

The Spiritual Heart of Transition

The term *Transition* in this context refers to the growing aspiration among many people around the world to learn how to transition to an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, and socially just human presence on the planet. It is expressed in various ways, sometimes called Transition, sometimes The Great Turning (Joanna Macy, David Korten) or the Necessary Revolution (Peter Senge). All of these are responses to the growing awareness that we live in an extraordinary time of convergence of problems which will require some radical responses if we are to get through them without enormous suffering. We hardly need reminding of these problems:

- Economic instability: the end of growth (failing banks, failing national finances etc)
- Climate change (rising water, melting glaciers, weather instability, population migration etc)
- The end of cheap energy supplies (rising fuel prices)

It may be that the economic crash of 2008 marks the beginning of a new phase of human history. We may be coming to the end of a money system based on growth, with the requirement to take ever increasing resources from a finite earth. Today this system is falling apart – it is part of an old story that no longer holds true. We are invited to grow up, to come of age, to live a new story, to “create a more beautiful world our hearts tell us is surely possible” (Charles Eisenstein). This convergence of crises invites us to enter a new story, one of co-creative partnership with the earth. What at first seems depressing – the crises that we face – is also the opportunity for Transition, becoming the catalyst for a timely leap in the evolution of human consciousness. It is a case of not only “what can we do about these problems” but “what will these problems do for us” in terms of bringing about a new consciousness and a new way of living and being in this world.

It is encouraging that there are many people, groups and organisations working with various aspects of transition. Liverpool City Council has a ‘low carbon sustainable city’ agenda for example. Another organisation is the Transition Network which supports local community-led responses to climate change and shrinking supplies of cheap energy, helping to build local resilience in the face of these problems. There is a local transition group, Transition Liverpool, which welcomes new people getting involved.

It seems to me that **religion and spirituality have always been about Transition**, expressed in such terms as being born again, conversion, repentance, awakening and enlightenment. In other words, transition has a spiritual heart. It has also been clear that any such transition will always affect both the inner and outer aspects of reality – a change of mind and heart and also a change in behaviour and action. Joanna Macy, the Buddhist teacher and environmental activist, puts it so well when she talks about The Great Turning:

The Great Turning is a name for the essential adventure of our time: the shift from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization. The ecological and social crises we face are inflamed by an economic system dependent on accelerating growth. This self-destructing political economy sets its goals and measures its performance in terms of ever-increasing corporate profits--in other words by how fast materials can be extracted from Earth and turned into consumer products, weapons, and waste.

A revolution is underway because people are realizing that our needs can be met without destroying our world. We have the technical knowledge, the communication tools, and material resources to grow enough food, ensure clean air and water, and meet rational energy needs. Future generations, if there is a liveable world for them, will look back at the epochal transition we are making to a life-sustaining society. And they may well call this the time of the Great Turning. It is happening now.

Whether or not it is recognized by corporate-controlled media, the Great Turning is a

reality. Although we cannot know yet if it will take hold in time for humans and other complex life forms to survive, we can know that it is under way. And it is gaining momentum, through the actions of countless individuals and groups around the world. To see this as the larger context of our lives clears our vision and summons our courage.

Many people have come to see the evolution of the universe, and of life and then consciousness, as a sacred journey, in some mysterious way filled full with God's creative Presence. The Transition to an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, and socially just human presence on this planet is a next stage in this sacred journey of the universe. This stage includes a spiritual transformation, one that involves the development of a stronger relational consciousness - a new relational oneness with each other, with other species, with the earth itself, the universe and with God.

There are many **outer things** to be done, which may include:

- The development of new economic models (see *Sacred Economics*)
- Learning how to grow food locally
- Building local community resilience in the face of change
- Learning how to save energy
- Developing renewable energy sources
- Developing Fusion as a viable and sustainable source of energy

Underpinning these and many other things is the **inner change** which lies at the heart of the spiritual way. A renewal of the mind, a putting on of the mind of Christ, an opening to the presence of Spirit which connects all things. To make the depth and degree of changes necessary ultimately requires a new level of consciousness. This can lead to transformed relationships within the whole 'earth system' and the possibility of sustainable life on the planet.

There are many inner thoughts, feelings and responses that can sabotage Transition:

- Disbelief – the difficulty of really accepting what is evidentially true and really happening
- Denial – refusal to even consider what is different to our current worldview, the way things have always been
- Dread – avoiding the problem because of the fear it invokes
- Disillusion – it's too hopeless to face

Part of the role of spirituality is to help people through these difficulties in a number of ways:

- Providing a new vision and perspective for life, a New Story to live by.
- By growing supportive communities of people who know that 'more for you is also more for me'
- By offering spiritual practices (worship, meditation/centering prayer, communion etc) which themselves can inspire and help us to greater freedom, wisdom and inner strength to choose more sustainable, healthy and just ways of being in this world.

Some questions:

Q. Is it possible to transition to an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, and socially just human presence on the planet?

Q. Are you worried about what the future may hold?

Q. How may spirituality help us to make this transition?

Q. Are there any practical responses that we can make towards transition, either individually or collectively?

Books:

Sacred Economics (money, gift & society in the age of transition) – Charles Eisenstein

Navigating the Coming Chaos – Carolyn Baker

The Great Turning – David Korten

The End of Growth – Richard Heinberg

The Transition Companion – Rob Hopkins

A Guide to Sacred Activism – Andrew Harvey

