

## **Introduction: Looking Within to Seed an Enduring Vision for the Future**

*What's needed now is neither fatalism nor utopianism, but a suite of practical pathways for families and communities that lead to a real and sustainable renewable future .... We need inspiring examples, engaging stories, and opportunities for learning in depth.*

— Richard Heinberg

*We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.*

— Thich Nhat Hanh

*Faith is not about finding meaning in the world, there may be no such thing — Faith is the belief in our capacity to create meaningful lives.*

— Terry Tempest Williams

**T**HIS BOOK COMPLETES AN EXPLORATION of the three main facets of the sustainability movement. *The Sustainability Revolution* examined the principles and bedrock values of sustainability, describing the aspiration of the world community to create a life in harmony with the Earth's living systems. Then *Thriving Beyond Sustainability* investigated the individuals and organizations implementing these ideas through large and small initiatives in rural villages and urban centers throughout the world. Now *The Heart of Sustainability* considers the personal

aspects of sustainability, with insights into how we can maximize our positive impact on the economic, social, and environmental challenges we face.

Two of the most significant factors shaping our well-being today are the consciousness and the technological revolutions. They affect us individually on a daily basis and call on us to make choices that can either enhance or diminish our well-being. We see the consciousness revolution in the scientific advancements in neuroscience, which have led to a widespread interest in topics ranging from brain research to meditation, mindfulness, positive psychology, yoga, qigong and other martial arts, and awareness exercises. The technological revolution is changing how we check in with ourselves and communicate with our family, friends, colleagues, and the world at large. The expansion of social media through Internet software platforms such as Facebook, Skype, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and a plethora of other applications, blogs, and email programs has transformed the way we interact. While our ubiquitous devices have made it simple for us to stay “in touch” and share our experiences, this hyperconnectivity has taken its toll on our connection to nature.

At the confluence of the consciousness and technological streams, we stand as individuals attempting to adapt to an increasingly rapid pace of life and make the best choices for ourselves and our loved ones. Three insights may guide us as we navigate the future: (1) we are part of nature, not separate from it; (2) we will benefit from taking a regenerative approach to the challenges we face; and (3) now is the time for us to step up and take leadership roles on behalf of all beings and the planet.

Bridging the separation from the natural world that many of us feel begins by reconnecting to ourselves and to where we live. Mindfulness often yields clarity in our interdependence with all natural systems. By going within, we sense our connection to the web of life, beginning with our backyard.

A regenerative approach builds on our connection to nature by integrating nature’s abundance, resiliency, and adaptability into our perspective of the world. The glass is not half full but is overflowing with possibilities. The mindset is one of abundance rather than scarcity, possibility rather than limits, and embracing the unknown rather than fearing

it. Using a regenerative approach allows us to create conditions where the goal is to thrive rather than merely to minimize our negative impact. So our homes are built to produce more renewable energy than they use; we improve the biodiversity of places previously destroyed by development; and we give back to others many times what we have received.

Taking a leadership role means that we look no farther than ourselves to see what is needed and to act. We are the leaders we have been waiting for. Instead of looking for “heroes” to solve the problems we face at the local, national, and global levels, we must look at our own gifts and talents and take the leap to gather our friends and neighbors and take action on issues important to us.

The exponential rate of technological advancement will undoubtedly continue. Indeed, many environmental and social solutions have already emerged. Our challenge lies in reaching our own personal potential to live a life in which we demonstrate our highest selves — first to tap deep within ourselves to discover what we are called to do in our lifetime and then to manifest this calling with the enthusiasm, care, and compassion that are in us, yearning to be shared. For this shift in awareness to occur, we need to be still and listen quietly to what stirs us, as a wildlife photographer stands still and observes the beauty of nature emerging. Subtle light changes during a sunrise, the wing flaps of a dragonfly, the majestic breaching of a whale — these moments arise sometimes dramatically and other times gradually, but we are able to capture and integrate their essence after opening our hearts to the beauty and awe of life in all its forms.

The journey of discovery in *The Heart of Sustainability* begins with the significance of our cultural narrative and how we are currently between stories. The old story of dominating nature and turning her resources into material possessions is quickly reaching a dead end. Since the new story of living a balanced, conscious, and compassionate life in harmony with the planet’s living systems has not yet taken root, we find ourselves with only glimpses of the future.

Personal myths, such as “I’m not good enough” and “I’m only one person with limited power,” often stunt the ways we can create meaningful change. These myths emphasize that we are separate from nature rather than an integral part of it; that we are ruled by a scarcity mindset

rather than one of abundance; and that fear rather than assurance has become an essential motivating force.

What is necessary for living a fulfilling life in harmony with natural systems? Our well-being is integrated with the well-being of the Earth. A focus on the environmental, economic, and social elements of sustainability is insufficient without an accompanying focus on our own characteristics: our capacity for being conscious of our activities, creative in our endeavors, compassionate toward others, and connected to ourselves and all life forms.

Our current geologic period is described as the Anthropocene — *anthropo*, or human, and *cene*, or epoch. This time in Earth's history is marked by the tremendous ecological devastation caused by humans and our failure to recognize our interdependence with all life. What we do to the benefit or detriment of other species comes right back to affect our own well-being. Although we are playing a “leading role” in shaping the Anthropocene, we are not the only “actors” on the world's stage and are continuously co-evolving with other life forms. Perhaps sharing the stage with more grace and humility will allow the flourishing of other species and benefit us all. As Richard Heinberg reminds us,

In the end, the deepest insight of the Anthropocene will probably be a very simple one: we live in a world of millions of interdependent species with which we have co-evolved. We sunder this web of life at our peril. Earth's story is fascinating, rich in detail, and continually self-revealing. And it's *not* all about us.<sup>1</sup>

What is our role and how do we leave a legacy that will inspire our children and grandchildren and support their well-being and the health of the planet? As biologist Janine Benyus writes, life creates conditions conducive to life. As humans who aspire to reconnect to the web of life, we can turn to nature to help us reconnect to our hearts. We can then move toward understanding the impact of our actions in an interconnected world.

Implementing positive change in the world requires leadership, and there are a variety of leadership styles. Numerous forms of activism

complement various temperaments and personalities. Understanding our own strengths and weaknesses helps us see how we may work to inspire others with our passion for reaching a common goal. What motivates us? What will get us to change course? What are the values that will guide us toward the compelling future we all long for?

To answer these questions, we need compassion, openness, understanding, regeneration, action, gratitude, and empathy. The encouraging news is that these qualities are already seeding initiatives worldwide. Now is the time for all of us to join in and help these initiatives grow.



## Chapter 1

### A New Story

*It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The Old Story — the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it — is not functioning properly and we have not learned the New Story.*

— Thomas Berry

*Storytelling is how we survive, when there's no feed, the story feeds something, it feeds the spirit, the imagination. I can't imagine life without stories, stories from my parents, my culture. Stories from other people's parents, their culture. That's how we learn from each other, it's the best way. That's why literature is so important, it connects us heart to heart.*

— Alice Walker

*It has been said that sometimes we need a story more than food in order to live.*

— Rachel Naomi Remen

**S**TORYTELLING HAS BEEN PART OF THE HUMAN experience for over 100,000 years and in that time we have evolved to create meaning from stories. As researcher and storyteller Kendall Haven points out, “Evolutionary biologists tell us that 100,000 years of story dominance

in human interaction [have] rewired the human brain to be predisposed before birth to think in, make sense in, and create meaning from, stories.”<sup>1</sup> Stories help us understand our identity and affirm our values, giving us purpose and meaning. Reflecting on our personal life story and on the stories from the surrounding culture can help us define the path ahead, giving us the strength and courage we will need to create a livable future.

The questions that emerge for the individual and for society as a whole are: what are our old, our current, and our future stories? How are our old stories still relevant and how are they limiting our growth? Are our current stories leading us toward the best future we can envision? Before delving more deeply into these questions, let’s explore the anatomy of a story. What makes up a story? And how does a story fit into our aspirations as self-realized human beings, as citizens, and as members of the human family?

### **Anatomy of a Story**

Haven describes a story as “a detailed, character-based narration of a character’s struggle to overcome obstacles and reach an important goal.”<sup>2</sup> He includes five elements necessary for a story: (1) character, (2) intent (goal or motive), (3) actions, (4) struggles, and (5) details.

The character drives the story through motives, actions, and struggles. When we expand the notion of a story’s character to society at large, we delve into the development of the human family. For many years, social researcher and writer Duane Elgin has been asking audiences from around the world: “What is the life-stage of the human family: toddlers, teenagers, adults, or elders?” The predominant response from audiences is that if we take the social average for the human family we are in the teenage years. Remarkably, Elgin has found overwhelming cross-cultural agreement that as a world community we are at the teenage stage of social development: impulsive, moody, peer-oriented, rebellious, creative, living in the moment, irresponsible, selfish.<sup>3</sup>

Our shortsighted, selfish actions have led to wars, destruction, and social, environmental, and economic crises around the world in the last several hundred years. Perhaps we see ourselves as navigating through uncertain times, trying to find our purpose and place in the world. We

know that the teenage years are often difficult ones with a mix of dangers and opportunities.

The intent for the story of the collective human family is probably as diverse as every individual's aspirations and is shaped by the cultures of the storymakers and storytellers. At the individual level, Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs provides a template outlining our needs as human beings. His pyramid of needs begins at the base with physiological needs (food, drink, sleep ...) and moves upward to safety needs (health, employment ...), love and belongingness needs (receiving and giving love, friendship, family ...), esteem needs (esteem and respect for self and others), cognitive needs (knowledge and meaning), and aesthetic needs (beauty, symmetry, balance) and concludes with self-actualization ("becoming everything one is capable of becoming") at the top of the pyramid.<sup>4</sup>

On a global scale, we can see that much of humanity falls near the bottom of Maslow's pyramid, attempting to meet basic needs. A child dies from a water-related illness every 21 seconds;<sup>5</sup> one third of the world is considered to be starving;<sup>6</sup> and one in three women aged 15 to 49 years will experience physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner at some point in her life.<sup>7</sup> These dire circumstances illustrate the desperation of millions to survive in a safe environment with enough food and water. Because so many people are simply not in the privileged position to focus on self-actualization, it is especially urgent that those who *are* devote more energy to this pursuit, putting themselves in a position to work toward the paradigm shift our world so desperately needs.

At a societal level, futurist and visionary R. Buckminster Fuller set a global intention to "make the world work, for 100% of humanity, in the shortest possible time, through spontaneous cooperation, without ecological offense or the disadvantage of anyone."<sup>8</sup> Fuller's intent visualizes a world that is inclusive, cooperative, fair, and ecological. In addition, he recognizes that we must take action promptly.

Both Maslow and Fuller articulate a vision for humanity propelled by a powerful intent that includes a goal and a motive (the *what* and the *why*). Maslow used a psychological lens while Fuller had a more objective and pragmatic perspective.



The actions in a story describe what the characters do to achieve their goal. During the Industrial Revolution these actions involved the extraction and shipment of natural resources for manufacturing. Petroleum, natural gas, and steam powered automobiles and railroads, coal fired power plants, and modernized cities and factories produced goods and services in the industrialized countries. Employment opportunities and migration patterns shifted to centers of mass production.

As these actions expanded over time, they encountered struggles, the fourth element of a story. Struggles challenge the characters to overcome difficult circumstances and, because we are not sure the characters will succeed, there is an element of suspense. At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we find ourselves in one of the most challenging struggles of all time. We have: rising human population; the greatest mass extinction of species since the demise of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago; dwindling supplies of cheap fossil fuels and available fresh water; increasing economic inequity between rich and poor that is fostering violence; desperate migrations to urban megacities with limited services; and greenhouse gases that are raising global temperatures and wreaking havoc on the planet with massive floods, droughts, wildfires, famines, hurricanes, and the melting of the ice caps with the dire consequences of sea level rise.

The repercussions of climate change are outlined by author and journalist Bill McKibben, who stated: “The biggest thing by far that’s happened in the lifetime of anyone alive today is that we’ve left the Holocene Period — this 10,000 year period of benign climatic stability that underwrote the rise of human civilization. That’s by far the biggest story of our times and yet, in real terms, people don’t know it.”<sup>9</sup> We will all pay a price for our lack of awareness. Just as it’s damaging to our personal lives when we fail to revise life patterns that don’t serve us, the results of our inattention to damaging collective patterns will be devastating.

Details are the final element needed in a story. These are the descriptions that fire up our imagination and curiosity. In the case of our personal story, they are the seemingly small elements that make up our days, weeks, and years. The details put “flesh on the bones,” engaging us in the story. Smells, textures, sights, sounds, and tastes all combine

to create an image that illustrates a compelling story. Although they may seem unimportant, together they shape the final outcome of any story.

Neuroscience research shows that stories incorporating vivid descriptions stimulate many parts of the brain. As Annie Murphy Paul points out, stories “stimulate the brain and even change how we act in life. Words like ‘lavender,’ ‘cinnamon’ and ‘soap,’ for example, elicit a response not only from the language-processing areas of our brains, but also those devoted to dealing with smells .... And there is evidence that just as the brain responds to depictions of smells and textures and movements as if they were the real thing, so it treats the interactions among fictional characters as something like real-life social encounters.”<sup>10</sup> The remarkable connection that the human brain makes between descriptions in stories and real-life experiences shows the power of an engaging story. That is how an idea in our imagination becomes a reality.

## **Our Role in the Hero’s Journey**

How does the human family fit into the stories that define us? Mythologist Joseph Campbell described the three stages of a hero’s journey: departure (or separation), initiation, and return. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell expanded on the archetypal hero’s journey, saying, “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”<sup>11</sup>

The hero’s journey encompasses universal questions that we ask ourselves: Who are we as individuals? Who are we as a world community? What are our individual and our collective purposes? Where do we find meaning and how does it benefit us all?

In the departure stage of the hero’s journey, the hero hears a call to adventure. Perhaps because of fear, insecurity, or denial, the hero initially refuses to listen to the call. For our human family today, the call is loud and clear. Accelerating global trends are diminishing the life support systems and social fabric of the planet. Pollution, social inequality, climate change, overpopulation, and loss of biodiversity are some of the alarm bells ringing in our biosphere.

Some individuals are hearing the call, stepping up, and taking whatever action they can to reverse these destructive trends. The sustainable agriculture and green building movements, for example, are transforming their industries. Individuals throughout the world are heeding the call by organizing community gardens, farmers' markets, and microloan programs, digging wells for safe drinking water, and undertaking myriad other initiatives. While the mainstream press does not usually report these stories, they are nevertheless quietly taking place and gradually making positive changes at the local level.

During the initiation stage of the hero's journey, he undergoes a series of trials that begin his transformation. As Campbell said, "The original departure into the land of trials represented only the beginning of the long and really perilous path of initiatory conquests and moments of illumination. Dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed — again, again, and again. Meanwhile there will be a multitude of preliminary victories, unretainable ecstasies and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land."<sup>12</sup> In our hero's journey we are precisely in the initiation phase. We are facing many environmental, economic, and social "dragons" to be slain and "barriers" that we must overcome. We have "momentary glimpses" of solutions that can indeed improve lives and change the world.

In the building industry, for example, the Leadership for Energy and Environmental Design's LEED Dynamic Plaque, the WELL Building and Living Building Challenge Standards, and the LENSES Framework for buildings are transforming the built environment. Implementing an integrated design process whereby professional engineers, architects, interior designers, contractors, owners, and occupants come together in the initial phase of a project to discuss common objectives and clarify their vision has revolutionized the construction process. This holistic approach, combined with new technologies for energy and water conservation and improved indoor air quality and using sustainable materials, has resulted in high performance, healthier buildings. People enjoy the buildings they live and work in, are more productive, and stay longer with their employers. The LEED standard has now spread to more than 90 countries worldwide, making it a dominant force in the green building industry.

Similar transformations are occurring in the food, education, and healthcare industries. There has been an expansion of demand for more local, organic foods; an explosion of online education opportunities now available to a worldwide audience through the Internet, including MOOCs (Massive Open Online Classes); and a rising interest in complementary, alternative, and integrative healthcare, including the use of herbs, supplements, acupuncture, and meditation.

In the final stage of the hero's journey, the return, the hero comes home to share the knowledge he gained on his journey and "bestow boons on his fellow man."<sup>13</sup> We each must undertake our own heroic journey, being willing to modify aspects of our lives that do not serve our collective goal of change; initiate activities we have identified as necessary for our personal growth; and share ways of implementing what we have learned.

Millions of citizens worldwide face the challenge of balancing the omnipresence of technology (such as computers, mobile phones, television, digital cameras, and email) with activities that help us reduce stress and give us a sense of belonging to something greater than ourselves (such as volunteering, time with family and friends, and spiritual pursuits). Individuals living in some of the most remote villages, for example, complete important business transactions through their cell phones and also yearn to maintain their spiritual traditions. In developed urban centers, long working hours and "keeping up with the Joneses" have left many feeling isolated, uncared for, and wondering what real wealth is. As Mother Teresa pointed out, "Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted is the most terrible poverty."<sup>14</sup>

The final stage of the hero's journey may be realized when as a world community we have learned to live in peace, made war obsolete, joined together to care for each other, and, as Buckminster Fuller suggested, discovered how to "make the world work, for 100% of humanity."

## **Living Between Stories**

Our old story was marked by historical events that have shaped our worldviews. After World War II, the Cold War highlighted an "us versus them" paradigm, with Western democratic values led by the United States opposing the Soviet Union's communist ideals. These two

worldviews clashed for over four decades until the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Soviet Union signaled a new period of reorganization.

New democracies emerged in Europe and other regions including Latin America. In the Middle East, the Arab Spring's demonstrations gave a voice to millions of people living under authoritarian regimes. The rise of China and India as economic powerhouses in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries signals another shift, with Asia an increasingly dominant force in what has become a global economy. The end of the Cold War also brought the devastating consequences of global terrorism caused by conflicting worldviews.

New measures of economic progress have emerged, such as ISEW (Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare), GPI (Genuine Progress Indicator), and GNH (Gross National Happiness). These metrics show a concern for the values that instill meaning and purpose in our lives.

Another shift from the old story to the new one is the global migration from rural to urban areas. Over half the world's population now lives in urban areas. This change is creating numerous megacities such as Tokyo's metropolitan region with over 37 million people and Jakarta, capital of Indonesia, with 26 million. The New York metro area with eight million ranks eighth among the megacities.<sup>15</sup>

For me, hope for a better world comes from the times I've seen the totally unexpected happen: the Cold War's end, the Iron Curtain gone, Nelson Mandela released to be head of state, Barack Obama's two election victories. These events were the result of positive energies working deep within the stream of history, invisible to mainstream media, a process always going on, even when things look dark. My inspiration comes from love of Earth's beauty and creatures. And I believe our young people will shape a livable future in creative and sustainable new ways.

Susan C. Strong, Ph.D.  
Founder and executive director, The Metaphor Project,  
Author, *Move Our Message: How to Get America's Ear*

We now find ourselves collectively living between stories. The old story is coming to an end and a new one has yet to be born. In the old story, our reliance on science and technology to solve many of humanity's problems has proven its limitations. The Green Revolution, agribusiness, large hydroelectric projects, nuclear power, harmful chemicals in products and foods, and our fossil fuel-based economies, for example, have had unintended repercussions ranging from carcinogens in our bodies to extreme weather events resulting from climate change.

The quintessential American dream has come into question. In 1931, in *The Epic of America*, James Truslow Adams defined the American dream as "that dream of a land in which life should be better, richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."<sup>16</sup> However, polls now show that Americans are evenly split on whether they believe the next generation will have a better life than their parents.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps these doubts point to a realization that quick fixes to environmental and social problems are not as readily available as we once thought. Moreover, our "teenage" attitudes have led to accidents such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in Japan in 2011. These events illustrate a pivotal point in the hero's journey, when the hero has a choice to continue on the same path or take personal responsibility for meaningful change.

We find ourselves in a similar predicament during this time between stories. On a personal level we may be familiar with this transitional time when we experience a breakdown in our lives and need to reassess and reinvent ways of moving forward. Whether it's a personal health issue, a traumatic event, the end of a relationship, or a career change, these are moments to look within and reexamine our values and objectives. This is also a fragile time when we are susceptible to being influenced by others' views. We may yearn for a quick solution to get through this uncomfortable and vulnerable period. However, having the patience and stamina, sometimes described as "sitting in the fire," to work through this transitional phase often leads to new openings. By "sitting in the fire" we also have a chance to heal the wounds from our past, learn from our mistakes, and find new ways of dealing with our challenges. Similarly, at a global level we have an opportunity to take

stock, examine our old story, and then look ahead at the possibilities for creating a new story.

### **Themes of the New Story**

The backdrop for the new story includes a more numerous and more elderly population living in a hotter world with severe droughts, storms, and floods. The world's population is expected to reach eight billion by 2025, nearly 10 billion by 2050, and 11 billion by 2100. The less developed countries have the largest population increase, with children under 15 years accounting for 26 percent and young adults (15 to 24) an additional 17 percent of the total in 2013.<sup>18</sup> The youth from these regions are searching for educational and job opportunities, which are scarce in these economies.

The world is aging, with people 60 and older expected to reach two billion by 2050 and three billion by 2100. Sixty-six percent of these older persons are currently living in the less developed countries and that number is expected to increase to 79 percent by 2050 and 89 percent by 2100.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the demographic trends, there are currently dozens of armed conflicts around the world and almost 30 million slaves (with 60,000 in the US), including forced laborers, forced prostitutes, and child soldiers. In the West African nation of Mauritania, for example, it is estimated that four percent (one in 25) of its people are enslaved.<sup>20</sup> On the upside, literacy rates and life expectancies have increased worldwide and millions of people have risen out of poverty. The number of countries with electoral democracies has also risen from 69 in 1990 to 117 in 2012.<sup>21</sup>

The new story has numerous facets and each one incorporates a theme dealing with the transitions we are experiencing. These themes include global communications, economic shift, protecting the commons, reconnecting to the land and community, and awakening to self-consciousness.

Global communications arise from a rapidly evolving technological revolution that is giving us speed and instant free or low-cost connection from nearly anywhere at any time through the Internet, iPads, iPhones, Skype, Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and more. These new capabilities and thousands of new software programs

or apps being developed daily by entrepreneurs worldwide are creating huge challenges and opportunities. Web-based services ranging from Airbnb, which provides travelers with affordable lodging throughout the world, to Foursquare, which finds entertainment options, to Lyft and Uber for ground transportation are changing the way we work and play.

These technologies also have eliminated many jobs that are now being replaced by software programs providing services including online travel and banking. In a global economy, job recruiters are extremely selective since they are able to attract the very best talent because the pool of applicants has now expanded to participants around the world. As author and columnist Thomas Friedman reminds us, “In the hyperconnected world, there is only ‘good’ ‘better’ and ‘best,’ and managers and entrepreneurs everywhere now have greater access than ever to the better and best people, robots and software everywhere.”<sup>22</sup> For the first time in human history, being hyperconnected through the Internet, mobile phones, and other devices allows billions of people to have access to a wide network of individuals and a repository of information that is continuously being updated. Thus we are now able to tap into a “global brain” that is quickly spreading its knowledge to all corners of the Earth.

The theme of economic shift in the new story involves moving from our current growth-based economy to a steady-state economy. Rob Dietz and Dan O’Neill, co-authors of *Enough Is Enough: Building a Sustainable Economy in a World of Finite Resources*, define a steady-state economy as one that “aims for stable or mildly fluctuating levels in population and consumption of energy and materials. Birth rates equal death rates, and production rates equal depreciation rates.”<sup>23</sup> The steady-state economy seeks a balance between the human economy and the larger ecosystem that provides the essential life support systems and resources for our survival.

Since our current growth-based economy has degraded the planet’s ecosystems through pollution, species extinction, deforestation, and so forth, achieving a steady-state economy requires reducing harmful economic activities. This approach foregoes growth-at-all-costs and instead aims for an appropriate scale of economic activity. Slight fluctuations in economic growth and contraction are recognized as normal. The



objective is to find the “sweet spot” where extremes are eliminated and a steady state is achieved through trial and error, regulation of markets, fair distribution, allocation of markets, and political will.<sup>24</sup>

The new story’s theme of protecting the commons speaks to valuing and safeguarding the ecological and social networks that are owned by all of us collectively. As Jonathan Rowe describes in *The Common Wealth*, “the commons includes our entire life support system, both natural and social. The air and oceans, the web of species, wilderness and flowing water — all are parts of the commons. So are language and knowledge, sidewalks and public squares, the stories of childhood, the processes of democracy. Some parts of the commons are gifts of nature, others the product of human endeavor. Some are new, such as the Internet; others are as ancient as soil and calligraphy.”<sup>25</sup>

We must first identify the commons and then devise ways to protect it before it is destroyed. Protecting the commons is essential in an age when multinational corporations aim to privatize natural resources such as drinking water and acquire patents for seeds including basmati rice from India and medicinal plants, such as the Neem tree from Nepal. Air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, melting sea ice in the Arctic, water pollution, oil exploitation, and overfishing are the results of competition for natural resources. The commons story has a moral imperative since as members of the human family we have an obligation to fight the forces that aim to privatize and destroy what belongs to all of us.

The theme of reconnecting to the land emphasizes our relationship to nature and our appreciation for the cultural and biological heritage of local places. The new story recognizes that every place has a personality. As author José Stevens points out, “In order to understand land you have to spend time with it just like with a person whom you hope to get to know. All land has a personality just like people do. We differentiate between people and we differentiate between places on the land.”<sup>26</sup> As we get to know the character of a place we learn to acknowledge the land and may honor its unique qualities by praying, singing, and making offerings. Similarly, reconnecting with community calls on our ties with our culture and our neighbors.

Since multinational corporations are beholden to shareholders who have little connection to local communities, we experience a

disconnection from the land as these corporations extend their global reach. Maintaining a strong “sense of place” comes from local appreciation of the land and its ties to the people.

Being disconnected from the land is associated with behavioral and addiction issues. In *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv describes the negative effects on children of spending too much time indoors away from outdoor activities. Louv calls this new phenomenon nature deficit disorder and, although not officially recognized as a medical disorder, excessive “screen time” and media consumption are common complaints by parents in many households. In 2012, the South Korean government estimated that 2.55 million Koreans were addicted to smart phones, using them eight or more hours a day, and 160,000 Korean children between five and nine years old were addicted to the Internet through smart phones, tablets, and computers. In an extreme case, a three-month-old girl died when her parents fed her only once a day because they were consumed by playing online games.<sup>27</sup> These addictive behaviors are increasing in many countries as more and more people have access to online entertainment and services.

The new story’s theme of awakening to self-consciousness can be traced back to the idea of the Earth’s noosphere in the work of Russian mineralogist Vladimir Vernadsky and French philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Similar to the geosphere (from *geo*, or Earth) and the biosphere (from *bio*, or life), the noosphere (from *nous*, or mind) describes the impact of human thought at a planetary scale. As the human family evolves and complexity increases, the mind sphere grows and we awaken to our role in the universe. In a sense, the mind sphere is the global version of our individual brain’s neural network, which fires the signals that trigger our thoughts.

We use our connectivity to tap into the “global brain.” This greater context, in turn, allows us to understand our role as part of an evolving human consciousness. As author and social innovator Barbara Marx Hubbard points out, “As universal humans, we are consciously integrating our social, spiritual, technological, and scientific capacities with our highest aspirations to create a world that works for everyone.”<sup>28</sup>

Experiments to verify the effects of global consciousness include the Global Consciousness Project, an initiative of the Institute of Noetic

Sciences, in which random number generators are used to measure global responses to major world events, such as the death of a world leader or a terrorist attack, in order to explore the correlation between such events and global consciousness. The results “show considerable evidence of a correlation between particular events and the data from our network of random event generators .... Thoughtful examination of the accumulated evidence shows something very remarkable, and the most parsimonious and elegant interpretation is that a global consciousness is at work.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Visions of the New Story**

The themes outlined above comprise the key elements of our new story. As we begin to create that story, arriving at a clear vision based on our values is essential. Our task is to elucidate both our individual and our collective values and align our efforts with them. What are our values? And how do we articulate them in a meaningful way? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and the Earth Charter, launched in 2000, are examples of basic values for the world community.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was born out of the atrocities of World War II. As Article 1 states, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the Earth Charter’s mission, which emerged from the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, aims to “promote the transition to sustainable ways of living and a global society founded on a shared ethical framework that includes respect and care for the community of life, ecological integrity, universal human rights, respect for diversity, economic justice, democracy, and a culture of peace.”<sup>31</sup>

To get to the core of these lofty ideals, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. Instead we can look back to the values of indigenous peoples from around the globe, who have stories describing how the world came to be, where they came from, and how to govern themselves and live in harmony with nature. For example, the songlines of the Aboriginal tribes in Australia have for millennia told the story of the features in the landscape. People can find pathways and navigate long distances

by singing these songs. The songlines act as both a compass to navigate the land and a cultural thread that links the history of a people to the land. In North America, the comprehensive system of governance of the Iroquois Confederacy, made up of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca tribes from upper New York State, is thought to have influenced the US constitution.

What do we value in modern society? Unlike indigenous peoples, we no longer have a mythology or system of values that we were all initiated into in our youth. Although modern society promotes many values, many more are left to families and individuals to choose and create. Once we have our basic needs such as housing, employment, education, and food met, most of us value spending time with friends and loved ones, a slower pace of life, time for creative pursuits, and managing stress. All of these qualities have an aspect of simplicity — leading less complex lives with a local focus — but they leave us with the task of discovering the purpose of our lives and where it fits in with that of our “tribe.”

To create the new story we must define the role of each community member. How do individual goals, growth, and development serve the health of the community? How do we help the younger generation discover their passion and purpose in life? How do we rediscover our own passion and purpose during periods of personal upheaval? How do we encourage the development of leadership skills and instill a sense of love for all living beings? The new story will continue to emerge from within us, finding expression in our work and our interactions with others.

Additional fundamental questions involve our view of an ideal community. What does its downtown look like? Is it pedestrian friendly? Is public transportation easy and effective? Where does the community's food come from? Its energy? Its water? Where does its waste go? What are the crime, education, and healthcare statistics and programs? Do the neighbors know each other? How are the homeless, the veterans, and the mentally ill taken care of? What is the governance structure? What are the traditions that bring people together and promote their cultural heritage and creative expression? Answering these questions, using well-defined bedrock values as our guide, will prompt us to create an enduring vision for a new story that is compelling and alluring.

Underlying these questions is a renewed sense of belonging to something bigger than ourselves, making the link between personal responsibility and community and global awareness. As former Czech president and playwright Vaclav Havel said, “I always come to the conclusion that salvation can only come through a profound awakening of man to his own personal responsibility, which is at the same time a global responsibility. Thus, the only way to save our world, as I see it, lies in a democracy that recalls its ancient Greek roots: democracy based on an integral human personality personally answering for the fate of the community.”<sup>32</sup>

The new story will guide the human family to its next stage. As the old story fades and the new one emerges, we have two important tasks: storymaking and storytelling. Storymaking involves those of us called to imagine a new era for humanity — envisioning the story’s political, economic, environmental, and social characteristics. Storymakers are creating the new businesses, nonprofits, and government institutions that are leading the changes.

Storytelling involves those of us called to inspire others by sharing the new story with the widest possible audience. Storytelling is the critical endeavor of engaging others and having them take ownership of the visions for the new story. By sharing the enticing details of the new story, storytellers are spreading the possibilities for a world that works for everyone. In this way, storymakers and storytellers complement each other. Although we are still between stories, we see glimpses of the new story emerging through initiatives worldwide.

### **Questions to Ponder**

- \* What are the themes of your current life story? (What do you value? How do you spend most of your time?)
- \* What are the themes of your “new story?” Have your values changed over the years and do your current activities and life structure reflect any changes?
- \* How do the values of your culture compare with your personal values?
- \* How have the major events in your life shaped who you are?
- \* What are the characteristics of your ideal community?