

Facing Climate Change – where are you at?

Climate change, the depletion of fossil raw materials such as oil, economic changes and mass extinction all together create an immense emergency situation on our planet earth. One big question is: how do we change ourselves so that we are strong enough to fully contribute to the great social and ecological shift we need to make to answer and solve these problems of our time?

The following task serves as a first personal inventory.
The intention is to help you take a closer look at the following questions:

- *What beliefs do I have - what story am I telling myself?*
- *Where do I stand with my behaviors?*
- *In which areas do I continue as before following habits as usual?*
- *To what extent am I paralyzed by fear and push the issue of climate change away from me?*
- *In what areas am I already contributing to social and /or ecological change?*

TASK: Please read the following three texts to get a clearer view of the topic.

(All information is taken from the Book: “Active Hope” from Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone published from New World Library, Novato, California, 2012.)

THREE STORIES OF OUR TIME

When we look at the topic of climate change we can see that there is a great gap between the emergency situation regarding climate change and the human response to the situation.

Why is it so? Our perception depends on the version of reality we identify with. And there are 3 main stories that shape our perception of reality.

There is no point of judging which one is right.
We need to acknowledge that all 3 stories take place at the same time.
And we participate in all three in different areas of our life and habits.

The main question is:
Where are we and which story do we choose to put our energy behind?

Here are the 3 stories:

1. BUSINESS AS USUAL



Economic and technical development has made life so much easier. The lifestyle and comfort we have in industrialized countries are a success story.

Our lifestyle holds many attractions:

- Owning computers, televisions, cars or air-conditioning...
- Travelling to distant countries and places
- consuming food, clothes and other goods that are transported from all around the world and being able to buy almost everything at every time of the year.

A market economy needs to increase in sales to grow. Therefore our economy is constantly searching for new markets and targets and promotes the cycle of consumption.

Some core assumptions of “BUSINESS AS USUAL” are:

- Economic growth is essential for prosperity.
- Nature is a commodity to be used for human purposes.
- Promoting consumption is good for the economy.
- Economy can and must continue to grow – we need to go ahead
- The problems of other people, nations and species are not our concern.

(Macy & Johnstone, 2012, S.16)

Television and media play a very important role in spreading the story of the possibility and necessity of unlimited consumption: An average American child watches between 25.000 to 40.000 television commercials a year. As our perception of the world is shaped by what we see, it's easy to think that reality **is** the way this story tells us – and that there is no alternative to the continuous expansion of consumption.

As this story of modern living is transmitted around the world by global media it provokes an increasing global appetite for consumption.

Thus media and advertising help to fuel our consumption behavior. They encourage us to buy more and more and continuously tell us about the newest “must haves”.

The Question is: why can't all people participate in this world of consumption and live “Western style”? The shadow side of modern living gives an answer and leads to the second story.

2. THE GREAT UNRAVELLING



Many Scientists and organizations such as “Greenpeace” or movements like “Fridays for future” point out that we are heading for a global catastrophe and that the clock is ticking towards twelve. A growing number of countries and people are massively affected by the impact of uncontrolled economic growth. Looking at the following five problem areas regarding the state of our planet is quite uncomfortable. But in order to take action and make a change, it is important to first confront the reality of the situation.

The story of the Great Unraveling reveals alarming problems of our reality and time:

▶ **Economic decline**

Continuing economic growth depends on ever-increasing consumption and exploitation of resources that goes along with an ever-increasing level of toxic waste.

▶ **Resource depletion**

Resources such as fossil fuels, fresh water, certain types of wood, rare earths, metals and minerals... are in decline. The more resources we exploit and the more we go beyond the limits of sustainability, the more we destroy our environment.

For example: The economy reacts to the decline of fossil fuels with drastic exploitation of the last resources such exploitation of oil reserves in the Amazon or other nature reserves.

▶ **Mass extinction of species**

The pollution and destruction of the natural habitat has resulted in a massive reduction and extinction of animals and plants on our planet Earth.

▶ **Climate change**

Global Warming is driven by the destruction of nature, the increase of global waste and carbon dioxide and leads to further environmental degradation.

The number of worldwide weather-related disasters such as floods, storms, droughts, wild fires or land slides has dramatically increased with terrible effects on people and nature.

▶ **Social division and war**

So far, the poor countries of our planet suffer the most from the consequences of these problems. And the gap between rich and poor is constantly growing. At the end of 2019, 1 percent of the world's population owned 43.4 percent of the world's wealth. In contrast, about 53.6 percent of the world's population owned only 1.4 percent of the world's wealth.

(source: <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/384680/umfrage/verteilung-des-reichtums-auf-der-welt/>)

This unequal distribution of resources is accompanied by social division and war.

3. THE GREAT TURNING



The Great Turning tells us of a radical shift: the ecological or sustainability revolution that is necessary to save life on Earth. It is a shift from an economy of industrial growth to a society that is life-sustaining and committed to the recovery and preservation of our planet. This transition is already taking place and many organizations are taking part in the Great turning. They develop technical innovations, work towards social justice and ecological sustainability. There are three dimensions to this change.

To support the transformation necessary, you can start to take action at any point you feel called to act.

1. The First Dimension: “Holding Actions”

The aim of “holding actions” is to reduce and to slow down the damage being caused by a political economy following profit and never ending consumption.

“Holding actions” aim to protect and rescue what is left of our natural world and biodiversity.

Another goal is to care for social justice, to protect communities from war, starvation and exploitation.

An important task is to raise awareness of the damage already being done: It is important to document and inform about the destructive impact of industrial growth on our environment, social systems and health.

Telling as much people as possible what goes on helps to recognize the causes of the environmental and social disaster we face. We need to clearly understand the link between consumption and the destruction of our earth: for example the link between pollution and childhood cancer; between the availability of cheap products and exploitative working conditions or between fossil fuel consumption and climate disturbances.

Unless we clearly understand these connections, we easily continue consumption and destroying our planet home. There are many ways you can act, especially with others together: you can participate in campaigns, boycotts, petitions to protest against practices that destroy our world.

2. The Second Dimension: “Life-Sustaining Systems and Practices”

Developing a life-sustaining culture aims to transform existing systems such as the banking system, health care system, education system, transportation system or agriculture. This process is also already underway in many places, for example with the organic farming movement, new sustainable banks that are also socially and environmentally engaged, new communal ways of living, or new forms of education. Guideline is the question: "Is there a better way to do things so that they do no harm, but contribute to a sustainable world and social justice?" We all can support major change. This happens, for example, through choices about where we shop, what transportation we use or where we invest our money.

3. The Third Dimension: “Shift in Consciousness”

A change of our fundamental perception, thinking and values is essential to find the compassion, care and courage necessary to change our usual actions and habits. This shift of consciousness implies the insight of “interdependence”. Insights of modern science and spiritual traditions point in the same direction: We are no separated individual beings but we are all interconnected with all life and our planet earth. Thus changing the self and changing the world go together. Personal work concerning our thought-systems and habits that are damaging to ourselves or our environment are necessary to strengthen our compassion and set the goal to strongly participate in “the Great Turning”.

We live in a double reality

The first two stories: “BUSINESS AS USUAL” and “THE GREAT UNRAVELING” show two entirely different realities about the state of our world. Both realities coexist within the same time and space.

You too might be moving between those realities in your daily life. One moment you might be making plans for a future that you believe will be similar to the world today. In another moment, you realize that we are heading toward a global disaster if we continue the way we do.

The mainstream reality of business as usual, as shown to us by the media and in advertising, is more and more disrupted by the terrifying news of the Great Unraveling.

In the western world we often live in a culture of distraction and a huge part of modern media are focused on gossip and celebrities. Thus realizing the mess we are in can be quite shocking.

Reactions such as dismissing the problem (“It’s not that bad.”) or being paralyzed and overwhelmed (“I don’t want to hear this, it’s too depressing.”) are common. Both block us from taking action and contributing to “THE GREAT TURNING” and the huge correction necessary to prevent the crash.

TASK:

Now that you have read the three stories, please reflect in which way you might be part of these stories.

You can think of them as “three rooms”.

Please “enter” each room below and write down any thoughts, feelings and habits that come in mind connected to the story of this room.

Please take time to complete the assignment and work on it over an extended period of time in which you observe your role in the three stories.

The task is meant to help you locate your inner and outer position concerning climate change.

You also can take a deeper look at your motivation behind your behaviors and habits.

Maybe you can identify needs that are fulfilled by these habits. For example:

Freedom; lightness; making things easy; comfort; rest; connection; fun; adventure; ...

Can you also name needs, that are not fulfilled with actions that you identified to belong to the first two rooms?

Room 1: BUSINESS AS USUAL

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Examples:

- I throw my rubbish in just one trashcan and do not separate it.
- I get excited when a new model of my favorite mobile phone brand is available on the market and think that I absolutely need have it.

Room 2: THE GREAT UNRAVELLING



Examples:

- When I recently heard on the radio that 160 tree species in Germany are threatened with extinction, I turned off the program because I felt so helpless.

Room 3: THE GREAT TURNING



Examples:

- *I changed my eating habits and largely reduced my consumption of meat.*
- *Since I started to observe my habit of media use, I also started to have a deeper look at when and why I use media the way I do.*