

2019-20 CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 12

The Chrysalis Model: From Thinking to Acting

I'm writing this chronicle in the midst of the CORONA-19 Pandemic. We've been at it for a number of weeks now and people want things to return to normal. But getting back to the current normal is the last thing we need. We need to begin creating a new normal.

This pandemic is more than "a disturbance in the force." It is the portal to a climate changing world. What we need to develop is a different kind of world that respects Mother Earth and benefits ourselves and the generations that will come after us.

In my last chronicle I talked about the need for a new way of thinking. I suggested Harbinger thinking. It has two characteristics. It is a way of thinking that will help us develop a safe route to continued existence on Earth. And Harbinger thinking also requires a focus not on the way the world is now but on the way it is becoming. To meet these two requirements we need a model to guide us—something that will help us move from thinking to action.

Rather than developing something off the top of our heads let's use a model that already exists in nature. In this chronicle I'm suggesting that we turn to the chrysalis experience. Most people are aware of the chrysalis experience—the way a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. I think with a bit of imagination we can adopt this experience to help us become harbinger thinkers in a climate changing world.

In the first part of this chronicle I'll begin with a brief review of the chrysalis experience. In the second part I will adapt the model to our climate changing world. I'll conclude with one of my favourite poems that can help us as we go on this Journey.

Part One: The Chrysalis Experience.

Stage 1: The Beginning. In the first stage the caterpillar creates a cocoon. The purpose of the cocoon is to protect the caterpillar and facilitate what is about to happen. Within the cocoon the caterpillar begins to gorge on food and increases in size. Then something different begins to happen.

Stage 2: The Imaginal Cells. In this stage there is a threat to the caterpillar. A different kind of cell begins to emerge. These cells are called imaginal cells because they carry the genetic image of the butterfly. At first there are only a few imaginal cells. The caterpillar defeats them but then things begin to change.

Stage 3: The Battle. The imaginal cells increase in number and begin to work as a team. They continue the battle and defeat the caterpillar.

Stage 4: The Metamorphosis. Then the caterpillar dissolves into a gooey mass. The imaginal cells use the dissolved cells of the caterpillar to grow and change into a butterfly.

Stage 5: The Breakout. When the butterfly is fully formed it breaks out of the cocoon and heads for the milkweed plants in order to feed and reproduce.

So how do we relate Harbinger thinking about securing a safe place in the future to the challenge of climate change? Here are some thoughts about how we might do this.

Part Two: From Thinking to Action Around Climate Change

Stage 1: The Cocoon The cocoon is the economic system developed over the past fifty years or so. It is based upon Adam Smith's invisible hand of free markets and the neoliberalism of Milton Friedman and Francis von Hayek. It argues that the market system is the only system that does not threaten individual liberty. The economic cocoon is controlled by a number of corporate executives at the top. They gain the support of political leaders that need funding to remain in power. Our legal systems also fall in line. They declare corporations to be individuals with the rights of individuals.

A dominant requirement of the system is that it continue to develop profits for the shareholders. This results in efforts to access the existing resources of Earth in both developed countries and the so-called under developed countries. The under-developed countries are often anxious to participate because they are in the midst of a population explosion and are often quite poor. It took 200,000 years for Earth to reach a population of a billion people at the beginning of the 19th century. By the beginning of the 20th century Earth had a population of nearly eight billion.

Stage 2: The Imaginal Cells. In this stage a number of individual groups; begin to appear. They have an image of a different kind of world. They are opposed by the economic elites who try and resist their efforts at every turn—through financial support for political leaders, lobbyists, media programs and various other means.

The imaginal cells see the injustices in the economic systems. They benefit wealthy individuals at the top and often fail to help those at the bottom of the economic ladder. They also give some corporations almost unlimited power to access Earth's resources. Earth's resources and ecosystems are plundered before Earth can replace them. This is especially a problem in the under-developed world where soils and forests are quickly depleted.

Stage 3: The Imaginal cells fight back. This is where we are right now. As was the case in the appearance of imaginal cells in the cocoon, individual imaginal cells join together with others in local communities in all parts of the world. All of them in different ways are experiencing the realities of climate change—heat waves, rising oceans, hurricanes tornadoes, droughts and damaged crops, and so forth.

Stage 4: A New Vision and System Development When the imaginal community groups are asked what they are fighting for, they will inevitable say that they are fighting for a shared vision and the development of new systems.

The vision is critical. It must hold them together and help them deal with the problems they are facing. They recognize the major problem is the abuse of the Earth they depend upon for their continued existence. So they develop visions that are mutually enhancing—visions that support Earth, humans and other species.

In terms of new systems the major systems will be the economic systems. They are key to a continued existence and survival. But, as with their vision, they need to develop living systems that can thrive within a living Earth. And where will we find the resources and expertise to develop these systems? Here I suspect we will take a page from the original imaginal cells.

When the caterpillar in the cocoon dissolved into a gooey mass the imaginal cells used some of the elements of the caterpillar's cells to create their own future. I suspect we will do the same thing. We will evaluate what we need—the science and the technology for example—that is consistent with our visions and use them to create new systems that can live within a living

Earth. (I think some of these systems are already emerging, for example Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economy. The Green New Deal also holds out some potential benefits.)

Stage 5: Towards a Viable Future. Just as the caterpillar broke out of the cocoon, we will break out of the economic systems and the flawed political and legal systems that have held us captive for so long. With new visions and new systems we will create a new kind of world

Conclusion

In this chronicle I have told two stories, the original story of the caterpillar and an *imaginary story* of the challenge we face in a climate changing world. Given what we have been doing to it, Earth will continue to "act out" to create some kind of balance for itself...with or without our continued existence.

This will be a difficult journey. We may often feel we are not up to the challenge and become discouraged. Here is a favourite poem that encourages me to turn to nature for inspiration. May it inspire you as it has inspired me.

Wild Geese | **Mary Oliver**

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

