

CHRONICLE 7-THE ECOZOIC 3

From Sustainability to Regeneration

In my last two chronicles I discussed the vision of Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry—the Ecozoic Era. It is a time of a *mutually enhancing relationship between our species and Earth*.

In this chronicle I will talk about implementing the vision. I will discuss two options: Sustainability and Regeneration. Sustainability means improving the existing systems. Regeneration means “to create again” starting over with different systems or kinds of systems.

As I have noted many times in these chronicles, it is our systems—the economic systems supported by political and legal systems—that are the major causes of climate change. So what are our options?

Do we try to sustain and improve the existing systems? Or do we generate new systems? We have to do something. The following story called **The Streetlight Effect** provides some guidance.

A policeman sees a drunken man searching for something under a streetlight. The cop asks the man what he has lost. He says he lost his keys. So they both look under the streetlight together. After a few minutes the policeman asks the man if he is sure he lost them here, and the man replies that he lost them in the park. The policeman asks why he is searching in this spot and the man replies, "Because this is where the light is."

Our conceptual bias is to search for something where it is easiest to find it. We look in the light cast by our existing systems. We have developed them and their technologies and we know how they are supposed to work. So our preference is to sustain them by trying to fix them.

But current systems are designed to give corporations almost unlimited access to the limited resources of Earth. In addition corporations must make continual profits for their shareholders. Given their nature, fixing these systems will simply sustain their life and enable them to do more damage more effectively and efficiently.

But we are conscious beings. We created the systems that are causing the problems. We can generate new systems if we choose to search into the dark side and find the keys. But we must know what we are looking for.

We are looking for those life elements that are mutually enhancing. They will benefit our lives and Earth's life together. Fortunately, as Swimme and Berry point out, these elements already exist. They are the three tendencies that all life forms manifest: individuation, a self-organizing capacity, and community.

Individuation. Nature loves individuality and it hates uniformity. It has produced many millions of different species. Each species is different from every other species and each

member within a species is different from every other member. My family is different from all other families and within our family I am different from my brothers and sisters.

Self-Organizing Capacity. Every living species and all life-forms have the ability to self-organize. We are all self-organizing systems. This is true at the cellular level, at the human level and at all levels. Our bodies can repair parts that are broken or damaged and we can reproduce. Cosmologists tell us this self-organizing tendency which seems to manifest some kind of conscious behavior is also true at the cosmic level.

Community. Every life is part of a community and is dependent on other life forms. We cannot continue to exist without them whether we are talking about ecosystems, other humans, or animal and plant species that we depend upon for shelter and nourishment.

So since these are life tendencies, one of the criteria for regeneration will be the extent to which new systems tend to promote the qualities of individuation, self-organizing capacity and community.

And a reminder. A key word in the title of this chronicle is the word “FROM” Sustainability to Regeneration. We must prepare for the transitions from our present systems to new systems. Given our experience of a climate changing Earth that is increasingly acting out, we have an urgent need for transitions and a long journey forward in the dark.

In closing, a word about the dark. Many of us as children were afraid of the dark. Suggesting that we enter the dark side may not be a welcome thought. But we can learn to adapt to it if not love the confusion that is ahead of us. Here is the poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s perspective on the dark....

THE NIGHT

You, darkness, of whom I am born—

I love you more than the flame
that limits the world
to the circles it illumines
and excludes all the rest.

But the dark embraces everything:
shapes and shadows, creatures and me,
people, nations—just as they are.

It lets me imagine
a great presence stirring beside me.

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