. We know that we are the ones who are divided, and we are the ones who must come back together to walk the Sacred Way. Grandfather, Sacred One, teach us love, compassion and honor, that we may heal the earth and heal each other.” Amen.

**Day Three:** As I write it has been about three full days that I’ve been on my water-only fast.

While I’m definitely weaker physically, my spirit is strong, very much buoyed up by the successful launch of this action on Tuesday the 4th and the many wonderful words of thanks and support I’ve been getting via email and in person.

Although it’s not easy to subsist on water, there are interesting things that have been happening with me physically and otherwise.

-As my sense of taste atrophies from non-use, I find myself more attuned to the other senses, much more self-conscious about how I’m feeling and how I’m taking in the world around me.

-A couple of times after I did some walking up a hill and climbed some steps, I was a little light-headed, reinforcing what I knew before I began, that I have to be very deliberate when I get up from my desk and move around. I won’t be riding my bike for the duration of this fast.

-This morning I was surprised to find myself with a much shorter emotional fuse than usual when something I was trying to get done didn’t go well. I need to be very conscious of that, especially in my relations with other people.

-I also had an interesting interaction this morning with a tiny fly that landed on my desk and stayed for a while. Ordinarily I would have swatted it and not thought anything more about it. This morning I took a couple of minutes to study this tiny creature, even talking to it, before it up and flew away. It really was very un-usual.

So although I am missing food, there's something about a fast which leads to valuable experiences and perspectives.

**Day 7:** As I write this I'm beginning the 7th day of fasting.

It's not easy to subsist on water, a few vitamins and salt. And I knew it wouldn't be. But I have no second thoughts about the rightness of this action. Congress has yet to pass anything remotely approaching what the science tells us is needed. Too many groups that get it on the climate crisis go about their work as if stuck in muddy ruts, unwilling or unable to really step it up as the crisis deepens. And I continue to be amazed and disturbed that too many people in the USA who see themselves as concerned about the human family, justice and peace say and do little or nothing on this huge, overarching issue.

A newspaper story I saw in The Guardian in England provided some emotional fuel to keep me going. It reported that the Greenland ice sheet is melting so quickly that "it is triggering earthquakes as pieces of ice several cubic kilometres in size break off. . . The glacier at Ilulissat, which supposedly spawned the iceberg that sank the Titanic, is now flowing three times faster into the sea than it was 10 years ago."

At the press conference on Capitol Hill last Tuesday I talked about the "grassroots political uprising" that is needed to provide the backbone implant too many legislators need to counteract the power of the coal, oil, automobile and other deep pockets corporations. I continue to work, to hope and pray, every day, every hour, every second (Gandhi: "fasting is the sincerest form of prayer") that this fast is helping to generate that badly-needed upwelling.

Many thousands participated this past week in the Climate Emergency Fast. Those thousands and many, many more need to keep talking, reaching out, organizing, spreading the word that the time is now to act, again and again and again.

**Day 9:** It's nine days on. I don't have a scale where I am but I would expect I've lost about 15 pounds. Maybe I should publicize a new diet: The Not Eating Diet.

Yesterday was the hardest day so far. I spent the whole day away from my office. I was at a national conference of climate activists from around the country for most of that time, listening intently and participating. But what really affected me was when I had to walk a mile or two in the heat and humidity in the middle of the afternoon. By the end of the afternoon I felt very, very tired and had to lie down for an hour to try to regain some strength before going to an evening meeting.

This morning, after a full night's sleep, I was OK, and working all day in my office has been just fine. I have plenty of energy for office work.

I can't end this blog entry without expressing my gratitude and thanks to Leonard Peltier.

Leonard Peltier is 63 years old today. He is a Native American activist who has been unjustly imprisoned for over 30 years. Huge numbers of people and groups around the world have called for his release. But he continues to sit in Lewisburg Federal Prison in Pennsylvania.

I've been on a number of 12 day fasts since 1992 calling for Peltier's release. These fasts have helped to prepare me for this one. But it is Peltier's writings and his commitment to standing up against injustice no matter what the personal cost that has been most inspiring. His book, "Prison Writings: My Life is a Sun Dance," is especially informative and moving.

So on this ninth day, I remember Leonard Peltier and all those millions of Indigenous people who have suffered and died over the centuries since Columbus. I particularly remember those today who are dealing with polluting coal plants, dangerous uranium mining, the siting of toxic wastes and other manifestations of a U.S. government that puts corporate interests above the interests of people, particularly people of color.

Native American people have much to teach the rest of us about respect for the earth and living in harmony with nature. These are absolutely essential teachings today.

**Day 14:** It's now been two weeks without food, only on water. I'm glad I'm at this milestone.

As far as I know, there are four other people still fasting, perhaps one or two more, on either water-only or liquids.

It'd be nice if more people were fasting, but at the same time it honestly wouldn't make any difference. I've become very clear as each day has gone by that this is a very existential thing for me. On the deepest personal level I know that this is right for me to be doing. I believe that now, right now, is the time when I need to do all that I can to contribute to the strengthening of the climate movement and the galvanizing of the broadest and most determined pressure on Congress.

The Democratic leadership in both houses has said they want to have global warming legislation passed this fall. This fast both supports that objective and says loudly that just any legislation isn't enough. It has to be strong, up to the challenge of the deepening climate crisis we are in.

Physically I'm doing OK. My mouth tends to be dry no matter how much I drink water and my stomach certainly feels different, empty but not in a way that I feel hungry. I have to be careful with my body movements or I get light-headed, and I'm definitely weaker physically. But my mind is sharp, in many ways sharper, it seems, more focused. There's something about not

having the distraction of all those digestive processes at work that, up to now, seems to help the mind and definitely the soul.

So I'll soldier on. I plan to continue on water for two more weeks and then assess the situation, what's happening in Congress, how I'm feeling, what kind of reaction at the grassroots this fast is generating, what kind of press coverage there is. I'll either continue at that point on water or go onto liquids—fruit and veggie juices, tea and broths. I do not expect to eat for many more weeks or months, unless the U.S. Congress gets so much pressure from the American people that it is forced to act.

That is my prayer. Every hour, every minute, every second. That is my prayer.

**22 Days:** I remember the last long fast I was on. I was 42 at the time. Three people, Karen Fogliatti, Scott Rutherford and Brian Willson, the Vietnam War veteran who lost his legs to a munitions train that wouldn't stop when he and others were blocking it from taking weapons to the Contras in Nicaragua, had come up with the crazy idea in 1992 of a 42 day fast from September 1 to October 12th. This was in connection with the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus landing in the Americas.

On that fast, about four weeks into it, I lost a lot of the psychic and other energy that I had pretty much had up to that point in time. I remember it became harder to walk and I had to sleep more and take naps.

That's what has happened to me on this fast over the last few days, a little less than three weeks on. I guess that's what happens when you're 15 years older.

I've decided to switch from a water-only fast to a juices and broth fast a few days early, this Friday evening. I was going to do it on Monday but there is an anti-war demonstration on Saturday that I want to leaflet at, and I can tell it's going to be really hard to do that without some nourishment, thus this change.

That liquid fast will go on for many weeks; I have no idea how long.

I take walks most every afternoon. There's a small park a few blocks away from the CCAN office where I'm living and working in Takoma Park. I love seeing the flowers and plants along the way and the little children playing in the park. There's also a black squirrel; last week I saw a white squirrel a few blocks away. There must be a genetic malfunction among the squirrels in Takoma Park.

I was speaking with a co-worker today who was asking me how I'm doing. I found myself telling him that it feels like I have about 20% of the physical strength that I usually have. I really have to watch it when I'm going out somewhere or picking something up. I keep both of those to a minimum.

I had a long interview yesterday with a reporter from the progressive news/commentary website, Truthout.org. They're doing a story about this fast. I also was called by a reporter from a publication, Politico, that I'm told is read by a lot of powerful people in D.C., including members of Congress. So little by little the word keeps getting out.

I remain convinced that this is the right thing to do at the right time. I am looking forward, however, to that glass of apple juice 72 hours from now.

**Day 26:** It's now the 26th day without food, but there's a big difference today. Last evening I added juice and broths to my menu. I notice the physical difference already.

I had apple and mango juice and miso broth. They were great.

Much more quickly than I expected, my digestive process started up in full force. I'm now experiencing what, for 25 days, I had not, like stomach sensations and bowel movements. And I've also got more energy, very noticeably. As I got up from bed this morning I didn't have the need to do so slowly and warily, watching for the dizziness and weakness that I've experienced many of the times I move from lying down to standing up. For that I am thankful.

I'll be exploring how I can have the most nutritious and balanced juice and broth diet. I do intend to keep this fast going for many more weeks. I won't be using my chewing muscles for a long time, because there's still nothing of substance that's been passed by Congress.

The good news of the last few days is what happened at the sham conference of the major carbon emitting countries of the world convened by the Bush administration. This was a conference pulled together just two days after an important United Nations meeting to try to push forward international negotiations for a stronger Kyoto-like treaty. Anybody who wasn't influenced by Bush administration propaganda knew the purpose of this Bush conference at the State Department was to undercut and obstruct those U.N.-based negotiations.

On Sept. 27th, the first day of the conference, 50 of us, myself included, were arrested after blockading the main entrance to the State Department where it was being held, loudly and continuously chanting for over two hours. We spent about five hours in jail before being released, and there was a lot of media coverage of what we did.

Then yesterday, on the 28th, eight or nine climate and enviro groups joined together for an excellent rally of 250-300 over lunch hour in a State Dept. park. There were some great speakers and music and, again, a lot of media in attendance.

So there are good signs that our climate movement is coming together and rising up in the ways needed.

**37 Days:** It's been more than a week since I've written here. It kind-of feels like this fast is

becoming almost a way of life, not a new thing anymore, a marathon and not a sprint, to use a cliché.

Drinking fruit and vegetable juices and miso broth is the totality of my culinary experiences these days. In some ways I'm very accepting of this limited diet and appreciative of both the tastes of these liquids and of the fact that they give me energy I did not have while on water-only.

But when I leave my office to go off on the local Metro subway line to a meeting or work which involves some walking, I do notice a difference. Just this morning I had to go somewhere and ended up walking perhaps a mile altogether over the course of an hour, and I definitely felt it on the way back to my office. Getting a bottle of juice at a store did help.

I had my first-ever experience talking to 150 or so students at the University of Wisconsin via the internet this afternoon. A professor teaching an environmental-related class who heard about my fast proposed this and we set it up. Although I wasn't able to see the students, I was glad to be able to answer their questions for 20 or so minutes.

One question came from a junior or senior asking for my advice for those about to graduate who will go out into the world looking for a job (and probably to pay off college debts); what did I have to say about their making a living as it relates to changing a world in need of major change?

The main thing I said was, "follow your heart. . . Don't get caught up in pursuit of material goods and power. . . Live in a way that builds community with others and for a better future."

I've learned this in my 58 years (58 as of yesterday, October 9, 2007). It's very internalized. I keep trying to stay true to this objective myself. I work to be a better person so I can do so. And this fast is helping.

I may be lacking in food, but the expressions of concern and the positive things people have said and keep saying to me over the course of this action are very nourishing spiritually.

**44 Days:** I had a good discussion yesterday with my co-workers at the CCAN office about this fast and the future. I wanted their honest input about what they have heard from other people about it and if I should continue.

To open the discussion I explained that I feel that, physically, it seems like I am capable of continuing this liquid fast with juices and broths for some period of time. It's not that I don't long to eat, and it's not that I don't feel weaker than normal, for sure, but my weight seems to have stabilized (at 30-33 pounds below normal) and so far I have enough energy to do the basic office work that is my usual—though not always—daily routine.

People felt that the fast continues to be of value, that many of those who hear about it react

positively. But that wasn't uniform. One person said that her mother, who is supportive of her work on the climate issue, thinks that I'm "crazy," her mother's word.

I came out of this discussion pretty much decided that I will be continuing to fast at least until this Congress adjourns, or until, by some miracle, they pass strong climate legislation before then. As of now the word from Nancy Pelosi's office is that adjournment could happen anytime between mid-November and sometime in the first half of December. If they adjourn without passing anything, I may continue fasting or I may temporarily come off it until they re-adjourn in January.

I think back to six or so months ago when I was beginning to think and talk about this fast. I remember how I felt back then, how much I believed that this action was the right one at the right time. Nothing since then has changed my mind; just the opposite. I am very much at peace with what I am putting my body through. The occasional discomfort, weakness and desire to eat is like nothing compared to what the world is facing if we don't move now. The fierce urgency of now—it's deeply internalized on this 44th day.

**Day 50:** It's day 50, 25 days on water-only, followed by 25 days on fruit and veggie juices and miso broth, with vitamin and protein supplements.

I got a big test yesterday of how I'm doing on this liquids-only regimen. I was up early in the morning and down to the U.S. Capitol by 6:30 a.m. to get prepared for our No War, No Warming action. I was intensely involved in the for-sure "action" phase of the event from about 7:45 to 9:30, at which point I was arrested and taken off to jail with almost 70 other sisters and brothers. We did an effective nonviolent civil disobedience action, sitting-in at entrances to Congressional office buildings and in the middle of busy streets. We spent about six-seven hours in a Capitol Police facility, a garage, sitting all together on hard metal chairs while processing went on. Almost all of us were released by late afternoon.

Through it all my body held up OK. I was somewhat surprised, given that I had almost no nourishment and just a small amount of water until I got out of jail and was able to get some juice.

But my spirit was on fire yesterday. Such a great day! After months of planning we pulled off something the likes of which I've never been a part of. From 8 a.m. until 9:30 or 10, with action after action, we accomplished our objectives, which were to disrupt business as usual on Capitol Hill and send a message out nationally (and internationally) via the mass media that people are outraged that the U.S. Congress, almost one year after a (supposedly) new one was elected, has done nothing to end the war, pass strong global warming legislation or address the myriad of justice and survival issues facing the country that are worsening because of the war and the climate crisis.

The time in the Capitol garage was memorable. For hours we talked with one another, we interacted with the dozens of cops watching over us, we sang song after song, we started

discussions about what do we do next, and over time our righteous and joyous, if tired, spirit was transforming the faces, body language and actions of some of the police. We even succeeded by the end of the afternoon in forming ourselves into a circle, joining the segregated female and male sides of the line-up of chairs, as the stern but apparently good-hearted police woman in charge first told us to move back but then good-naturedly relented.

And talk about inter-generational! A majority of those arrested were young people under 25, maybe under 22, while the grey head generation was respectably represented with other ages in between.

It was a joy to be part of this action, especially with the young people. In the words of Ella Baker, “Young people come first, they have the courage where we fail, and if we can just shed some light while they carry us through the gale, we who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.”

**Day 60:** Two months without food, and over the last week I’ve developed some digestive discomfort. When I saw my doctor on Tuesday she prescribed some medicine for it. I hope that helps; it hasn’t yet. It’s not pain, just discomfort, and it seems to flare up when I drink fruit juice. Veggie juice and miso broth don’t have much of an impact. The problem is that I need the fruit juice for the calories. Hopefully the medicine will kick in soon.

Tonight I give the first speech at the first plenary session of the big, historic Power Shift conference organized by Energy Action. As of yesterday 5,400 students were registered!! Following two and a half days of panels, workshops and networking, they’ll descend on Capitol Hill on Monday to lobby for strong action on the climate crisis. Great stuff!

Here’s the speech I’ll be giving tonight.

Healing the Earth and One Another

I want to first thank and congratulate all of those tremendous young people who put this conference together and all of you who are here today for this truly, truly historic conference. Congratulations!!! Good job!!

Let’s stop global warming! Let’s make a clean energy revolution! Let’s step it up!

I’ve been stepping it up over the last two months. This is now my 60th day of a hunger strike, a climate emergency fast. It began on Sept. 4<sup>th</sup> when thousands of people from literally every state in the country fasted on that day that Congress returned from their summer recess. Scores continued for days and weeks, and I’m still going.

I’m fasting because there is no question but that global warming—the climate emergency—is not just here, it’s accelerating. What are the signs of that acceleration?

-a decline of sea ice by 20% between the end of summer 2005 and the end of summer 2007. At that rate by 2015, 35 or more years ahead of schedule, there will be parts of the summer when there is zero Arctic ice cover.

-the historic droughts in the southeast. There is a very real chance that towns and maybe the city of Atlanta will have to be evacuated this winter if major rains don't come soon.

-wildfires in the west. There are four times more wildfires in our national forests now compared to 25 years ago.

-for the first time in recorded history, two Category 5 hurricanes formed in the Caribbean this season within two weeks of each other.

-and the list can go on.

I'm fasting because I want to do all that I can right now to impact our federal government, Congress, to get them to give leadership on this critical issue.

That's why I've been arrested twice in the last month, three times in the last year, in acts of climate-related, nonviolent civil disobedience. Last October Paul Burman and I were arrested on a ledge 25 feet over the entrance to NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, after we had unfurled a banner which read, "Bush, Let NOAA Tell the Truth." Five weeks ago I was arrested at the State Department with 50 others protesting the Bush Administration's sham major carbon emitters conference. And 11 days ago I was arrested with 67 others while blocking traffic on Capitol Hill as part of No War, No Warming's first action.

We need to be relentless in bringing pressure on Congress right now, through 2008 and into 2009. The world, our climate, cannot stand any more delay. We want Congressional action to reduce ghg's by at least 30% by 2020, at least 90% by 2050, we want a moratorium on any new coal plants, and we want a green jobs program that creates millions of clean energy jobs, reducing poverty and building healthier communities. And if this Congress won't do it, let's elect a new one a year from now that will!

Finally, we need to be part of the growing international grassroots climate movement. I hope all of you will be part of the third International Day of Climate Action on Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>, taking place during the time of the UN climate conference in Bali, Indonesia.

I'd like to conclude with a prayer, an Ojibway prayer. It articulates what our movement has to be about on the deepest level. And we have to go deep if we are to be successful in this campaign to save our ecosystem from destruction.

Grandfather, look at our brokenness.  
We know that in all creation  
Only the human family

Has strayed from the Sacred Way.  
We know that we are the ones  
Who are divided,  
And we are the ones  
Who must come back together  
To walk the Sacred Way.

Grandfather,  
Sacred One,  
Teach us love, compassion, and honor,  
That we may heal the earth  
And heal each other.

Amen

**Day 64:** It was gratifying, humbling and very rewarding to be at the Power Shift 07 conference and lobby day over the past weekend. Many young people told me that they had been inspired by this fast. And in return, I was incredibly inspired by all of them and the whole event.

From November 2-4 upwards of 6,000 people, overwhelmingly young people, a wonderful multi-racial mix, from all over the country and with some international representation, met on the campus of the University of Maryland in College Park at the “first-ever national youth climate summit.” Over the course of two and a half days they heard lots of speakers and music at plenary sessions and panels and took part in close to 300 different workshops, on a range of topics.

This was a conference of thousands of **serious** young people. They were not there just to enjoy one another’s company, although that was definitely going on. They were there primarily to learn, to contribute, to strategize, to return home as smarter and more effective activists for a justice-based, peace-encouraging, world-changing clean energy revolution.

One of the political high points for me was when, during a major plenary session Saturday night, a “we want more” chant went up from some of those in the crowd of thousands during the speeches of Congresspersons Ed Markey and, following him, Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House. Markey is the chair of a special House committee on global warming set up by Pelosi earlier this year.

Markey and Pelosi were the two prominent national politicians who spoke at Power Shift. I was told that all of the Presidential candidates were invited and, tellingly, none came.

I was especially pleased by this interruption of Markey’s and then Pelosi’s speeches because I was disappointed by the initially loud and strong welcoming of Pelosi when she was introduced to the crowd. Other speakers Friday night and earlier Saturday night had received a warm response when they spoke against the war in Iraq during their time on the stage. So for Pelosi to

be received so positively given her misleadership in Congress on that issue was not what I had thought would happen. I was hoping that the response would be more mixed.

But then the “we want more” chant rose up out of the crowd. Here’s how it was described on the Power Shift website blog by one of those who led it, Juliana Williams:

“Tonight at Power Shift, as Congressman Ed Markey stood before us inciting us to support the proposed Energy Bill, a few of us began chanting ‘We want more, we want more.’ Congressman Markey stopped short to listen. We chanted for a full minute with a fervor, intensity and volume that left me light-headed, hoarse and thoroughly invigorated. As we chanted, for the first time, I felt an almost painful desire for the future we want to see. . .

“We don’t just want policy fixes, or simply a change in leadership in the White House, higher fuel economy standards, or 80% emissions reduction by the year 2050. This movement is about more than just politics. This movement is about more than just supporting clean energy sources. This movement is about recognizing the patterns of consumption, patterns of thought, patterns of behavior that have led to the social ills we see today. It’s about rediscovering the value of our resources, the value of our neighbors, the value of life on this planet.”

“We want more” came forward as a chant another time that I heard over the course of the weekend. It was on Monday the 5th on the west lawn of the U.S. Capitol during a mid-day rally of close to 2,000 young people in between morning and afternoon mass lobbying by the students in support of the strong legislative demands of the 1 Sky campaign ([www.1skycampaign.org](http://www.1skycampaign.org)).

The best lobby day story I heard about was what happened in the Hart Senate Office Building that morning. Spontaneously, hundreds of students started chanting “80 by 50” (80% reductions in carbon emissions by 2050) across an atrium in the center of that building around which Senate offices are lined up. I was with a group of about 25 that chanted anti-war slogans into that atrium space during the first week of the Iraq war in March of 2003, and we were loud, so I’m sure hundreds of students chanting on Monday were heard by everyone in the building.

Power Shift. As was talked about this past weekend, a phrase with a double meaning. A shift from carbon to clean energy, and a shift from old, corporate-dominated politics as usual to the new, democratic (small “d”), participatory politics experienced by thousands at the University of Maryland. We are on the way, we are moving, we have hope, we can see the future, and we are determined to do what needs to be done to get there. Young people are rising up and giving leadership and all of us of whatever age need to follow and work with them. Si, se puede! Si, se puede!

**Day 73:** As I was picking up my mail at the local post office yesterday morning I saw two friends of mine talking with one another. They looked at me like they were seeing a ghost and asked how I was doing. I knew they meant more than the usual “how ya’ doing,” and I said something like, I’m fine, doing OK, I’m getting nourishment from the liquids I’m taking, thanks much. They looked skeptical. I know they and other family and friends are worried about me as I

continue my climate emergency fast, now on the 73<sup>nd</sup> day without solid foods.

I am getting nourishment. For the first 25 days of water-only I didn't, but since then I've been consuming fruit and vegetable juices and miso broth. Over the past week I've added liquid vegetable soups. I also take vitamins and protein powder. And as of the beginning of November, my weight has stabilized at 40 pounds below what it was when I started, down to a little less than what I weighed in college 40 years ago.

I know there's a risk of long-term damage to my health, but I don't think it's a big one, and more importantly, I think it's worth it. I really do. I am completely certain that we don't have any time to waste when it comes to the climate crisis, and all of us need to step up what we're doing on this issue.

Developments in Congress over the last week have strengthened my resolve to continue this fast for, most likely, a few more weeks. There is a possibility that we can actually get an important victory before this Congress adjourns sometime in December. But it will only happen if there's a flood of calls, faxes, letters and emails to Congress **right now** demanding that they pass a strong energy bill.

There is every indication that Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi, undoubtedly inspired and pushed by the thousands of young people who manifested their political power at the Power Shift conference a little over a week ago, are working to get an energy bill passed before Congress adjourns for the year. Two different versions were passed this summer by the House and Senate, and there's a decided pick-up in momentum toward a vote within days or weeks on a piece of legislation which, hopefully, merges the best of both bills. If it does that, it will be an important first step, a beginning, along the path toward a through-going, clean energy revolution.

A new Zogby International poll, commissioned by the American Wind Energy Association and released just two days ago, indicates the political breadth of support behind this issue. The poll of potential 2008 voters found that 77% of Republicans, 86% of Southerners, 83% of those in military families, 77% of self-identified conservatives, 81% of rural voters, 85% of independent voters and 92% of Democrats agreed that the Federal government should follow the lead of a number of states that now require at least some of their electricity come from renewable sources such as wind and solar.

It would be sweet, very, very sweet, to break my fast up on Capitol Hill in the aftermath of the passage of a genuinely good energy bill. Much more importantly, such a victory would help to expand and accelerate serious action by the USA and the nations of the world on this huge international issue.

#### **Day 84: Wanting Food**

Making a veggie soup  
in my kitchen

and I open  
the refrigerator door,  
see the cheese,  
and feel a  
Very  
Strong  
Longing  
to eat.

That hasn't happened much  
on this now 84-day fast.

As I said today,  
when asked about  
how I dealt with  
being around people  
eating turkey  
and the rest  
over Thanksgiving,  
"I've turned off my brain  
to food  
until this fast is over."

Brave words,  
human being,  
"man of actions,"  
"national leader."

Right now,  
all I want is—

what?—

I want food—

but not more strongly  
than I want  
a clean energy revolution.

For the first national steps  
to be taken  
down that road  
of hope and promise.

For the sake of that  
Absolutely  
Essential  
Turning  
I will will my appetite  
back into the place  
it's been usually staying  
for almost three months.

Submerged,  
back burnered,  
turned off,  
overcome.

It is easier to overcome  
the pangs of hunger  
than the coal and oil lobbies,  
but I stay strong,  
knowing they are the past.

**91 Days:** Yesterday was the 91st day of this fast, and I spent it on Capitol Hill, on a very windy late fall day. It was a day on which I began to feel that this fast could actually have a relatively happy ending with the passage of a pretty good energy bill. Over the weekend, press reports indicated that Nancy Pelosi is leading an effort to make that happen, and she has to be given credit for that. Although it's still unknown to most of the world exactly what her and others' work is going to end up with as far as a piece of legislation, there are positive signs.

Even the best possible energy bill from this particular Congress will not change the hard reality that the USA is behind most of the rest of the industrialized world on this issue. Europe's cars already are getting an average of over 40 mpg, and for China it's 35 mpg, and in this developing energy bill the USA wouldn't reach 35 mpg until 2020.

I am totally, 100% convinced, that if the world collectively puts its intelligence, energies and resources into solving the climate crisis—which of necessity means a turn away from wars for oil and natural gas and the huge sums of money and human energy put into them—that we can prevent catastrophic climate change. We cannot prevent years, decades, of disrupted and often highly destructive weather, but it can be ameliorated and, working together, the world can be about economic and infrastructure changes that help those most impacted by these changes over the coming decades.

**Day 99:** This Tuesday morning the 11th, around 10 a.m., on the 99<sup>th</sup> day of my climate emergency fast, I'm going to the Senate office on Capitol Hill of Mitch McConnell, the top-

ranking Republican in the Senate. And I'm going to stay there for a while, attempting to draw attention to the anger that a lot of us feel about this latest outrage by Republican leaders in Washington out of touch with even their own rank and file. According to a recent Zogby poll, 77% of Republicans agree that utilities should be required to produce some of their energy from clean sources such as wind and solar.

Despite this reality, McConnell led the Republicans in a successful effort Friday morning to defeat a surprisingly good—for this Congress—energy bill passed by the House on Thursday. A key part of that bill, and a part singled out by Republicans as a main reason for their opposition, was a requirement that 13 years from now, by 2020, utility companies must get 15% of their power from renewable sources, from the sun, wind, tides, the earth's heat and other clean sources.

Never mind the fact that half the states have already passed legislation mandating something similar, some of them with stronger requirements. Never mind the fact that there was a 20% reduction in the amount of sea ice in the Arctic between the end of this summer and the end of the summer of 2005. Never mind the fact that the House renewables requirement is actually quite modest, as is true for other parts of the bill.

It is absolutely clear that what we need is not a 1% a year increase in renewable energy, or a 3/4 of a mile per year increase in fuel efficiency standards, which is what the gasoline mileage efficiency provision of the House bill provides for, to an average of 35 miles per gallon by 2020.

What we need is a full-fledged, deep-seated, through-going clean energy revolution. If we're going to have a chance of avoiding the catastrophic climate change that we're staring down the gun barrel at right now, we must make that qualitative and quantitative shift as soon as possible. We must do on the energy issue what we did in 1942 when the U.S., following the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, rapidly shifted from a peacetime to a wartime economy in the battle to defeat Hitler and Japanese fascism.

This time, we need to defeat the oil and coal interests and their enablers in other parts of the economy and in Congress. Those are the corporate interests who are behind what McConnell and his partners did on Friday.

**Day 100:** These 100 days of not eating on this soon-to-end fast have only deepened my personal commitment to do everything I can each day to help us get to where we need to go.

And I've re-learned something else on this fast. It's that you become more human, more alive, a more positive human being when you are willing to risk something for what you believe.

On this fast I've risked damage to my health. I've also risked spending long hours in jail by my participation in three acts of nonviolent civil disobedience, yesterday being the latest when Jane Califf, my wife, and I were arrested in the office of Senate Republican Minority Leader Mitch McConnell while demanding that Republican Senators support the inclusion of renewable energy

in the energy bill currently being negotiated. The other two were on September 27th, at the U.S. State Department protesting the Bush administration's sham climate conference of the world's major carbon polluting nations, and on October 22nd up on Capitol Hill as part of the first No War No Warming action.

I sometimes wonder why more climate activists, and activists within other progressive movements, aren't getting arrested. I know that many of us are deeply troubled by what we see happening to the earth's ecosystem. I know that many of us work hard in our own ways to bring about change. But it's just a relative handful, a paltry percentage of our movement, really, who have been willing to participate in nonviolent direct action over the last couple of years. My educated guess is that there can't be more than a few hundred people at most who have done so over that period of time.

Maybe it's the influence of an environmental movement culture whose base historically has been overwhelmingly not just white and middle-class but white and upper-middle- and upper-class. For the young people who have come into the movement in just the last few years—and there are thankfully a huge number of them—maybe it's the fact that there continue to be a growing number of victories on college campuses to get schools to institutionally commit to switching over to clean energy, or the fact that since Al Gore's movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, the climate issue has become a major “in issue” within the media and culture. Maybe this is giving those young people, on the one hand, a sense of hope in the possibilities of change, which is a good thing, but also almost a false misunderstanding about the limitations of those positive developments given the great urgency of the crisis.

Maybe conditions just haven't ripened enough yet to the point where there's the kind of explosive upsurge that, all of a sudden, makes revolutionary change seem very real, very possible. History shows, without a doubt, that sooner or later these kind of qualitative leaps forward do happen.

Maybe 2008 will be the year that this upsurge happens. In these last few days, however many more it turns out to be, of this climate emergency fast, I pray with all my heart that it will be so.

**Ending the 2007 Fast:** Two days ago, December 19th, Congress' last day of work for this fall, following the House's vote in support of \$70 billion in no-strings-attached money for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and, as a result, in support of an appropriations bill for 2008 that includes almost \$30 billion in loan guarantees for nukes and coal, I began to eat solid foods for the first time in 107 days.

The first things that I used my teeth to chew on since September 4th, the day Congress returned from its summer recess, were a regular potato and a sweet potato, followed by some mixed vegetables.

It was good to eat, but it would have been much, much better if the end to this fast were not so bittersweet.

I do give thanks that an energy bill was passed which does represent the beginnings of a turn away from our fossil fuel addiction, as limited as that bill is and problematic as parts of it are, particularly its dramatic support for corn-based and other forms of ethanol.

On the other hand, perhaps it was fitting that the continued dominance over this Congress by the oil, coal, nuclear, gas and industrial agriculture interests was made clear by these last few days of voting. Because of that dominance there was virtually no money for renewable energy in the energy bill that was signed by Bush on the 19th, while an extremely modest effort to repeal tax breaks for oil companies in that bill was threat-of-filibustered out.

And that awkward wording is deliberate. There wasn't a filibuster, just a threat of one, the tactic used by Republicans over and over this year, the tactic the Democrats only once called their bluff on, and that in a half-hearted way.

When will we have leadership in Congress that stands up to evil?

And these people are evil. I called the Bush/Cheney gang "climate criminals" on Democracy Now during a December 11th interview. That's what they are, liars, deceivers, obstructionists—evil.

In this Christmas season, the words of Jesus come to mind: "love your enemies." Yes, we should love these enemies by confronting them, by getting as close to them as we can, and telling them that they need to be "born again" to the truth of what they are doing so that, like Paul on the road to Damascus in the Bible, they can become powerful witnesses to help the world take the necessary steps so that we and our descendants, the seventh generation, can have a future worth living for, worth living in.

Are there any people with a conscience left within the Bush administration?

Fortunately, outside of that administration more and more of us are stepping it up. That is where my hope for the future comes from. That is why I intend to begin fasting again after the first of the year.

Every Monday, for an indefinite period of time, certainly for many months, I will eat no food and drink water only.

I don't want to forget or lose touch with the many, many positive things that have happened on this 107-day, 2007 climate emergency fast:

-the expressions of support and appreciation from so many people, friends, relatives, co-workers, people I didn't know before. All of us need to feel appreciated, and I'm no different. To feel that support was very strengthening;

-the daily remembrance of what is being done to our earth and all of its life forms because of the actions of powerful, evil people; the sense of connection to those suffering as a result; and the heightened appreciation of the need for me to do all that I can to help to change those realities;

-the sense that I was playing as effective a role as I could within the climate movement and the larger progressive movement, that my willingness to take action on a daily basis amplified what I had to say;

-the personal weight loss which, while greater (45 pounds) than what is healthy for me long-term, will hopefully help me to be more disciplined as I return to eating and keep my weight where it should be;

-and finally, the truly amazing things that happened on this fast that never would have if I wasn't doing it. Like the vivid dream I had on the 12th night followed the next day by an interpretation of it by a prominent Indigenous leader who by some coincidence or by fate was with me at a conference. Or the close friend and fellow activist who asked me to pray to Jesus with him for the strength to carry on, day to day, with this sometimes difficult work. Or the many young people at the Power Shift conference who came up to me and thanked me for what I was doing. Or the sense of connection I had, especially during the water-only, first 25 days, with the plants and animals I encountered as I walked around the neighborhood in Takoma Park, Md. where I was staying.

I hope other people will want to join with me on this every-Monday, 2008 climate emergency fast. We can't forget that our energies and our commitment are needed now, right now, that 2008 will be a critical year in our desperate struggle to slow, stop and reverse the path toward the cliff we are being driven by those in power.

#### After the Fast

I carried through on my decision to fast every Monday on water-only in 2008. I did that every single Monday, and it continued into 2009. And as I wrote about at the beginning of Chapter 1, that led into a 32-day fast between April 20<sup>th</sup> and May 21<sup>st</sup> with eight other people, an effort to influence what was taking place within the House of Representatives, particularly right then the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Unlike my long 2007 fast, this one, and all of the political pressure and grassroots lobbying being done by probably hundreds of thousands of people all over the country, had very little impact. The Waxman-Markey bill, The American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009, doesn't come close to being what we need.

But this hasn't changed my belief in the political potential of long fasts. Indeed, as I write this, I

intend to join a serious fast beginning November 1 of this year and continuing until and through the mid-December United Nations Climate Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. This fast has been initiated by young people in Australia and Europe. Some of them intend to fast on water-only over this 43 days or longer period of time. I intend to fast for at least two weeks on water-only and possibly continue in solidarity on liquids beyond that.

It was heartening to hear about this initiative by young people on the other side of the world. It is just one of many examples indicating that the culture of resistance, the culture of human solidarity and love for the earth and all of its life forms, continues to grow and spread.

It is essential that we recognize that we need and are building that supportive alternative culture within the dominant capitalist culture which is literally destroying the ecosystems that have allowed human civilization to develop over the past 10,000 years. We must spread and strengthen this culture, one which draws upon positive traditions reaching back centuries while adding new elements gained from important social movements of the recent past.