

Annet Kieswetter



blamed nuclear weapons themselves, though a moment's thought should have revealed that were all the bombs to have been gathered into one place and ground to dust the fears and enmities that compelled their original construction would have urged new batches onto the assembly line in a matter of weeks or months. All this blame had the effect of shifting responsibility away from the individual and of putting those in positions of power on the defensive, making a relaxation of tensions ever more difficult.

Thus I decided, if I were to blame anyone or anything for the world situation I would merely be perpetuating the attitudes helping to fuel the worldwide engine of terror. As I observed my own thoughts, feelings and actions, I saw that whatever tendencies I abhorred in nations or in political leaders were present in some degree in myself as well. Unless I could learn to deal creatively with these tendencies in my own heart and mind, so that they no longer controlled my behavior in any way, there would be little hope for the world as a whole. I resolved to become a microcosmic testing-ground for the possibility of human regeneration and transformation.

In the early months of my awakening experience I tended to think that I had chosen a hopelessly naive and simplistic approach. After all, the essence of my realization had been offered in various forms over the millennia by innumerable moral and spiritual leaders, and yet here was mankind on the brink of suicide. Jesus, Buddha, Krishna and scores of lesser saints had taught compassion, love and forgiveness, and invariably their sayings had been codified by followers into dogma, which often then served as a basis for more war and conflict. Could I hope that now, with the world at the end of its rope, human beings would suddenly respond to the voice of wisdom? There was no way to know, no apparent cause for optimism. Yet reason led inescapably to this as the only approach that could make a real and lasting difference.

To my surprise and delight, not long after I came to this point of decision within myself I began to meet others who had made a similar commitment. I will never forget the excitement of meeting a friend who shared my new awareness — the depth of our individual understanding, determination and ability to act quadrupled immediately! — and then another friend, and another. Gradually I became aware of an anonymous, spontaneous network of men and women around the world who were interested in putting the wellbeing of the whole world ahead of their own opinions, beliefs, likes and dislikes. We all had come to realize that the survival of our species could result only from a basic change in human character. We had seen, in effect, that WE were the only possible hope: if we merely demanded that governments change without experiencing that change first within ourselves, nothing worthwhile would result; but if we could demonstrate a quality of character that was sane, rational and loving, then perhaps we might provide the seed for an entirely new state of being for the body of mankind.

As I became aware of more and more people who were interested in personal transformation, a few came into view who had pioneered the way many years before. One was Buckminster Fuller, who in 1927, penniless and with wife and child to feed, nevertheless resolved to dedicate his life to mankind. In his later years "Bucky" had spoken of the trim-tab factor. The trim-tab is a small adjustable flap on a ship's rudder; by maneuvering it, one person can easily turn the entire ship. He was saying that one person can make a difference, that in fact it is always individuals who make the difference. Other pioneers were less well known than Fuller, but had explored other essential aspects of global renewal. Some thought in political terms, some in spiritual terms, some in economic terms, but all emphasized personal responsibility.

As I came to realize, the fact that the world was at the end of its tether was in some unforeseeable way a positive element in the equation rather than a negative one. In our generation, for the first time in history, all of mankind was faced with the full consequences of its actions. Always before there had been the illusion that we human beings could and would get away with our self-centeredness: even if a given individual did not survive, his offspring would presumably have the same opportunity he had had to extract

as much as possible from the earth and from other people, while giving as little as possible in return. Now we were faced with the very real possibility that there would be no future generations, and, as human beings, we had no one to blame but ourselves. Thus for burgeoning numbers moral regeneration began to take on the imperative of the survival instinct.

As the years went by the amorphous movement I am seeking to describe began to encompass every field of human endeavor. It was not a matter of men and women leaving the professions to become full-time antiwar activists; rather businessmen, doctors, politicians, artists — people in every conceivable trade and profession — brought a new awareness with them into their work. And the awareness was not "anti" anything, not even antiwar: in retrospect one could say that we were discovering the real nature of peace. Peace as merely the absence of war was a hollow goal; instead, we were learning that peace is a palpable, living, loving atmosphere which one is personally responsible for maintaining. Both the realization and the atmosphere were infectious.

Even though more and more people began to resonate with the new tone being sounded in human consciousness, specific effects were at first difficult to put one's finger on. Because what we were up to was neither violent nor sensational, the media paid little attention to us. Since we were uninterested in finding villains to blame, no one saw us as a threat. Since we were expressing a spirit rather than promoting a program, cause or religion, some of us were not even aware that we were part of what in retrospect we might call a "movement" — indeed, many of us were individualists who avoided joining organizations. Yet we all felt compelled to learn how to work together in a spirit of loving friendship, in order both to share our awareness with others — through newsletters, symposiums, films and other projects — and also simply to demonstrate in our relationships the attitude of yieldedness to Life that we were talking about.

Yet in spite of our invisibility to the media and our lack of traditional organizational structure (or perhaps because of it!) we were producing results. Merely because we saw the stupidity of blame and accusation, others began to see it too; the awareness spread as if by osmosis into the general population. Public figures — who increasingly wished to appear genuine, compassionate, balanced and sane — were more or less forced to let go of whatever tendencies they'd had toward dogma, inflexibility or egotism. Even the electioneering hyperbole of politicians lost its harsh, accusatory tone as candidates saw that in order to be respected they needed to appear respectful of each other.

Moreover, this new awareness knew no national boundaries. As leaders in one nation moved toward a reasonable, compassionate stance, other world leaders felt safe to relax their hardline approach to various issues. Treaties became easier to negotiate, and distinctions dissolved: socialists found that only by promoting individual initiative and personal responsibility could government actually help people, while capitalists began to see for themselves that greed, and its resulting uncontrolled devouring of resources, weren't in anyone's ultimate interest — their own included.

So far, I have been describing only the constructive, integrative aspects of the transition. But the fact is that not everyone responded to the new spirit on the move — far from it. For instance, business and corporations which insisted on putting profits above people began to find resources and raw materials vanishing. Because international money manipulators traded on the average person's acquisitiveness and fear, when the character of the average person began to change subtly the world monetary system was thrown into disarray. Years of economic chaos resulted; but it is safe to say that today virtually everyone is thankful that the arcane and incredibly fragile global monetary system of the twentieth century, which was based on debt and speculation, has been replaced by a more natural order in which transactions of material goods are kept as simple and straightforward as possible, with spiritual values as the underlying medium of exchange.

In addition, and of far greater immediate consequence, those who were determined to press their own ideology, religion, program or profit

were somehow deeply frightened and angered by the ineffable change in the mass consciousness. Dogmatic governments seemed determined to get into a battle — but since it was so difficult to fight with those who were becoming increasingly reasonable and flexible, it was necessary for the doctrinaires to contend with each other. Unfortunately, their contentions became increasingly violent, so that by the 1990s lines of tension were stretched to the breaking point.

Some say that the hostile exchange of four multiple-warhead nuclear missiles in late 1995 was the catalyst which showed mankind once and for all the futility and senselessness of war. It is true that the horrendous, instantaneous carnage of that fateful week in November marked a distinct turning point, since now everyone could see the options in stark contrast. Yet, had a positive alternative not already been in place the destruction would simply have spread and engulfed the whole world. In retrospect, the significant event was not the apocalyptic detonations which immediately commanded the world's horrified attention, but the slow, invisible changes in hearts and minds which had been going on for years — subconsciously for most, but consciously for at least a few. Enough awareness and practical experience had emerged through and among us pioneers that when the powderkeg blew there were just sufficient stable, clear men and women on hand to pick up the pieces and show a new direction.

And it was an entirely new direction: prior to the events of November, 1995, virtually no one would have thought it possible for human beings to change so deeply and so quickly. We were suddenly and forcibly brought to terms with the hollowness of all our institutions and philosophies, and the inherent destructiveness of human nature itself. The old voices of greed and hate fell silent in one long moment of shame and sorrow. All of mankind was at last united — in tragedy, yes, but united just the same — and the unprecedented, profound and unified silence of the moment left space for a new voice to be heard.

It was then that gentleness first had its way. The simple truth of oneness could not be denied, and the small, quiet minority became the way-shower for all mankind. The prophecies of all the ancient cultures — of a time of global conflict followed by the beginning of a new age of peace, "a new heaven and a new earth" — were suddenly clear in meaning. Our individual lives took on a new context and a new sense of purpose.

In the fifteen years since the Great Destruction we have come far: not only have weapons been put aside, but governments and institutions have themselves become virtually meaningless, and the assumption of individual responsibility for wholesome, healing function is virtually everyone's concern and priority. Yet the deeper the internal changes go, the more acute is our awareness that we, humankind, have for millennia been in grievous violation of the natural order. Clearly, we have a long way to go before innocence is restored. The choice has been made, however, and the process is inexorable.

If I could send a message back through time to the people of 1985, it would be one of encouragement and hope, but I would certainly stress the insidiousness of complacency. Had it not been for those brave few who were willing to stop accusing and blaming and to make changes in their own living it is clear the direction of events would not have been taken. It was the individuals who made the difference, not organizations, governments, religions or philosophies; and it is to the individual I would speak. "Only you can do it," I would say. "It is up to you. What we call human nature is not inevitable; beneath your acquired human identity you are inherently divine. Let the light of truth shine through you, no matter what..."

Richard Heinberg is from Loveland, Colorado. "How Peace Was Discovered" was entered in a national essay contest but did not win. It is available as a booklet from Foundation House, 4817 North Country Road 29, Loveland, Colorado 80537, for two dollars.