

COMOX VALLEY CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 23

The Farmer and His Horse: A Reframing Story. ,

There is an old Taoist story about a farmer in a poor community with a horse he used for plowing and transportation. He was considered well-to-do because he was the only farmer who owned a horse.

One day his horse ran away. His neighbours felt very sad for him. But a couple of days later the horse returned with two other horses. His neighbours were happy for him.

The next day his son tried to ride one of the horses. He was bucked off, fell to the ground and broke his leg. Once again the neighbours expressed their sympathy.

But then the Emperor, preparing for war, sent conscription officers to the town to take young men for the army. But the officers rejected the farmer's son because of his broken leg and yes, the neighbours were once again happy for him and his father.

In all of these situations the farmer seemed non-committal. But when things went badly he was sad, when they went well he was happy. When he said, "We'll see" it was because he knew that things can change and he must change with them. He also knew he was not alone. He had the support of his neighbours.

This is a reframing story. A frame is the conceptual, psychological and emotional way we see the world and give it meaning. Our frames develop out of our personal experiences. When our perceptions change we change our frames.

Our frames also serve as filters. They help and protect our emotional lives. They reject things that we do not agree with and they let in things we do agree with.

The Anthropocene with its climate change and irreversible transformations is the mother of all changes. It forces all of us to reframe. When we look at the way people reframe in regard to climate change there seem to be three different types of reframers. There are the Deniers, the Doubters, and Do-ers.

The Deniers deny that climate change is humanly induced. They shut out opinions to the contrary.

The Doubters do not necessarily doubt the reality of climate change. They just feel that it is so overwhelming they doubt we can do anything about,

The Do-ers believe climate change is humanly induced through our systems and practices. They also think that we are destroying Earth and are going to hell in a handbasket. They are convinced that we must do something about it. They may not

know specifically what to do but they know that we must come up with some different ways of living on this planet.

The Do-ers also recognize they we can't do this by themselves. The farmer had his neighbours. There are people in our community, in communities in our province and states and in countries around the world who are trying different things. "Let's try some of them and we'll see if they work in our community."

But there are some cautions.

First, we must appreciate the scope of the problem. This is a global problem. Our species has little if any practical experience working in an Anthropocene world with irreversible transformations. To put in another way in terms of reframing, the overwhelming majority of us have not developed "Anthropocene Frames."

Second, if we want to be Do-ers we must realize that most of the rest of the world are not Do-ers and many of them don't even like Do-ers. In a world of "cultural frames"—progressives and conservatives, black and white, business and labour, indigenous and non-indigenous, masculine, feminine, gay and transgender—our ability to survive and live healthy lives depends upon our ability to work together to create mutually enhancing relationships between our species and Earth. What the farmer had going for him in his trials and tribulations were his neighbours.

Third a "Let's See" strategy is risky. It will indeed cause a lot of blowback, especially trying to develop new alternative systems and transitions. It is hard to imagine politicians and corporate leaders saying to their constituents or shareholder "Look folks, we are not sure about what we are doing. We haven't faced a world like this before. But we are going to spend your tax or investment dollars on such and such. We think it is a good bet. "Let's see" if it works."

"Outrageous!" you might say about this trial and error process and it is outrageous. But we don't have a lot of options besides a trial and error process. We are reframing for ourselves, our families, our communities and the planet on which we all depend. The stakes couldn't get any higher. As the sign says, "There is no Planet B."

Mike Bell, Comox Valley Climate Change Network.