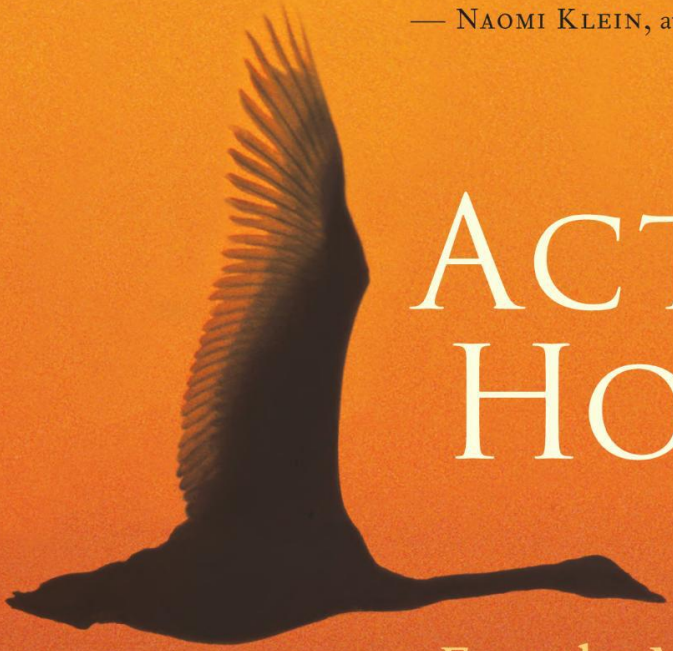
"Books about social and ecological change too often leave out a vital component: how do we change ourselves so that we are strong enough to fully contribute to this great shift? *Active Hope* fills this gap beautifully, guiding readers on a journey of gratitude, grief, interconnection, and, ultimately, transformation."

— NAOMI KLEIN, author of *The Shock Doctrine*



ACTIVE HOPE

How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy

JOANNA MACY &
CHRIS JOHNSTONE

Active Hope

How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy

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Chris Johnstone

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Introduction

"Dangerous," "frightening," "out of control" — as we go around the room, people are calling out the word or phrase that comes to mind as they complete this sentence: "When I consider the condition of our world, I think things are getting…" Over the last few decades, we've done this process with tens of thousands of people in a wide range of settings. The responses we hear echo survey findings that show high levels of alarm about the future we're heading into.[1]

Such widespread anxiety is well-founded. As our world heats up, deserts expand and extreme weather events become more common. Human population and consumption are increasing at the same time as essential resources, such as freshwater, fish stocks, topsoil, and oil reserves, are in decline. While reversals in the economy have left many feeling desperate about how they're going to manage, trillions of dollars are spent on the making of war.[2] Given these adversities, it is no surprise if we experience a profound loss of confidence in the future. We can no longer take it for granted that the resources we're dependent on — food, fuel, and drinkable water — will be available. We can no longer take it for granted even that our civilization will survive or that conditions on our planet will remain hospitable for complex forms of life.

We are starting out by naming this uncertainty as a pivotal psychological reality of our time. Yet because it is usually considered

too depressing to talk about, it tends to remain an unspoken presence at the backs of our minds. Sometimes we're aware of it. We just don't mention it. This blocked communication generates a peril even more deadly, for the greatest danger of our times is the deadening of our response.

We often hear comments such as "Don't go there, it is too depressing" and "Don't dwell on the negative." The problem with this approach is that it closes down our conversations and our thinking. How can we even begin to tackle the mess we're in if we consider it too depressing to think about?

Yet when we do face the mess, when we do let in the dreadful news of multiple tragedies unfolding in our world, it can feel overwhelming. We may wonder whether we can do anything about it anyway.

So this is where we begin — by acknowledging that our times confront us with realities that are painful to face, difficult to take in, and confusing to live with. Our approach is to see this as the starting point of an amazing journey that strengthens us and deepens our aliveness. The purpose of this journey is to find, offer, and receive the gift of Active Hope.

WHAT IS ACTIVE HOPE?

Whatever situation we face, we can choose our response. When facing overwhelming challenges, we might feel that our actions don't count for much. Yet the kind of responses we make, and the degree to which we believe they count, are shaped by the way we think and feel about hope. Here's an example.

Jane cared deeply about the world and was horrified by what she saw happening. She regarded human beings as a lost cause, as so stuck in our destructive ways that she saw the complete wrecking of our world as inevitable. "What's the point of doing anything if it won't change what we're heading for?" she asked.

The word *hope* has two different meanings. The first involves hopefulness, where our preferred outcome seems reasonably likely to happen. If we require this kind of hope before we commit ourselves to an action, our response gets blocked in areas where we don't rate our chances too high. This is what happened for Jane — she felt so hopeless she didn't see the point of even trying to do anything.

The second meaning is about desire. When Jane was asked what she'd like to have happen in our world, without hesitation she described the future she hoped for, the kind of world she longed for so much it hurt. It is this kind of hope that starts our journey — knowing what we hope for and what we'd like, or love, to take place. It is what we do with this hope that really makes the difference. Passive hope is about waiting for external agencies to bring about what we desire. Active Hope is about becoming active participants in bringing about what we hope for.

Active Hope is a practice. Like tai chi or gardening, it is something we *do* rather than *have*. It is a process we can apply to any situation, and it involves three key steps. First, we take a clear view of reality; second, we identify what we hope for in terms of the direction we'd like things to move in or the values we'd like to see expressed; and third, we take steps to move ourselves or our situation in that direction.

Since Active Hope doesn't require our optimism, we can apply it even in areas where we feel hopeless. The guiding impetus is intention; we *choose* what we aim to bring about, act for, or express. Rather than weighing our chances and proceeding only when we feel hopeful, we focus on our intention and let it be our guide.

The Gift Is Both Given and Received

Most books addressing global issues focus on describing either the problems we face or the solutions needed. While we touch on both of these, our focus is on how we strengthen and support our intention

to act, so that we can best play our part, whatever that may be, in the healing of our world.

Since we each look out onto a different corner of the planet and bring with us our own particular portfolio of interests, skills, and experience, we are touched by different concerns and called to respond in different ways. The contribution each of us makes to the healing of our world is our gift of Active Hope. The purpose of this book is to strengthen our ability to give the best gift we can: our finest response to the multifaceted crisis of sustainability.

When we become aware of an emergency and rise to the occasion, something powerful gets switched on inside us. We activate our sense of purpose and discover strengths we didn't even know we had. Being able to make a difference is powerfully enlivening; it makes our lives feel more worthwhile. So when we practice Active Hope, we not only give but we receive in so many ways as well. The approach we describe in this book is not about being dutiful or worthy so much as it is about stepping into a state of aliveness that makes our lives profoundly satisfying.

Three Stories of Our Time

In any great adventure, there are always obstacles in the way. The first hurdle is just to be aware that we, as a civilization and as a species, are facing a crisis point. When we look at mainstream society, and the priorities expressed or goals pursued, it is hard to see much evidence of this awareness. In the first chapter we try to make sense of the huge gap between the scale of the emergency and the size of the response by describing how our perceptions are shaped by the story we identify with. We describe three stories, or versions of reality, each acting as a lens through which we see and understand what's going on.

In the first of these, Business as Usual, the defining assumption

is that there is little need to change the way we live. Economic growth is regarded as essential for prosperity, and the central plot is about getting ahead. The second story, the Great Unraveling, draws attention to the disasters that Business as Usual is taking us toward, as well as those it has already brought about. It is an account, backed by evidence, of the collapse of ecological and social systems, the disturbance of climate, the depletion of resources, and the mass extinction of species.

The third story is held and embodied by those who know the first story is leading us to catastrophe and who refuse to let the second story have the last word. Involving the emergence of new and creative human responses, it is about the epochal transition from an industrial society committed to economic growth to a life-sustaining society committed to the healing and recovery of our world. We call this story the Great Turning. The central plot is finding and offering our gift of Active Hope.

There is no point in arguing about which of these stories is "right." All three are happening. The question is which one we want to put our energy behind. The first chapter is about looking at where we are and choosing the story we want our lives to express. The rest of the book focuses on how we strengthen our capacity to contribute to the Great Turning in the best way we can.

The Spiral of the Work That Reconnects

The journey that begins in chapter 2, and that continues throughout the book, is based on an empowerment process we have offered in workshops for decades. Initially developed by Joanna in the late in 1970s, it evolved and spread, with the vital contribution of a growing number of colleagues. It has been used on every continent except Antarctica, has been conducted in many different languages, and has involved hundreds of thousands of people of different

faiths, backgrounds, and age groups. Because this approach helps us restore our sense of connection with the web of life and with one another, it is known as the Work That Reconnects.[3] Through helping us to develop our inner resources and our outer community, it strengthens our capacity to face disturbing information and respond with unexpected resilience. In our experience of doing this work, again and again we've seen energy and commitment mobilized as people rise to their role in the Great Turning.

We've written this book so that you can experience the transformative power of the Work That Reconnects and draw on it to expand your capacity to respond creatively to the crises of our time. The chapters ahead guide you through the four stages of the spiral it moves through: Coming from Gratitude, Honoring Our Pain for the World, Seeing with New Eyes, and Going Forth. The journey through these stages has a strengthening effect that deepens with each repetition.

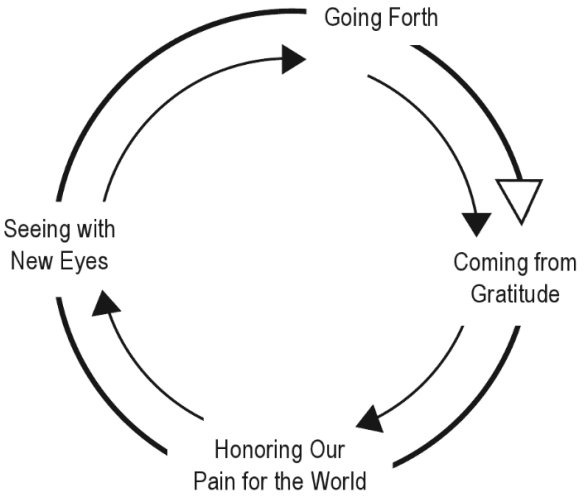


Figure 1. The spiral of the Work That Reconnects

While rich rewards can be reaped while journeying alone, the benefits of the Work That Reconnects grow quickly with company. We encourage you to seek others with whom to read this book or share notes along the way. Bringing our concerns into the open is a key part of facing the mess we are in, though for reasons we will explore, fear often prevents this type of sharing. We will examine what makes it so difficult to talk about our planetary crisis and provide tools that support us in having the empowering conversations our times call for.

We encourage you to gain familiarity with the tools we describe by trying them out. Scattered throughout the book are "Try This" boxes inviting you to experience practices we find valuable both for personal use and in groups.

What We Bring

At the heart of this book is a collaborative model of power based on appreciating how much more we can achieve working together than as separate individuals. The story of our coauthorship is a fine example. The seedling idea sprouted out of a conversation about lessons we had learned from our experience of the Work That Reconnects. What surprised and excited us both was how often, in the many hours of talking that followed, insights would surface that neither of us had received before. While the core framework, concepts, and practices of the Work That Reconnects are well tested, we have been able to enrich, hone, and add to them in ways that bring together a great deal of material not published elsewhere.

There is an old saying that two eyes are better than one, since out of two different perspectives comes the depth of three-dimensional vision. As coauthors we come from different backgrounds, live on different continents, and draw from different sources, all of which

has contributed to the rich synergy we have experienced and that is expressed through our writing.

Joanna is a scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology. She has taught at several universities in the United States and has traveled the world, offering trainings to enliven and empower our responses to planetary crisis. In her early eighties, she lives in Berkeley, California. She has been an activist for more than five decades; is a respected voice in the movements for peace, justice, and ecology; and has either written or cowritten a dozen books, most of which have been translated into other languages.

Chris is a medical doctor who has specialized in the psychology of behavior change, resilience, and recovery from addiction. Living in the United Kingdom, he works as a coach, trains health professionals in behavioral medicine, and has pioneered the role of resilience training in promoting positive mental health. An activist since his teenage years and now in his late forties, he has taught and written about the psychology of sustainability for more than twenty years.

The two of us met in 1989 at a weeklong training led by Joanna in Scotland. Called "The Power of Our Deep Ecology," it was a life-changing event for Chris. We have worked together many times since. This book describes the work we share and cherish. It is offered not as a blueprint solution to our problems but as both a set of practices and insights to draw strength from and as a mythic journey to be transformed by. Rebecca Solnit writes:

> An emergency is a separation from the familiar, a sudden emergence into a new atmosphere, one that often demands we ourselves rise to the occasion.[4]

When we face the mess we're in, we realize that Business as Usual can't go on. What helps us rise to the occasion is experiencing

our rootedness in something much larger than ourselves. The poet Rabindranath Tagore expressed this idea in these words:

> The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world.[5]

This is the stream we are following. It points us toward a way of life that enriches rather than depletes our world. It takes us to our gift of Active Hope. When we face the mess we're in by offering this gift, our lives become enriched too.

PART ONE

The Great Turning

CHAPTER ONE

Three Stories of Our Time

When the stories a society shares are out of tune
with its circumstances, they can become self-limiting,
even a threat to survival. That is our current situation.

DAVID KORTEN, *The Great Turning*[1]

On May 7, 2001, journalists gathered for a press briefing at the White House. Ari Fleischer, President Bush's press secretary, had nothing to announce that day but invited questions from the assembled crowd. Rising energy costs quickly became the lead topic, with one of the early questions evoking a strong response.

> JOURNALIST: "Does the President believe that, given the amount of energy Americans consume per capita, how much it exceeds any other citizen in any other country in the world, does the President believe we need to correct our lifestyles to address the energy problem?"
>
> MR. FLEISCHER: "That's a big no. The President believes that it's an American way of life, and that it should be the goal of policy makers to protect the American way of life."[2]

While presidents come and go, Mr. Fleischer's "big no" remains a powerful force in our society. It is the voice that doesn't question the way we live. This conviction grows out of a particular story about how things are in our world. By *story*, we don't mean a work of fiction but rather the way we make sense of the events we see happening.

In this chapter we identify three stories being enacted in our time, as mentioned in the introduction. The first assumes that our society is on the right track and that we can carry on with business as usual. The second reveals the destructive consequences of the business-as-usual mode and the progressive unraveling of our biological, ecological, and social systems. The third is about the groundswell of response to danger and the multifaceted transition to a life-sustaining civilization. Recognizing that we can choose the story we live from can be liberating; finding a good story to take part in adds to our sense of purpose and aliveness. We will explore how these stories shape our response to global crisis.

THE FIRST STORY: BUSINESS AS USUAL

Of the food you've eaten in the last twenty-four hours, how much is based on ingredients produced hundreds, or even thousands, of miles away? For most of us living in industrialized countries, the answer is *lots of it*. The average carrot, head of lettuce, or box of strawberries sold in supermarkets in Iowa, for example, is likely to have traveled more than eighteen hundred miles.[3] And it's not just our food: many of the things we use have traveled vast distances to reach us. Transportation costs are a major factor in making ours the most energy-costly era in history. Ari Fleischer might think of this as the American way of life. But it isn't just American. Increasingly, for those living in affluent parts of our world, it is becoming the modern way, the accepted way, the one we think of as normal.

This modern life we're describing holds many attractions. It's common for people to take vacations in faraway places and to have their own cars, computers, televisions, and fridges. Just a few

generations ago, such comforts, if attainable at all, would have been seen as the preserve of the super-rich. Nowadays advertisements give the impression that everyone should have these things, and progress is measured in terms of how much more we have than we used to or how much farther and faster we can go.

One way of thinking about our times is that we are enacting a wonderful success story. Economic and technological development has made many aspects of our lives easier. If we're looking at how to move forward, the path this story suggests is "more of the same, please." We're calling this story Business as Usual.

This is the story told by most mainstream policy makers and corporate leaders. Their view is that economies can, and must, continue to grow. Even in the face of economic downturns and periods of recession, the dominant assumption is that it won't be long before things pick up again. Expressing his trust in the path of economic growth, in November 2010 President Obama said, "The single most important thing we can do to reduce our debt and deficits is to grow."[4]

For a market economy to grow, it needs to increase sales. That means encouraging us to buy, and consume, more than we already do. Advertising plays a key role in stimulating consumption, and increasingly children are targeted as a way of boosting each household's appetite for goods. Estimates suggest that the average American child watches between twenty-five thousand and forty thousand television commercials a year. In the United Kingdom, it is about ten thousand.[5] As we grow up, we learn by watching others. Our views about what's normal and necessary are shaped by what we see.

When you're living in the middle of this story, it's easy to think of it as just the way things are. Young people may be told there is no alternative but to find their place in this scheme of things. Getting ahead is presented as the main plot, supported by the subplots of finding a partner, fending for your family, looking good, and buying stuff. In this view of life, the problems of the world are seen as far away and irrelevant to the dramas of our personal lives.

Transmitted by global media, this story of modern living is catching on around the world and arousing an increasing appetite for consumption. Before 1970 just four items were regarded as essential purchases in China — a bicycle, a sewing machine, a wristwatch, and a radio. By the 1980s a growing consumer class had expanded this list to include a fridge, a color TV, a washing machine, and a tape recorder. A decade later, it had become normal for more and more people in China to have a car, a computer, a mobile phone, and air conditioning.[6] And it's a list that's still growing, as Joe Hatfield, CEO of Walmart Asia, explains:

> We started out with four feet of skin care; today it's twenty feet. Today we don't have deodorants, but someday down the road we will have deodorants in China. Five years ago perfumes were not a big business here. But if you look today it's the emerging market...there's a lot fewer bicycles, so that takes away from the exercise side of it, so people are getting larger, so what's that tell you? Sales of exercise equipment's getting good, exercise wear, jogging outfits, and at some point, we'll have Slimfast and all those type of products.[7]

Some view this as progress.

Box 1.1. Some Core Assumptions of Business as Usual

- Economic growth is essential for prosperity.
- Nature is a commodity to be used for human purposes.
- Promoting consumption is good for the economy.
- The central plot is about getting ahead.
- The problems of other peoples, nations, and species are not our concern.

Why shouldn't people in other parts of the world develop the lifestyle thought of as normal in the West? And why shouldn't we continue with the Business as Usual of economic growth, with people buying more things and using so much energy (see Box 1.1)? To answer those questions, we need to look at the shadow side of modern living and also at where this is taking us. That leads us to our next story.

The Second Story: The Great Unraveling

In 2010 polls for both CBS[8] and Fox News[9] showed that a majority believed the conditions for the next generation would be worse than for people living today. Two years earlier, an international poll of more than 61,600 people in sixty countries yielded similar results.[10] With so many people losing confidence that things will be okay, a very different account of events is emerging. Since it involves a perception that our world is in serious decline, we take a term used by social thinker David Korten and call this story the Great Unraveling.[11]

In our work with people addressing their concerns about the world, we're struck by how many issues are triggering alarm. The list in Box 1.2 identifies five common areas of concern, and most likely you have some others you would add to this list. Facing these problems can feel uncomfortable, even overwhelming, but in order to get to where we want to go, we need to start from where we are. The story of the Great Unraveling offers a disturbing picture of where that is.

Box 1.2. The Great Unraveling of the Early Twenty-First Century

- Economic decline
- Resource depletion
- Climate change
- Social division and war
- Mass extinction of species

Economic Decline

The economic crisis that erupted in 2008 saw not only the collapse of financial institutions but also rising prices, unemployment, home foreclosures, and food riots in many parts of our world. Just a few years earlier, at the beginning of 2005, the global economy was thought of as booming. With house prices rising fast in the United States, property was considered a "safe" investment. There was money to be made in the mortgage business, and loans were freely given, even to those with poor credit ratings. But this boom grew into a bubble that eventually burst. An economist might view this as part of a boom-and-bust cycle. Another phrase we'd use to describe what happened is *overshoot and collapse*. Here's why.

When something moves beyond the point at which it can be sustained, we call this *overshoot*. To restore balance, we need to notice and correct such overextension. If we don't, and the system keeps pushing for more and more, that system can only go so far before reaching a point of breakdown and collapse. The housing market couldn't keep growing indefinitely; neither can the economy.

After years of unsustainable growth, the bubble eventually burst in the US housing market, and in 2006 and 2007 property prices collapsed. Since so many financial institutions were invested in the mortgage industry, the crisis affected the entire economy. Like a row of dominoes, financial giants fell one after the other. Governments borrowed huge amounts of money to prop up ailing institutions that had gone first into overshoot and then into collapse. But what if the whole economic system is in overshoot mode and is now unraveling as a consequence?

The bubble of continuing economic growth depends on an ever-increasing input of resources and generates ever-higher levels of toxic waste. The more we push beyond sustainable limits for both of these, the more the unraveling occurs.

Resource Depletion

In 1859, when the first of the US oil fields was discovered in Pennsylvania, the world's population stood at just over a billion people. By 1930 it had doubled, and by 1974, with increased food production from oil-powered agriculture, it doubled again to 4 billion. We are already well on the way to another doubling, with global population passing the 7 billion mark in 2011. It isn't just population that's growing; the spread of modern lifestyles, as discussed above, has amplified our appetites, especially for energy.

In the twentieth century, global consumption of fossil fuels increased twentyfold. Oil has been our dominant fuel, and we are now consuming more than 80 million barrels a day. If we continue at this rate, we will use up available supplies within a few decades.[12] Problems start long before we run out; as oil fields become depleted, the remaining reserves become more difficult and costly to extract. The same is true of the world's supply as a whole. As a result, fuel prices are rising and the age of cheap oil is already behind us.

Each big rise in the price of oil over the last thirty-five years has been followed by a recession, with the price of oil doubling in just twelve months prior to the economic downturn of 2008.[13] When oil production levels move past their peak and into decline (the point referred to as "peak oil"), the inability to meet demand will push prices through the roof.

We're unlikely to be rescued by new oil source discoveries; for the last three decades more oil has been consumed each year than has been found in new reserves. By 2006 that deficit had grown to four barrels used up for every new barrel discovered.[14] What's more, the new reserves are either difficult to reach, as is the case with the deep-water wells over a mile beneath the ocean's surface, or are of much poorer quality, as is the case with the tar sands in Canada.

Our collective oil consumption cannot be sustained. If we don't address this issue, we will be heading for a crash.

Even more crucial to life on our planet, the availability of freshwater is also in decline. A recent United Nations report warns that within twenty years, as much as two-thirds of the world's population could be at risk of water shortages.[15] Industrialization, irrigation, population growth, and modern lifestyles have dramatically increased our water consumption, with water use increasing sixfold during the twentieth century.[16] Climate change has also been a factor, with more rain in some parts of the world but much less in others. Since 1970 severe droughts have increased, and the proportion of the earth's land surface suffering very dry conditions has grown from 15 to 30 percent.[17]

Climate Change

When more people consume more things, we not only deplete resources, but we also produce more waste. The rubbish generated each year in the United States could fill a convoy of garbage trucks long enough to go round the world six times.[18] Not all our waste is so visible: each year, the average European puts out 8.1 tons of carbon dioxide; the average American more than double this.[19] While this greenhouse gas is invisible, its effects are not. Climate change is no longer only a distant threat for future generations: it has arrived in measurable and destructive form.

At the time, the 1980s was the warmest decade ever recorded. The 1990s were even warmer, and the decade starting in 2000 warmer still.[20] Linked to this warming, weather-related disasters (including floods, droughts, and major hurricanes) have increased dramatically: on average, three hundred events were recorded every year in the 1980s, 480 events every year in the 1990s, and 620 events every year in the decade up to 2008. In 2007 there were 874 weather-related disasters worldwide.[21]

As warming causes water to evaporate more quickly, land is drying out so much in some parts of the world that crops are failing and wildfires are becoming more intense. In Brazil, the droughts in 2005 were considered a once-a-century event. Yet the droughts that followed in 2010 were even worse. In Washington State, there has been more forest loss from wildfires in the last ten years than in the previous three decades combined.[22]

At the same time, warmer winds carry more water from the oceans, causing other areas to suffer an increase in flooding and extreme rainfall events. Ronald Neilson, a professor of bioclimatology at Oregon State University, explains: "As the planet warms, more water is getting evaporated from the oceans and all that water has to come down somewhere as precipitation."[23]

In Bangladesh, fourteen inches of rain fell in a single day in 2004, contributing to floods that left 10 million homeless and much of the crop yield destroyed. The floods in Pakistan in 2010 put a fifth of the country underwater, displacing 20 million people.

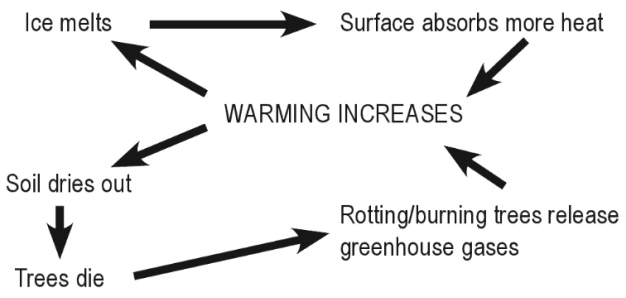
Most of the world's major cities developed as ports bordering the sea or major rivers, and more than 630 million people live less than thirty-three feet above sea level. If the ice sheets in Greenland and West Antarctica continue melting, rising water levels will flood London, New York, Miami, Mumbai, Calcutta, Sydney, Shanghai, Jakarta, Tokyo, and many other major cities.[24] Melting ice is also significant because land and sea surfaces absorb more of the sun's warmth than ice cover does. This creates a vicious cycle (see Box 1.3), in which the more the ice melts, the less it reflects the sun's heat and the warmer it gets, leading to further ice melting.

Forests play a protective role by absorbing carbon dioxide, but as woodlands are chopped down, we lose this crucial process. Tropical trees are additionally at risk because when warmer air dries out the soil beyond a certain point, the ground can no longer support large trees. A global temperature increase of 7.2°F (4°C) could be

enough to kill much of the Amazon rain forest.[25] If this happened, not only would we lose the forest's cooling effect, but the greenhouse gases released from rotting or burning trees would further add to warming, setting off another vicious cycle. The term *runaway climate change* is used to describe this dangerous situation, in which the consequences of warming cause more warming to occur (see Box 1.3). Professor Kevin Anderson of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change warns of the catastrophe this could lead to:

> For humanity, it's a matter of life or death...it's extremely unlikely that we wouldn't have mass death at 4°C. If you have got a population of nine billion by 2050 and you hit 4°C, 5°C or 6°C, you might have half a billion people surviving.[26]

Box 1.3. Amplifying Loops in Runaway Climate Change



Social Division and War

At the moment, the poor of our world are bearing the brunt of the Great Unraveling. As oil prices have gone up, the cost of food has rocketed. Global food prices more than doubled between February 2001 and February 2011, pushing more and more people below

the poverty line.[27] In 2010 more than 900 million people suffered chronic hunger. Meanwhile, the richest 20 percent of our world's population (that's anyone able to spend more than $10 a day) receive three-quarters of the total income.[28]

While some argue that economic growth is needed to tackle poverty, wealth has flowed much more to the rich than to the poor as the global economy has grown. The number of millionaires and billionaires increases, while nearly half the world's population still lives on less than $2.50 a day.[29] Within affluent countries too, the gap between rich and poor has grown wider. Twenty-five years ago, the richest 1 percent in the United States earned 12 percent of the national income and owned 33 percent of the wealth. In 2011 they earned nearly a quarter of the income and owned 40 percent of the wealth.[30] Studies show the more economically divided a society becomes, the more trust levels fall, crime increases, and communities fall apart.[31]

The UN Millennium Project estimates that extreme poverty and world hunger could be eliminated by 2025 for a cost of approximately $160 billion a year.[32] The world's military spending in 2010 was ten times that amount, with the US government spending almost as much as all the other countries in the world put together.[33] The unraveling of our world comes, in part, from seeking security through battling enemies rather than addressing the threats presented by deepening inequalities, resource depletion, and climate change.

Mass Extinction of Species

With rising pollution, habitat destruction, and the disturbance wrought by climate change, the toll on wildlife has been enormous. A third of all amphibians, at least a fifth of all mammals, and an eighth of all bird species are now threatened with extinction. "The Global Biodiversity Outlook," a UN report, concluded:

> In effect, we are currently responsible for the sixth major extinction event in the history of Earth, and the greatest since the dinosaurs disappeared, 65 million years ago.[34]

Some species play critical roles in the healthy functioning of natural systems; we depend on them for our survival. Microscopic plankton in the oceans, for example, is the food that fish depend on; these plankton also produce much of the oxygen we breathe. When carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels is absorbed by the oceans, it makes the seawater more acidic, harming the plankton. The combination of ocean acidity and warming water has already led to a dramatic decline in the global population of plankton.[35] If this decline continues, we don't know at what point it will yield catastrophic consequences — such as the collapse of fish life or a substantial reduction in the oxygen available to us.

THE DOUBLE REALITY

The stories of Business as Usual and the Great Unraveling offer starkly contrasting accounts of the state of our world. They are two different realities coexisting in the same time and space. You probably know people who live in a different story than you. You may also be moving between stories yourself. It's possible to spend part of a day in our own business-as-usual mode, making plans for a future we assume will be much like today. Then something triggers an awareness of the mess we're in, and we recognize in our hearts and minds the crash that lies ahead.

For increasing numbers of people, the crash has come already: homes flooded after extreme rainfall, farms abandoned because of long-term drought, water supplies contaminated and undrinkable, jobs or savings lost. The mainstream reality of Business as Usual is increasingly becoming interrupted by the bad news of the Great Unraveling.

When we first become aware of the grimness of our situation, it can come as quite a shock. Most of these issues are squeezed out of mainstream media, their coverage confined to occasional documentaries or fringe publications. The gaze of the modern press, particularly in the Western world, is more focused on gossip about celebrities. We live, as Al Gore puts it, in a culture of distraction.[36]

When these issues do come up in conversation, they are often met by awkward silences. Two different views commonly block the flow of words. The first dismisses the problem as overblown. This is the voice of the first story that says it's not really that bad. The second perspective fully inhabits the Great Unraveling. This view sees continued decline as so inevitable as to render it not worth talking about. There is a resigned acceptance that things have gone too far, that we can't do anything about them, that we've crossed a point of no return.

The expression *things have gone too far* is another way of saying we are in overshoot. We are too late to prevent the harm already done or to prevent aspects of collapse already well under way. Overfishing has already led to the devastating collapse of many of the world's fisheries. Climate change has already led to an increase in extreme weather events worldwide. Many oil-producing countries (including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia) are already past their production peak, their oil output now in decline.[37] These things have already happened. But we can learn from them and make choices about where we go from here. In their detailed study of the global overshoot in our material economy, environmental scientists Donnella Meadows, Jørgen Randers, and Dennis Meadows write:

> Overshoot can lead to two different outcomes. One is a crash of some kind. Another is a deliberate turnaround, a correction, a careful easing down.... We believe that a correction is possible and that it could lead to a desirable, sustainable,

> sufficient future for all the world's peoples. We also believe that if a profound correction is not made soon, a crash of some sort is certain. And it will occur within the lifetimes of many who are alive today.[38]

The story of Business as Usual is putting us on a collision course with disaster. And by itself, the Great Unraveling can seem like a horror story that overwhelms and defeats, paralyzing us. Fortunately there is a third story, one that is becoming increasingly visible. You are probably already part of it.

THE THIRD STORY: THE GREAT TURNING

In the Agricultural Revolution of ten thousand years ago, the domestication of plants and animals led to a radical shift in the way people lived. In the Industrial Revolution that began just a few hundred years ago, a similar dramatic transition took place. These weren't just changes in the small details of people's lives. The whole basis of society was transformed, including people's relationship with one another and with Earth.

Right now a shift of comparable scope and magnitude is occurring. It's been called the Ecological Revolution, the Sustainability Revolution, even the Necessary Revolution. This is our third story: we call it the Great Turning and see it as the essential adventure of our time. It involves the transition from a doomed economy of industrial growth to a life-sustaining society committed to the recovery of our world. This transition is already well under way.

In the early stages of major transitions, the initial activity might seem to exist only at the fringes. Yet when their time comes, ideas and behaviors become contagious: the more people pass on inspiring perspectives, the more these perspectives catch on. At a certain point, the balance tips and we reach critical mass. Viewpoints and

practices that were once on the margins become the new mainstream.

In the story of the Great Turning, what's catching on is commitment to act for the sake of life on Earth as well as the vision, courage, and solidarity to do so. Social and technical innovations converge, mobilizing people's energy, attention, creativity, and determination, in what Paul Hawken describes as "the largest social movement in history." In his book *Blessed Unrest*, he writes, "I soon realized that my initial estimate of 100,000 organizations was off by at least a factor of ten, and I now believe there are over one — and maybe even two — million organizations working towards ecological sustainability and social justice."[39]

Don't be surprised if you haven't read about this epic transition in major newspapers or seen it reported in other mainstream media. Their focus is usually trained on sudden, discrete events they can point their cameras at. Cultural shifts happen on a different level; they come into view only when we step back enough to see a bigger picture changing over time. A newspaper photograph viewed through a magnifying glass may appear only as tiny dots. When it seems as if our lives and choices are like those dots, it can be difficult to recognize their contribution to a bigger picture of change. We might need to train ourselves to see the larger pattern and recognize how the story of the Great Turning is happening in our time. Once seen, it becomes easier to recognize. And when we name it, this story becomes more real and familiar to us.

As an aid to appreciating the ways you may already be part of this story, we identify three dimensions of the Great Turning. They are mutually reinforcing and equally necessary. For convenience, we've labeled them as first, second, and third dimensions, but that is not to suggest any order of sequence or importance. We can start at any point, and beginning at one naturally leads into either of the

others. It is for each of us to follow our own sense of rightness about where we feel called to act.

The First Dimension: Holding Actions

Holding actions aim to hold back and slow down the damage being caused by the political economy of Business as Usual. The goal is to protect what is left of our natural life-support systems, rescuing what we can of our biodiversity, clean air and water, forests, and topsoil. Holding actions also counter the unraveling of our social fabric, caring for those who have been damaged and safeguarding communities against exploitation, war, starvation, and injustice. Holding actions defend our shared existence and the integrity of life on this, our planet home.

This dimension includes raising awareness of the damage being done, gathering evidence of and documenting the environmental, social, and health impacts of industrial growth. We need the work of scientists, campaigners, and journalists, revealing the links between pollution and rising childhood cancers; fossil fuel consumption and climate disturbance; the availability of cheap products and sweatshop working conditions. Unless these connections are clearly made, it is too easy to go on unconsciously contributing to the unraveling of our world. We become part of the story of the Great Turning when we increase our awareness, seek to learn more, and alert others to the issues we all face.

There are many ways we can act. We can choose to remove our support for behaviors and products we know to be part of the problem. Joining with others, we can add to the strength of campaigns, petitions, boycotts, rallies, legal proceedings, direct actions, and other forms of protest against practices that threaten our world. While holding actions can be frustrating when met with slow progress or defeat, they have also led to important victories. Areas of old-growth forests in Canada, the United States, Poland, and Australia,

for example, have been protected through determined and sustained activism.

Holding actions are essential; they save lives, they save species and ecosystems, they save some of the gene pool for future generations. But by themselves, they are not enough for the Great Turning to occur. For every acre of forest protected, many others are lost to logging or clearance. For every species brought back from the brink, others are lost to extinction. Vital as protest is, relying on it as a sole avenue of change can leave us battle-weary or disillusioned. Along with stopping the damage, we need to replace or transform the systems that cause the harm. This is the work of the second dimension.

The Second Dimension: Life-Sustaining Systems and Practices

If you look for it, you can find evidence that our civilization is being reinvented all around us. Previously accepted approaches to healthcare, business, education, agriculture, transportation, communication, psychology, economics, and so many other areas are being questioned and transformed. This is the second strand of the Great Turning, and it involves a rethinking of the way we do things, as well as a creative redesign of the structures and systems that make up our society.

The financial crisis in 2008 caused many to start questioning our banking system. In a poll that year, over half those interviewed said interest rates used to be their main concern, but now they also considered other factors, such as where the money was invested and what it was doing.[40] Alongside this shift in thinking, new types of banks, like Triodos Bank, are rewriting the rules of finance by operating on the model of "triple return." In this model investments bring not only financial return but also social and environmental benefits. The more people put their savings into this kind of investment, the more funds become available for enterprises that aim for greater benefits than just making money. This in turn fuels

the development of a new economic sector based on the triple bottom line. These investments have proved to be remarkably stable at a time of economic turbulence, putting ethical banks in a strong financial position.

One area benefiting from such investment is the agricultural sector, which has seen a swing to environmentally and socially responsible practices. Concerned about the toxic effects of pesticides and other chemicals used in industrial farming, large numbers of people have switched to buying and eating organic produce. Fair-trade initiatives improve the working conditions of producers, while community supported agriculture (CSA) and farmers' markets cut food miles by increasing the availability of local produce. In these and other areas, strong, green shoots are sprouting, as new organizational systems grow out of the visionary question, "Is there a better way to do things — one that brings benefits rather than causing harm?" In some areas, like green building, design principles that were considered on the fringe a few years ago are now finding widespread acceptance.

When we support and participate in these emerging strands of a life-sustaining culture, we become part of the Great Turning. Through our choices about how to travel, where to shop, what to buy, and how to save, we shape the development of this new economy. Social enterprises, micro-energy projects, community teach-ins, sustainable agriculture, and ethical financial systems all contribute to the rich patchwork quilt of a life-sustaining society. By themselves, however, they are not enough. These new structures won't take root and survive without deeply ingrained values to sustain them. This is the work of the third dimension of the Great Turning.

The Third Dimension: Shift in Consciousness

What inspires people to embark on projects or support campaigns that are not of immediate personal benefit? At the core of our consciousness is a wellspring of caring and compassion; this aspect of

ourselves — which we might think of as our *connected self* — can be nurtured and developed. We can deepen our sense of belonging in the world. Like trees extending their root system, we can grow in connection, thus allowing ourselves to draw from a deeper pool of strength, accessing the courage and intelligence we so greatly need right now. This dimension of the Great Turning arises from shifts taking place in our hearts, our minds, and our views of reality. It involves insights and practices that resonate with venerable spiritual traditions, while in alignment with revolutionary new understandings from science.

A significant event in this part of the story is the *Apollo 8* spaceflight of December 1968. Because of this mission to the moon, and the photos it produced, humanity had its first sighting of Earth as a whole. Twenty years earlier, the astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle had said, "Once a photograph of the Earth taken from the outside is available, a new idea as powerful as any in history will be let loose."[41] Bill Anders, the astronaut who took those first photos, commented, "We came all this way to explore the moon and the most important thing is that we discovered the Earth."[42]

We are among the first in human history to have had this remarkable view. It came at the same time as the development in science of a radical new understanding of how our world works. Looking at our planet as a whole, Gaia theory proposes that the Earth functions as a self-regulating living system.

During the past forty years, those Earth photos, along with Gaia theory and environmental challenges, have provoked the emergence of a new way of thinking about ourselves. No longer just citizens of this country or that, we are discovering a deeper collective identity. As many indigenous traditions have taught for generations, we are part of the Earth.

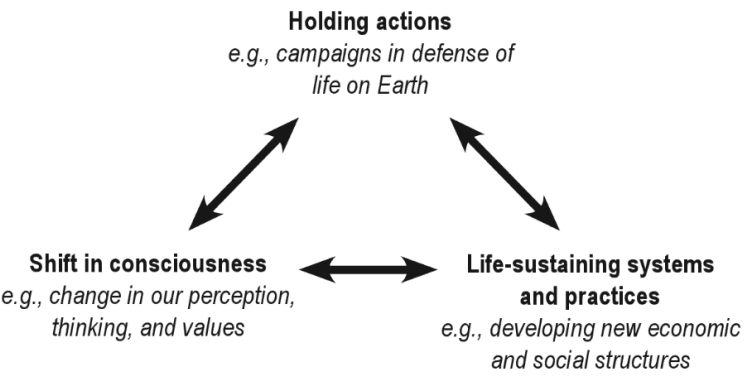
A shift in consciousness is taking place, as we move into a larger landscape of what we are. With this evolutionary jump comes a

beautiful convergence of two areas previously thought to clash: science and spirituality. The awareness of a deeper unity connecting us lies at the heart of many spiritual traditions; insights from modern science point in a similar direction. We live at a time when a new view of reality is emerging, where spiritual insight and scientific discovery both contribute to our understanding of ourselves as intimately interwoven with our world.

We take part in this third dimension of the Great Turning when we pay attention to the inner frontier of change, to the personal and spiritual development that enhances our capacity and desire to act for our world. By strengthening our compassion, we give fuel to our courage and determination. By refreshing our sense of belonging in the world, we widen the web of relationships that nourishes us and protects us from burnout. In the past, changing the self and changing the world were often regarded as separate endeavors and viewed in either-or terms. But in the story of the Great Turning, they are recognized as mutually reinforcing and essential to one another (see Box 1.4).

Box 1.4. The Three Dimensions of the Great Turning

These are happening simultaneously and are mutually reinforcing:



Active Hope and the Story of Our Lives

Future generations will look back at the time we are living in now. The kind of future they look from, and the story they tell about our period, will be shaped by choices we make in our lifetimes. The most telling choice of all may well be the story we live from and see ourselves participating in. It sets the context of our lives in a way that influences all our other decisions.

In choosing our story, we not only cast our vote of influence over the kind of world future generations inherit, but we also affect our own lives in the here and now. When we find a good story and fully give ourselves to it, that story can act through us, breathing new life into everything we do. When we move in a direction that touches our heart, we add to the momentum of deeper purpose that makes us feel more alive. A great story and a satisfying life share a vital element: a compelling plot that moves toward meaningful goals, where what is at stake is far larger than our personal gains and losses. The Great Turning is such a story.

stories often go. There may be times when all feels lost. That too can be part of the story. Our choices at such moments can make a crucial difference.

The Thread of Active Hope

Any situation we face can resolve in a range of different ways — some much better, others much worse. Active Hope involves identifying the outcomes we hope for and then playing an active role in bringing them about. We don't wait until we are sure of success. We don't limit our choices to the outcomes that seem likely. Instead, we focus on what we truly, deeply long for, and then we proceed to take determined steps in that direction. This is the second thread we follow.

We can react to world crises in many different ways, with a spectrum of possible responses, from our best to our worst. We can rise to the occasion with wisdom, courage, and care, or we can shrink from the challenge, blot it out, or look away. With Active Hope we consciously choose to draw out our best responses, so that we might surprise even ourselves by what we bring forth. Can we train ourselves to become more courageous, inspired, and connected? This takes us to the next thread.

The Thread of the Spiral of the Work That Reconnects

The spiral of the Work That Reconnects is something we can come back to again and again as a source of strength and fresh insights. It reminds us that we are larger, stronger, deeper, and more creative than we have been brought up to believe. It maps out an empowerment process that journeys through four successive movements, or stations, described as Coming from Gratitude, Honoring Our Pain for the World, Seeing with New Eyes, and Going Forth.

When we come from gratitude, we become more present to the wonder of being alive in this amazing living world, to the many gifts we receive, to the beauty we appreciate. Yet the very act of looking at what we love and value in our world brings with it an awareness of the vast violation under way, the despoliation and unraveling. From gratitude we naturally flow to honoring our pain for the world.

Coming from gratitude helps build a context of trust and psychological buoyancy that supports us to face difficult realities in the second phase. Dedicating time and attention to honoring our pain for the world ensures that there is space to hear our sorrow, grief, outrage, and any other feelings revealing themselves in response to what is happening to our world. Admitting the depths of our anguish, even to ourselves, takes us into culturally forbidden territory. From an early age we've been told to pull ourselves together, to cheer up or shut up. By honoring our pain for the world, we break through the taboos that silence our distress. When the activating siren of inner alarm is no longer muffled or shut out, something gets switched on inside us. It is our survival response.

The term *honoring* implies a respectful welcoming, where we recognize the value of something. Our pain for the world not only alerts us to danger but also reveals our profound caring. And this caring derives from our interconnectedness with all life. We need not fear it.

In the third stage, we step further into the perceptual shift that recognizes our pain for the world as a healthy expression of our belonging to life. Seeing with new eyes reveals the wider web of resources available to us through our rootedness within a deeper, ecological self. This third stage draws on insights from holistic science and ancient spiritual wisdom, as well as from our creative imaginations. It opens us to a new view of what is possible and a new understanding of our power to make a difference.

To experience the benefits of these empowering perspectives, we want to apply them to the task of addressing the challenges we face. The final station, Going Forth, involves clarifying our vision of how we can act for the healing of our world, identifying practical steps that move our vision forward (see Fig. 2).

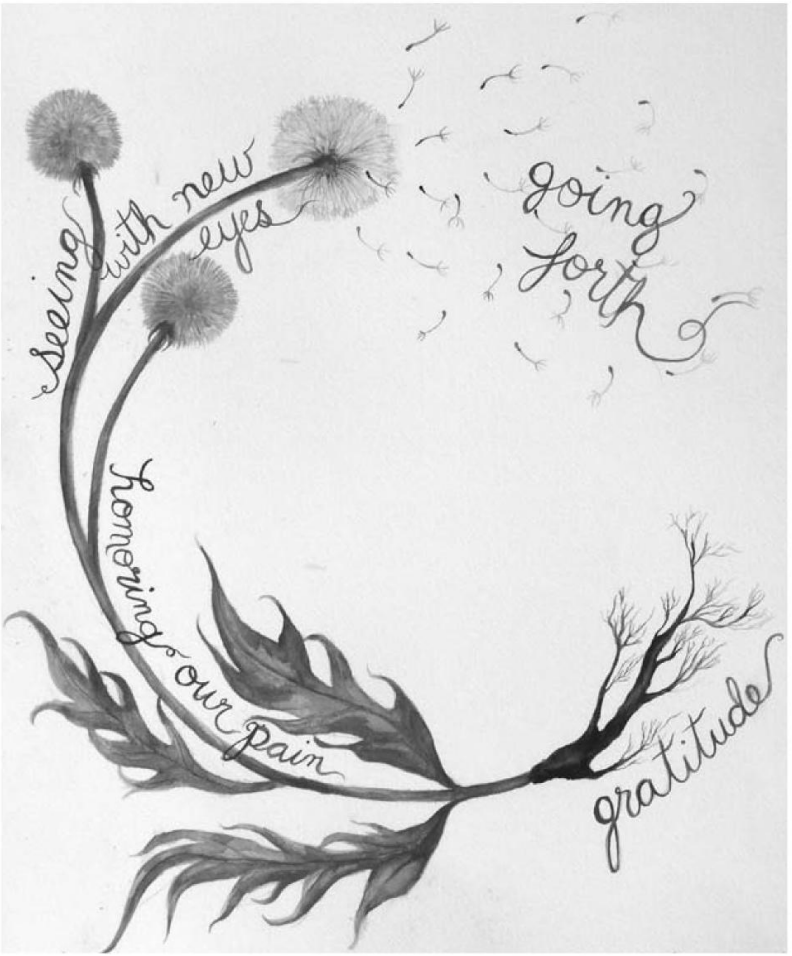


Figure 2. The spiral of the Work That Reconnects

The spiral offers a transformational journey that deepens our capacity to act for the sake of life on Earth. We call it a spiral rather than a cycle because every time we move through the four stations we experience them differently. Each element reconnects us with our world, and each encounter can surprise us with hidden gems. As each station naturally unfolds into the next, a momentum and a flow build up, allowing the four elements to work together to form a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. As we allow ourselves to be guided by this spiral form, it isn't just us acting; we are letting the world act on us and through us.

THE WORK THAT RECONNECTS AS A PERSONAL PRACTICE

The spiral provides a structure we can fall back on, and into, whenever we need to tap into the resilience and resourcefulness arising from the larger web of life. If you're feeling sickened by a disturbing news report, you can step into gratitude simply by focusing on your breath and taking a moment to give thanks for whatever may be sustaining you in that moment. As you feel the air entering your nostrils, give thanks for oxygen, for your lungs, for all that brings you to life. The question, "To whom am I grateful?" moves your attention beyond yourself to those you receive from, those who support you.

A moment of gratitude strengthens your capacity to look at, rather than turn away from, disturbing information. As you allow yourself to take in whatever you see, allow yourself also to feel whatever you feel. When you experience pain for something beyond your immediate self-interest, this reveals your caring, compassion, and connection — such precious things. By honoring your pain for the world, in whatever form it takes, you take it seriously and allow the signal it brings to rouse you.

When seeing with new eyes, you know that it isn't just you facing this. You are just one part of a much larger story, a continuing

stream of life on Earth that has flowed for more than three and a half billion years and that has survived five mass extinctions. When you sink into this deeper, stronger flow and experience yourself as part of it, a different set of possibilities emerges. Widening your vision increases the resources available to you, since through the same channels of connectedness that pain for the world flows, so also do strength, courage, renewed determination, and the help of allies.

With the shift of perception that seeing with new eyes brings, you can let go of feeling you need to sort everything out. Instead you focus on finding and playing your part, offering your gift of Active Hope, your best contribution to the healing of our world. As you move into going forth, you consider what this might be, and what your next step will be. Then you take that step.

What we've described here is a short form of the spiral that might only take a few minutes to move round. Like a fractal that has the same characteristic shape whatever scale it is viewed at, the form of the spiral can be applied to a wide range of time frames, with rotations happening over minutes, hours, days, or weeks. We move through the four stations in a way that supports our intention to act for the sake of life on Earth. The more familiar you become with this strengthening journey, the more you can trust the spiral structure process. Each of these stations contains hidden depths, rich meaning, and treasures to explore. It is to these that we turn in the chapters ahead.

to bed, you ask yourself, "What happened today that I'm pleased about or thankful for?" that question will direct your gaze. You start searching your memory for moments that bring a smile to your face or that trigger a glow of appreciation. They might be small things, such as a conversation with a friend, a moment watching a bird in flight, or the satisfaction of completing a task. When we're busy, moments like these can too easily pass us by. Keeping a gratitude diary builds them into a pool of memories we can keep dipping back into.

When we get into the habit of keeping this kind of journal, we train our minds to notice the upside of life more easily and quickly. Experiencing gratitude is a learnable skill that improves with practice. It isn't dependent on things going well or on receiving favors from others. It's about getting better at spotting what's already there.

TRY THIS: A GRATITUDE PRACTICE

Notice: Scan your recent memories and identify something that's happened in the last twenty-four hours that you're pleased about. It doesn't have to be anything big, just something that makes you think, "I'm glad that happened."

Savor: Close your eyes and imagine that you are experiencing that moment again. Notice colors, tastes, sounds, smells, and the sensations in your body. Notice also how you feel in yourself.

Give thanks: Who or what helped this moment to happen? Was anyone (or anything) else involved? If so, think of them and imagine expressing your thanks.

There are two sides to gratitude: the first is appreciation, where you're valuing something that has happened, and the second is attribution, where you're recognizing the role of someone or something else in bringing it about. Even when you're grateful to yourself, it is likely that others played a role in your development of the skill, strength, or quality you used. Gratitude is a social emotion. It points our warmth and goodwill out toward others.

Gratitude Builds Trust and Generosity

Think of the people you trust. Do you also feel grateful toward them or suspect they feel gratitude toward you? Gratitude feeds trust, because it helps us acknowledge the times we've been able to count on one another. Not surprisingly, research shows we're more likely to help those we feel grateful to, leading to a positive spiral of helping, gratitude, trust, and cooperation.[4] Because of this, gratitude plays a key role in the evolution of cooperative behavior and societies.

When gratitude levels are high, not only are we more inclined to return favors, but we're also more likely to assist complete strangers. In the 1970s American psychologist Alice Isen demonstrated this in an experiment in which coins were left in public phone booths so that the next person using them would get a free call.[5] When the person had finished and was leaving the phone booth, one of the experimenters appeared to accidentally drop a file of papers just in front of the subject. This process was repeated near phone boxes that hadn't been primed with coins. People receiving the unexpected lucky gift of a free phone call were much more likely to help the experimenter pick up her papers. This experiment, and a host of others like it, suggests that our willingness to act on behalf of others isn't just attributable to some people being good-natured and others less so. Our readiness to help others is influenced by the level of gratitude we experience.

GRATITUDE AS AN ANTIDOTE TO CONSUMERISM

While gratitude leads to increased happiness and life satisfaction, materialism — placing a higher value on material possessions than on meaningful relationships — has the opposite effect. In reviewing the research, psychologists Emily Polak and Michael McCullough conclude: "The pursuit of wealth and possessions as an end unto itself is associated with lower levels of well-being, lower life satisfaction and happiness, more symptoms of depression and anxiety, more physical problems such as headaches, and a variety of mental disorders."[6]

Affluenza is a term used to describe the emotional distress that arises from a preoccupation with possessions and appearance. Psychologist Oliver James views it as a form of psychological virus that infects our thinking and is transmitted by television, glossy magazines, and advertisements. The toxic belief at the core of this condition is that happiness is based on how we look and what we have. If we compare our appearance or wealth to that of the models and millionaires on prime-time television, it is easy to feel we don't measure up so well. James comments, "Since programmes are saturated with exceptionally attractive people living abnormally opulent lives, expectations of what is 'normal' are raised."[7]

When women were asked to rate their self-esteem and satisfaction with their appearance, measures for both fell after the women looked at photos of models in women's magazines.[8] How we feel depends so much on what we compare ourselves to, and an increase in eating disorders is one of the consequences of having thin models as a reference group. In 1995, the year television was introduced to Fiji, there were no recorded cases of bulimia on the island. Yet within three years, 11 percent of young Fijian women were found to be suffering from this eating disorder.[9]

Gratitude is about delighting in and feeling satisfied with what you're already experiencing. The advertising industry aims to undermine this by convincing you that you're missing something. On

a website for marketing professionals, the advertiser's Law of Dissatisfaction is described like this:

> The job of advertisers is to create dissatisfaction in its audience. If people are happy with how they look, they are not going to buy cosmetics or diet books....If people are happy with who they are, where they are in life, and what they got, they just aren't customer potential — that is, unless you make them unhappy.
>
> Most cosmetic advertisements feature beautiful women, igniting the promise that you too can look like a drop-dead glorious model if only you use the product. This approach is based on showing an ideal that the audience will undoubtedly be unable to stack up against. The audience, after seeing what they could look like, is no longer happy with what they do look like, and they are now motivated to buy into the promise of change.[10]

Each year, more than four hundred billion dollars are spent on advertising that pushes the message "buy this, and your life will improve." Yet even though people in materially rich countries buy many more things than they did fifty years ago, surveys show they are less happy (see Box 3.1).[11] Depression has reached epidemic proportions, with one in two people in the Western world likely to suffer a significant episode at some point in their lives.[12] The consumer lifestyle isn't just wrecking our world; it is also making us miserable. Can gratitude play a role in our rehabilitation?

Box 3.1. Ponder Point

More resources have been consumed in the last fifty years than in all preceding human history.[13] Yet we're not any happier, and depression has reached epidemic proportions.

In looking at what drives materialism, researcher Tim Kasser identifies two main factors: feelings of insecurity and exposure to social models expressing materialistic values.[14] Gratitude, by promoting feelings of trust, helps counter insecurity. By making us more likely to return favors and help others, it also encourages us to act in ways that strengthen the networks of support around us. As Polak and McCullough point out, "Gratitude alerts us that there are people out there with our well-being in mind and it motivates us to deepen our own reservoirs of social capital through reciprocation."[15]

Gratitude and materialism offer different stories about what we need in order to feel secure. With materialism, security is based on having the right things: we know what these right things are by keeping an eye on our neighbors and on current fashions. Insecurity grows when we feel we're falling behind, and pressure builds to "keep up with the Joneses" in a way that further drives consumption.

Gratitude pulls us out of this rat race. It shifts our focus from what's missing to what's there. If we were to design a cultural therapy that protected us from depression and, at the same time, helped reduce consumerism, it would surely include cultivating our ability to experience gratitude. Training ourselves in the skill of gratitude is part of the Great Turning.

TRY THIS: OPEN SENTENCES ON GRATITUDE

Read the following beginnings of sentences, and see what words seem to naturally follow. You can think this to yourself, or put it in writing, or try it with a partner, taking turns to speak and listen. It is worth devoting a few minutes or more to each sentence. Whenever you're not sure what to say, come back to the beginning of the sentence and see what naturally follows — it may be different each time you do this.

is among the most highly prized of victories. If we can stand on our own two feet, why give thanks to the beans and the corn? Yet the notion that we can be completely independent or self-made denies the reality of our reliance on other people and on our natural world.

The Haudenosaunee see humans as interconnected parts of a larger web of life, where each being is uniquely valuable. Crops, trees, rivers, and the sun are respected and thanked as fellow beings in a larger community of mutual aid. If you have this view of life, you don't tear down the forests or pollute the rivers. Instead, as their "Basic Call to Consciousness" describes, you accept other life-forms as part of your extended family. "We are shown that our life exists with the tree life, that our well-being depends on the well-being of the Vegetable Life, that we are close relatives of the four-legged beings."[17]

The Haudenosaunee's expressions of thanksgiving are "the words that come before all else" and precede every council meeting. Instead of being reserved for a special day each year, thanksgiving becomes a way of life.

Gratitude Motivates Us to Act for Our World

What is striking about their thanksgiving prayers is that the Haudenosaunee don't focus on possessions or personal good fortune. Rather, the emphasis is on the blessings we all receive because they are part of our natural world. While the expressions of gratitude are delivered spontaneously in people's own words, the order and format follow a traditional structure. A version of the thanksgiving address has been published by the Mohawks, one of the six nations of the Haudenosaunee, and begins like this:

The People

> Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance

and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as People.
Now our minds are one.

The Earth Mother

We are all thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to care for us as she has from the beginning of time.
To our Mother, we send greetings and thanks.
Now our minds are one.[18]

The other verses in turn give thanks to the waters of the world; the fish life in the water; the varied vastness of plant life; the food plants from the garden; the medicine herbs of the world; the animal life; the trees; the birds, "who each day remind us to enjoy and appreciate life"; the four winds; the thunder beings of thunder and lightning, "who bring with them the water that renews life"; our eldest brother, the Sun; our oldest Grandmother, the moon, "who governs the movement of the ocean tides"; the stars "spread across the sky like jewelry"; Enlightened Teachers; the Creator or Great Spirit; and finally to anything forgotten or not yet named. Thanksgivings like this deepen our instinctual knowledge that we belong to a larger web and have an essential role to play in its well-being. As Haudenosaunee Chief Leon Shenandoah said in his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1985, "Every human being has a sacred duty to protect the welfare of our mother earth from whom all life comes."[19]

Different stories give us different purposes. In the Business as Usual model, nearly everything is privatized. The parts of our world remaining outside individual or corporate ownership, such as

the air or the oceans, are not seen as our responsibility. Gratitude is viewed as politeness, not necessity. In their "Basic Call to Consciousness," the Haudenosaunee tell a very different story, one in which our well-being depends on our natural world and gratitude keeps us to our purpose of taking care of life. When we forget this, the larger ecology we depend on gets lost from our sight — and the world unravels.

The Modern Science of Gaia Theory

The skill side of gratitude involves recognizing and valuing benefits we might have previously ignored. New information makes a difference; our gratitude to others, and our enthusiasm to help them, can suddenly grow if we discover they have done us a great favor. You might think of examples of this from your own life, perhaps times you've felt warmer toward someone after hearing of support provided to you. This same principle holds true in our relationship with our world.

Just as we depend on plants for food, we also rely on them to make air breathable. Our two neighboring planets, Mars and Venus, have atmospheres that would kill us in a few minutes, and we've only recently discovered that Earth's atmosphere used to be similar. Three billion years ago, our planet's air, like that of Mars and Venus, had much more carbon dioxide and hardly any oxygen.[20] Over the next 2 billion years or so, early plant life did us the remarkable service of making our atmosphere breathable by adding an abundance of oxygen and removing much of the carbon dioxide.

Oxygen is a highly reactive gas, which wouldn't normally be expected to exist at levels as high as the 20 percent we have now. It was the chemically unlikely fact that oxygen has remained at this level for hundreds of millions of years that led British scientist James Lovelock to develop the early ideas of Gaia theory. Here is how he described his moment of insight:

> An awesome thought came to me. The Earth's atmosphere was an extraordinary and unstable mixture of gases, yet I knew that it was constant in composition over quite long periods of time. Could it be that life on Earth not only made the atmosphere, but also regulated it — keeping it at a constant composition, and at a level favourable for organisms?[21]

The core tenet of Gaia theory is that our planet is a self-regulating system. There's a parallel here to the way our bodies keep arterial oxygen and temperature levels stable or the way termite colonies maintain their internal temperature and humidity. Living systems have the capacity to keep themselves in balance. Gaia theory shows how life looks after itself, different species acting together to maintain the balance of nature. In addition to maintaining oxygen levels, life plays a role in regulating the salinity of the sea and the dynamics of our climate.

As stars grow older, they tend to burn brighter. Because of this, it is estimated that our sun now puts out at least 25 percent more heat than it did when life began on Earth three and a half billion years ago.[22] Yet has our planet also gotten 25 percent hotter? Human life wouldn't exist if it had. And we have plant life to thank for this. By absorbing carbon dioxide, plants reduce the greenhouse effect of this gas, keeping the planetary temperature within a range suitable for complex life such as ours.

GIVING BACK AND GIVING FORWARD

A timber executive once remarked that when he looked at a tree, all he saw was a pile of money on a stump. Compare this with the Haudenosaunee view that trees should be treated with gratitude and respect. If we saw trees as allies that helped us, we would want to become allies to them. This dynamic pulls us into a cycle of regeneration, in which we take what we need to live and also give back.

Because our modern industrialized culture has forgotten this principle of reciprocity, forests continue to shrink and deserts to grow. To counter this unraveling, let's develop an ecological intelligence that recognizes how our personal well-being depends on the well-being of the natural world. Gratitude plays an important role in this.

Try This: Thanking What Supports You to Live

Next time you see a tree or plant, take a moment to express thanks. With each breath you take in, experience gratitude for the oxygen that would simply not be there save for the magnificent work plants have done in transforming our atmosphere and making it breathable. As you look at all the greenery, bear in mind also that plants, by absorbing carbon dioxide and reducing the greenhouse effect, have saved our world from becoming dangerously overheated. Without plants and all they do for us, we would not be alive today. Consider how you would like to express your thanks.

The carbon dioxide released when we burn fossil fuels puts back into the atmosphere the gas that ancient plants removed hundreds of millions of years ago. By burning fossil fuels we are reversing one of the planet's cooling mechanisms, and temperatures are rising. Present-day forests make their contribution to planetary cooling not just through absorbing carbon dioxide but also through helping clouds to form. When tropical forests are chopped down, the local climate becomes hotter and drier, making it more difficult for trees to grow again. Tropical forests like the Amazon are under threat not only from deforestation but also from drought related to climate change. They need our help, just as we need theirs.

him, and could smell the foul stench of his wound, he acted as if nothing was wrong.

The next morning, Parsifal woke up to find that the king, his courtiers, and the entire castle had disappeared. Setting off, he eventually found his way out of the wasteland and made it back to King Arthur's court. A feast was held to mark the return of this much-admired knight. The celebration was interrupted by the dramatic entrance of a hideous but wise witch called Cundrie. She publicly scolded Parsifal for lacking the compassion to ask about the suffering of the Fisher King and his people.

"You call yourself a knight," Cundrie cried out. "Look at you! You didn't even have the guts to ask what was going on."

Haunted by Cundrie's accusations and his own feelings of failure, Parsifal fell into a depression. He finally realized he had to return to the court of the Fisher King. It took many years, and many adventures, to find the mysterious castle again. When he did, he found the king in a state of even greater suffering.

This time Parsifal strode right up to the king and knelt before him. "My lord, what aileth thee?" he asked. That Parsifal cared enough to ask this question had an immediate and powerful effect. Color returned to the cheeks of the king, who rose from his couch, his health regained. In the same moment, the wasteland began once again to bloom. The spell was broken.

Parsifal's story, which is part of the legend of the Holy Grail, was put into writing more than eight hundred years ago.[1] Yet the situation it describes, one of great suffering not being acknowledged and of people carrying on as if nothing were wrong, is easily recognizable today. The question "What aileth thee?" or its modern equivalent, "What troubles you?" invites people to express

their concern and anguish. There are all kinds of reasons why this question doesn't get asked, and why, like Parsifal, we sometimes find ourselves caught up in the pretense that all is well, even when we know it isn't. When this happens in relation to the state of our world, as it so often does, our survival response becomes blocked. This chapter explores what gets in the way of acknowledging disturbing realities and looks at how honoring our pain for the world can break the spell that maintains Business as Usual.

Understanding the Blocked Response

A key survival mechanism in our response to danger is the activation of alarm. A fire chief once remarked that when a building burns, the people most at risk are not those who panic, who tend to get out quickly, but those who, not having grasped the emergency, sort through their possessions deciding which to save. With this in mind, psychologists Bibb Latané and John Darley carried out a study examining factors that influence our response to potential danger.[2]

In the study volunteer subjects were asked to wait in a room and fill out a questionnaire. While they were at work, a steady stream of smokelike vapor started pouring in through a vent in the wall and filling the room. If individuals were in the room alone, they responded quickly, leaving the room and looking for help. But when several people sat in the room together, they looked to see how others responded. If they saw others remaining calm and continuing to fill in their questionnaires, they were more likely to do so too. Even when the room became so smoky that it was difficult to see, and some subjects were coughing or rubbing their eyes, most persisted with their questionnaires. More than two-thirds continued for a full six minutes before they were "rescued" by one of the researchers.

This experiment serves as a metaphor for our responses to planetary emergency. If the smoke represents disturbing information, filling out the questionnaire is like continuing with Business as

Usual. If we are to survive as a species, we need to understand how our active responses to danger get blocked and also how we can prevent this from happening. What gets in our way of noticing the smoke? Often we experience an inner tension between the impulse to do something and the resistance to it. There are many varieties of resistance. Here are seven common ones:

1. I don't believe it's that dangerous.

When the researchers interviewed the people who had not responded to the smoke, a common reason given by the subjects was that they didn't believe there was a fire. They had developed another explanation for the smoke that led them to discount it as a cause of alarm. That this happened so much more when the subjects saw others ignoring the smoke demonstrates how powerfully influenced we are by what we see others doing. We see this same dynamic at play with global events as well: if we learn some disturbing information about an issue but see most people acting as if it is no big deal, then it is easier to believe the problem can't be that serious.

Corporate-controlled media amplifies this effect. How often, for example, have you seen characters in TV soaps, sitcoms, or dramas express concern about the condition of our world? Most major television stations and newspapers are owned by a tiny number of corporations, and their main source of revenue is advertising. Their commercial goal is to present audiences to advertisers. People are allowed to be disturbed by world events just enough to keep them interested but not so much as to put them off from buying things. As a result, crucial information about the unraveling of our world is omitted or downplayed in news reports. When, for example, the World Meteorological Organization announced in December 2009 that the decade 2000–2009 was on track to be the warmest on record, the managing editor of Fox News sent the following email directive to news teams and producers:

> We should refrain from asserting that the planet has warmed (or cooled) in any given period without IMMEDIATELY pointing out that such theories are based upon data that critics have called into question. It is not our place as journalists to assert such notions as facts.[3]

2. It isn't my role to sort this out.

The individualism of Business as Usual creates a sharp dividing line between our problems and those of other people and an even sharper line between the concerns of humans and those of other species. "What happens to polar bears is really not my responsibility," said Martin, a neighbor, when discussing climate change. This fragmentation of responsibility, with its diminishing care for our world, is the dominant mode in industrialized societies. In this view, the world is divided into separate pieces, and we're only responsible for the pieces we own, control, or inhabit. We may take great care of our backyards but view anything beyond the end of the street as someone else's problem.

3. I don't want to stand out from the crowd.

When Joanna first heard the shocking news that President Kennedy had been assassinated, she was standing in the checkout line at a supermarket. Although the radio announcement had been clearly audible, people carried on shopping as if nothing had happened. Joanna, like everyone else, remained passively in line without speaking. Despite her inner response of shock and horror, she kept quiet because she didn't want to stand out from the crowd.

If we're alarmed by something but no one else seems to be, then we risk drawing attention to ourselves if we express our concern. Keeping quiet protects us from the discomfort of standing out. This invisible pressure to conform is both subtle and powerful. It

can even lead us to doubt our perceptions, for if no one else is acknowledging a problem, perhaps we've got it wrong.

By naming an issue, we bring it into the open. By doing so we disturb the status quo, since it is more difficult to ignore a problem once it has been acknowledged. Whistle-blowers are often blamed for the inconvenience of being forced to address previously ignored problems. When speaking out is risky, a climate of fear can lead to a culture of collusion. Tony, a participant in one of our courses, described his experience of working in a large corporation: "In my work, it is common practice to leave your conscience at the door. Questioning company policy is viewed as disloyalty; it could threaten your career." Especially at a time of job insecurity, the fear of being labeled a troublemaker discourages the expression of alarm and disturbing information.

4. This information threatens my commercial or political interests.

Throughout the 1990s Thailand's chief meteorologist, Mr. Smith Thammasaroj, gave repeated warnings about the risk of a tsunami to the country's southwest coast.[4] For decades he had studied the relationship between underwater earthquakes and these giant tidal waves; he was so concerned that he recommended beachside hotels in the coastal provinces of Phuket, Phang Nga, and Krabi be fitted with tsunami alarms. His cautions were seen as harmful to the tourist trade, he was sidelined from his job, and his recommendations were ignored. On December 26, 2004, an underwater earthquake off Sumatra led to a massive tsunami striking the very regions he had warned about. In one of the worst disasters in recorded history, more than 5,000 died in Thailand and more than 225,000 in thirteen other countries.

Before the tsunami struck, Mr Thammasaroj, accused of scaremongering, was even banned from some of the provinces he had been trying to protect. One way we resist information we don't

three are linked to the ghastly realization that things are so much worse than we'd thought.

We can exist in both these realities at the same time — going about our normal lives in the mode of Business as Usual while also remaining painfully aware of the multifaceted crisis unfolding around us. Living in this double reality creates a split in our mind. It is as though one part of our brain operates on the default assumption that things are fine, while another part knows full well they are not. One way of dealing with the confusion and agony of this splitting is to push the crisis out of view. This is like carrying on with the questionnaire and trying not to think about the smoke. But this way of living is difficult to sustain, particularly as the condition of our world continues to worsen.

It is difficult even to talk about this. There are taboos in normal conversation that block the discussion of anything considered too depressing. When we feel dread about what may lie ahead, outrage at what is happening to our planet, or sadness about what has already been lost, it is likely that we have nowhere to take these feelings. As a result, we tend to keep them to ourselves and suffer in isolation. If people see us keeping quiet, not mentioning the crisis, then just like in the smoke-filled room, they'll be more likely to keep their mouths shut as well. Yet if we reveal our distress, and name the horrors we see, we're likely to be called overly negative or too emotional.

We can be caught between two fears — the fear of what will happen if we, as a society, continue the way we're going and the fear of acknowledging how bad things are because of the despair that doing so brings up. If we listen to the first fear, it can provoke responses that aid our survival; but to benefit from this wake-up call, we need to free ourselves from the stifling effect of the second fear. There are ways to do this.

More than thirty years ago, an approach was developed that

helps people respond creatively to world crises rather than feeling overwhelmed or paralyzed by distress. As with grief work, facing our distress doesn't make it disappear. Instead, when we do face it, we are able to place our distress within a larger landscape that gives it a different meaning. Rather than feeling afraid of our pain for the world, we learn to feel strengthened by it.

When first developed by Joanna in the late 1970s, this approach, which largely involves working with groups in a structured workshop format, was known as "despair and empowerment work." Because it deepens our relationship with the web of life, the term "deep ecology workshops" has also been used. Since the late 1990s, this approach has been known as the Work That Reconnects. The principles and practices can be applied not just to workshops but also to education, psychotherapy, community organizing, and spiritual practice. At the heart of this approach lies a different way of thinking about our pain for the world.

Pain for the World Is Normal, Healthy, and Widespread

Many years ago, a therapist told Joanna that her concerns about bulldozers flattening the forests stemmed from her fear of her libido. This tendency to reduce our distress about planetary conditions to some kind of psychological problem or neurosis is common. Our anguish and alarm about what we're doing to our world are viewed as symptoms to be treated or as markers of an underlying personal issue. Self-help groups have not been immune to this approach: a recovering alcoholic, mentioning his fears for our world in his support group, found himself challenged with the question, "What are you running away from in your own life that you bring up such concerns?"

Drawing on her doctoral studies exploring convergences between Buddhist philosophy and systems theory, Joanna saw that the meaning we give to our emotional responses is of central importance. The perception of radical interconnectedness found in both Buddhism and

systems thinking supports a reframing of our distress about world conditions. It helps us recognize how healthy a reaction this distress is and how necessary it is for our survival. A central principle of the Work That Reconnects is that *pain for the world*, a phrase that covers a range of feelings, including outrage, alarm, grief, guilt, dread, and despair, is a normal, healthy response to a world in trauma.

In Buddhism, as in other major world religions, open alertness that allows our heart to be stirred by the suffering of others is appreciated as a strength. Indeed, in every spiritual tradition, compassion, which literally means "to suffer with," is prized as an essential and noble capacity. This ability is evidence of our interconnectedness with all life.

The concept of "negative feedback loops" from systems theory helps us recognize how this ability to suffer with our world is essential for our survival. We navigate through life by paying attention to information, or feedback, that tells us when we are off course and by responding with a course correction. This dynamic process loops continually: stray off course, notice this, make a response that brings us back on course, stray off course again, notice this, come back on course (see Fig. 4). Since this process functions to diminish the degree to which one is off course, it is called a negative feedback loop.

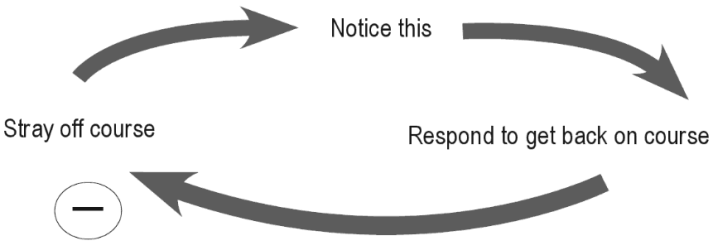


Figure 4. A negative feedback loop:
Each response reduces deviation from chosen course.

It is through loops like this that living systems keep themselves in balance. For example, if we feel too cold, we might respond by putting on a jacket. If after a while we feel too hot, we take the jacket off. If a roomful of people start to feel too hot, someone might open a window. In this case, the system of the group acts through its members to keep the room temperature comfortable.

How would we notice if we were straying off course as a society? We would start to feel uncomfortable. If we were heading in a dangerous direction, we might feel alarmed; if something unacceptable was taking place, we might feel outrage. If parts of our world that we loved were dying, we would expect to grieve. These feelings are normal, healthy responses. They help us notice what's going on; they are also what rouses our response.

UNBLOCKING FEEDBACK RELEASES ENERGY

In our workshops we see people sharing their anguish and despair for our world situation and then emerging energized and nourished by the experience. That facing painful feelings can enliven people like this flies in the face of common assumptions about how best to deal with distress.

There's a strong current in mainstream culture that views depressing news, gloomy thoughts, and feelings of distress as "negative experiences" from which we need to protect ourselves. The notion that we should steer clear of anything too negative sets up avoidance as a default strategy. Yet the more we shy away from something we find difficult, the less confident we become that we can deal with it. Avoidance easily becomes a habit. And when avoidance of emotional distress becomes the habit of a culture, this low level of confidence in our ability to cope creates a barrier to publicly acknowledging upsetting information. This in turn leads to