

CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 23

Taking the Road That Matters

Each week I churn out a Chronicle on climate change. I try to base the chronicle on a story. This week I spent many hours looking for a story and travelled down some wrong roads. Then I found one that seems helpful. So here goes.

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* Alice went through the looking glass and ended up lost in a strange new world. One day she came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. "Which road do I take?" she asked. "Where do you want to go?" was his response. "I don't know," answered Alice. "Then," said the cat, "it doesn't matter."

Like Alice, we humans have also entered a strange new world, the Anthropocene. Its devastating feature is climate change. We have come to a fork in the road and for us the road we choose from here really does matter. For the most part we are not even aware that a while back we headed off in the wrong direction. We first chose the road that accelerated climate change. This decision resulted in further damage to Earth. It is also jeopardizing our future and that of generations to come.

How did things get to this point? For almost fifty years scientists have been warning us about what we are doing but we have treated these warnings like people treated those of the boy who cried "wolf." Now the wolf is at our door and it is scary.

So what is it going to take to deal with this crisis? Can we go back to the original fork in the road and choose the road that matters? Of course not. That would be like trying to tell a whole civilization to go backwards. But we have created this situation and there is at least the possibility that we can make a course correction. I think we might start with some questions.

1. **What's the problem?** The problem is that we are going to hell in a handbasket. We have been so proud of our systems and technologies that we were unaware of the irreversible transformations to the Earth's climate system. We have taken over Earth's role in guiding evolution. Even now we don't recognize that we are driving the evolution bus. The Earth has become what our actions have determined it should become.

2. **How did we manage to take over?** We did it with our systems, particularly our liberal economic systems that demand continual profit and unlimited access to the limited resources of Earth. These have been supported by political parties that have caved in to the lobbying and financial contributions of corporations. The legal systems have established corporations as persons. They don't recognize the "rights of Earth" and, as we have seen in both Canada and the U.S., environmental laws can be removed at the blink of a political eye.

3. **What will it take to turn things around?** It will take a *Metanoia* (a biblical term adopted by some management consultants meaning "a complete shift in thinking and

consciousness”). This metanoia is an intellectual /psychic /spiritual awareness that we are earthlings. Earth is not something “out there”. We must realize that we are part of a conscious living Earth and universe. As such we have a responsibility to help Earth heal itself and, in the process, heal us.

4. Where do we start? We start with a broad vision of the future we must strive for. Some of this vision has already begun to emerge. I have often mentioned in these chronicles the vision of Berry and Swimme—The Ecozoic Era—a time of a *mutually enhancing relationship between our species and Earth*.

5. How do we take the right road from here? In addition to a vision we need transition mechanisms. Our final goal is to develop living systems that can live within a living Earth. But we need transitions from what we have now to those living systems. In a sense we must become Earth system triage workers. We save what can be useful to our new vision and we reject the damaging elements.

6. What resources do we need to proceed? The most valuable resources are people in our communities who are already involved in community projects. The climate change damages will be severe. Many of these folks are already experienced in reaching out beyond themselves to respond to economic, social, health and other kinds of needs.

7. What else do we need? It is important to be realistic. Witnessing to the change we need is always difficult and demanding. We must expect blowback. (It may be helpful to remember that the word “witness” comes from a Greek word meaning ‘martyr’) We need to care for ourselves, for the work we are taking on can be very demanding. We need to develop resilience through some kind of regular personal practices: meditation, prayer, tai chi, exercises, art, music, hobbies, reading or whatever helps us maintain our balance.

Will using some of these ideas help you go down the right road to deal with climate change? I don’t know. You might find out by sharing them with friends or raising them in discussion groups.

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