

The Full Job of Restoring the Environment

The way the world is developing demands changes in humans' treatment of the environment. It's possible to understand the situation and develop good, intelligent policies for improving it. We're in this environmental position because as humans we haven't thought enough in this particular area. We've taken lots of actions that have affected the environment, and we haven't been able to think about all the unintended consequences and ramifications of those actions.

We're a marvelous, ingenious, inventive species that gets stuck in acting in unthinking ways because of hurtful experiences in our past. (See below: The Theory of Re-evaluation Counseling upon Which This Statement Is Based) Where our thinking is contaminated by past hurtful experiences, our behavior changes from aware to unaware. For example, as a species we have been driven by feelings of scarcity and the danger of annihilation: we carry forward the fears of earlier generations. If our family or our people had a history of famine, or loss, or war, we see the world in a certain way. Our species has been left with feelings of scarcity and competition—feelings that we need more, need more, need more.

As a species we could figure out ways of getting more. We could figure out how to exist in parts of the world that humans didn't start out in, places our ancestors didn't know how to live in. We spread across the world, and we spread more quickly than other organisms because we were able to travel across places we couldn't stay and survive in.

We could adapt how we functioned, not just find another place where we could function in the same way that we had before. We learned new things in order to fit in, but our fears of scarcity also kept us from being able to

thoughtfully consider certain things, as they could seem secondary to survival or not related to it. For example, the welfare of other people could seem secondary to making sure we got more.

We spread out and became successful, and as we figured out more things, we became more numerous and did more things that had a more drastic effect on the environment. Salvation always seemed to mean more—more of us and having more command of the environment, so that we could produce more of what was reassuring to us: more food, bigger castles, bigger ships. We tried to more thoroughly dominate the things that used to dominate us.

Patterns of destructive wastefulness have been part of human societies. Societies have always destroyed people and other forms of life. But in the past there weren't as many of us, so the destruction didn't have such a big effect. We have now reached the point where the destructive functioning locked into our societies has massive effects.

Organized societies have always been mired in oppressive ways of functioning. They operate by organizing people into groups and classes that support the functioning of the society, and some groups are given much less resource than others. Those that receive the largest share and have the most control of the resources make decisions about the resources that give themselves the most immediate material benefit, with little or no regard for the effect this has on other groups of people, other life-forms, the environment, or even their own long-term existence.

For example, there continues to be a drive to find more fossil fuel deposits, and new ways to exploit them, no matter what pollution and damage that their

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use causes. As long as short-range profit can be made, many people can't face that producing and burning more fossil fuels is what's causing climate change and massive environmental damage.

Our societies are consistently destructive and short-sighted. Their most damaging effects are inflicted on the people who are already the most exploited, for example, those doing the actual work of production, those targeted by racism, those living in countries that have not yet developed economically to where they can protect themselves against the large economies of the world.

WE MUST CHANGE SOCIETY, IN THE INTEREST OF ALL LIFE-FORMS

Societies built on fear and greed from hurts connected with scarcity, insecurity, and isolation, cannot function intelligently enough to keep from damaging people and the world. We can usefully oppose and stop particular aspects of this destructive rigid functioning, and need to. We can also stop tolerating the existence of societies based on greed and exploitation.



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Past efforts to change oppressive societies have involved the majority of people opposing the class that controls the resources of the society, the owning class. However, the individuals in that class are simply the agents of oppression, driven by a society based on greed and oppressive in its functioning. And they are not the only ones with patterns of looking out for their own interests; everyone in the society gets hurt by the acting out of greed and ends up with a version of this functioning, making it a struggle to think about the welfare of everyone and everything on the planet.

The work to change society is not really a struggle against people of a certain class—it is a struggle to end the effect of greed and other hurts on all of us. We are not struggling for one group of people against another. We are trying to end the grip of hurtful experiences and thereby the behaviors these hurtful experiences cause, on all people, including those who direct the society, for the benefit of all people. Portraying the way forward as a struggle against any group of people is always misleading and incorrect in a fundamental way.

To protect the environment from the ongoing destructive, irrational functioning of society, we need to change society—not in the interests of one group of people as opposed to another but in the interest of all life-forms. We need to change it in order to preserve an uncounted number of life-forms from the environmental effects of society's harmful functioning. This is in everyone's interest, including those whose hurts have not yet allowed them to realize it, and those whose destructive policies must be interrupted.

WE CAN MOVE

This change in society should not be delayed, since large environmental changes are happening rapidly and their consequences are difficult to predict. We can move against our feeling inadequate, small, and passive. We can free ourselves from the hurts installed in our childhoods that have left us with those feelings and confusions. And we can become important parts of the ongoing efforts to interrupt the patterned mistakes that are damaging the environment.

We can move out of passivity, learn what we do not yet know, and free ourselves from feelings that keep us from playing the roles we want to play—as participants, communicators, supporters of existing leadership, and developers of policy and perspective.

THE THEORY OF RE-EVALUATION COUNSELING UPON WHICH THIS STATEMENT IS BASED

Every human being acts and cooperates well except where patterns of emotional distress interfere. Then irrational behavior, negative feelings, and failure to cooperate or communicate replace the inherent human behavior. These “distress patterns” are the residue of physical or emotional hurts, many of them dating back to childhood, from which we have never fully recovered. We re-enact them when something in the current environment reminds us of the earlier times of distress.

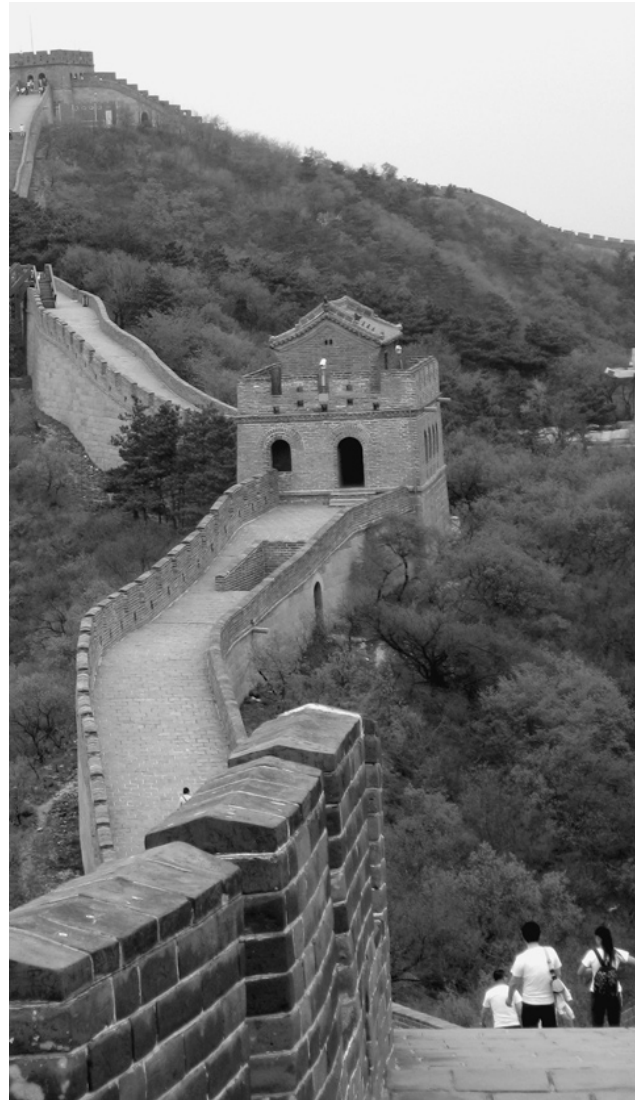
The residual effects of past distress experiences could have been thrown off quickly and permanently, at the time we were hurt, through the natural channels of emotional discharge (for example, crying, laughing, and trembling). After emotional discharge, a person’s mind is able to think more clearly and re-evaluate what happened in the distressing incident.

Instead, some of the social conditioning against emotional discharge carried by our cultures and rigidly inflicted upon us when we were children (“Don’t cry,” “Be a big boy,” and so on) has interfered with, and prevented, recovery from our hurts, leading to an increasing accumulation of distresses and tensions. By the time we are adults, this has severely limited our original abilities to achieve good relationships with others, to succeed, and to enjoy life. It also interferes with our collective progress towards a society that supports all humans to thrive in cooperative, respectful relationships.

We can regain the natural ability to heal from hurt. The prime requirement for this is a listener and counselor who is sincerely interested, who will remain relaxed in the face of our tensions, and who understands how the process of emotional discharge operates.

Many of our accumulated distresses result from societally-imposed hurts that we call oppression (racism is one example). Every adult in every present society has been conditioned, through the imposition of distress patterns, into functioning in both oppressed and oppressor roles. (For example, the same person can both be oppressed by racism and be in the oppressor role with regard to sexism.)

Oppression is neither inevitable nor inherent in human beings. It arises and operates only on the basis of distress patterns. No human being would agree to submit to oppression unless a distress pattern of such submission



GREAT WALL OF CHINA • DIANE SHISK

had been previously installed while the human being was hurting. No human being would ever agree to, or participate in, oppressing another human being unless a distress pattern had been previously installed. Once these patterns are in place, we are susceptible to acting irrationally and oppressively toward others, including people in our own group, and even toward ourselves. (For example, when racism has hurt people to the point where they unknowingly internalize it, they may demean and mistreat themselves and their own people.)

Individuals can be freed from the damage caused by racism, and other oppressions, through the processes of emotional discharge. This healing empowers individuals to engage in the organizing and struggle necessary for the elimination of racism from institutions and society.