



## **Culture Shift: 2012 and beyond**

If you have read some of the articles on this site and others that deal with issues such as peak oil, environmental degradation and societal unrest, you'll be aware that there are BIG changes coming, and that mainstream society is largely unaware and unprepared for them. Perhaps the biggest obstacle to overcome in accepting such a reality is an inner one: the psychological shock of thinking that our global way of living could experience uncomfortable and possibly ugly disruption in the all-too-near future. As well as physical preparation, we need to prepare and fortify ourselves mentally and spiritually: we need an inner shift in personal consciousness to aid the emergence of a global culture shift.

### **The end of...**

We tend to dismiss any talk of changes to the fabric of our society as ridiculous; everything seems so secure and permanent - but does it? The cracks are beginning to show and the truth is our just-in-time society is only as strong as the weakest link, and that is very weak indeed. Without energy, cheap and abundant, everything we have come to take for granted will decline and disappear.

The first reaction to a new awareness of peak-oil and its implications is usually one of depression and hopelessness; this passes with acceptance, but the reality can never leave you. The peak oil fraternity is split into two camps, those of the sudden collapse and those of the long, slow decline. I think I'm in the latter camp and in some respects this gives us both more and less hope for the future. More, in that we meet each crisis as it comes; we shift, change tack, retreat, diminish until we live within the means of the new, reduced resource range then available. Less, because this stabilises society over a long cycle (maybe 100+ years), we re-gain strength, recover, re-grow, outstrip our resources again (which are still diminishing) and go through another long collapse period until we once again live within the current range of resources. This process can take several hundred years and is how all previous civilisations have collapsed – it took the Roman empire 500 years to collapse and 150 years for the Mayan empire. At each stage, we will emerge with less technology, less resources and less of the memory and skills required in order to keep so-called essential technologies running. We therefore become less technical over time, retreating into a more basic and restricted society. The first bout of this can be seen in our current global recession; at this stage, of course, everyone expects us to recover and re-grow, and for a while, we will – but not for long.

If, however, we had a quick and almost complete societal collapse, over say two decades, the results would be ugly and utterly devastating, but we would emerge with the same people who have direct knowledge of such technologies and skills as can be recovered - in the long collapse, this information and skill-set is lost over the generations.

This reality is quite difficult to get your head around. The mental transition is easier for some people than others and that all depends upon where you start from. There are some ugly truths which are unpalatable but which have to be faced: with no significant new energy source to replace fossil fuels we will decline. That's the hardest thing, for we are all human and why should some survive when others do not? Of course, when it comes down to such basic things, you want you and yours to be amongst the survivors, so self preservation kicks in. But you also quickly realise that you can't survive in isolation and fight off the hordes of hungry who want the food you've kept or grown for yourself. So you've got to look to your community and see what's there: is it the right place to be, when things get difficult? Are there people who are like-minded around you, who are already doing things? Urban living may get difficult or impossible, but it may not be much easier in the countryside either – it all depends on preparation and skills, but most of all, on attitude. There is probably no better place than where you are right now, for there are too many people and too few places left to run to. I've come to the point now where, although not "ready" in many practical aspects, I'm accepting of the sweeping changes which are on the horizon, like dark storm-clouds looming. I certainly want a good place to shelter, and I'm not sure that I've got it at the moment, but in a perverse kind of way, I look at the gathering clouds and know that we desperately need the rain.

Mankind is on the edge of massive change, no doubt. In the 1920's, the world population was only 1bn; just 90 years ago. In the 1950's it was 2.5bn. Today (2011) it is 7bn and projected to reach 9.5bn by 2050, but I doubt it'll ever get there. I reckon it'll be heading back towards 2bn by that point; a grim thought indeed. Like any life-form that embarks upon an exponential growth curve - fuelled by an abundant energy source - it will collapse once it outgrows and over-pollutes its environment. Retraction may well be painful and ugly in every county of the world, though possibly third-world countries will be the worst hit. On the other hand, they are also those most used and capable of subsistence living. Cuba survived it's shake-up after the collapse of the USSR and subsequent loss of oil supplies, because it had not entirely lost its peasant culture; there were still an older generation who knew how to cultivate land with an ox, how to grow vegetables without chemical fertilisers, etc. Only when global transport systems - and so food markets - collapse will poor countries be free to grow their own food again.

In the supposedly advanced countries of the world we have long lost such connections and have become de-skilled in many basic things. We don't know

how to maintain or repair things; gone are the old gaffers (which even I can remember) who would repair your broken spade, or sharpen a hand-saw. Today, we go to the DIY store and buy another, something we won't be able to do in the future – we'll all be left with a shed full of blunt disposable saws that can't be sharpened (I've just bought a traditionally-made, sharpenable hand-saw; it's a joy to use; I'll be buying some more). Most of the younger generations do not know how to change a plug, because today, they are moulded onto the lead and we are inculcated with the mantra of replacement, not repair. Self reliance then needs a skill-set and once we realise that we can set about re-skilling ourselves, our family, friends and neighbours. That is a pivotal point of personal empowerment, and in our coming to terms with all the monumental changes that are going to be thrust upon us, self empowerment is the key to mental, physical and spiritual survival. In fact, once you embrace this simple fact, you can begin to not merely prepare to survive, but actually thrive in the most positive of senses. And there is an amazing array of week-end courses springing up in all sorts of fields, from survival training, to making bio-diesel, to wood craft, spinning and rearing pigs or poultry, as well as courses on inner transformation - check them out, go on some.

I haven't been able, personally, to do much about my family's overall energy consumption (our old cottage just haemorrhages space heating in winter, and an off-grid self-built house is my long-term answer, although a recent woodstove has made a contribution), but we have started mastering the arts of self reliance in food terms, a long but exciting road. Fortunately, I've always been good at building with my hands, especially from recycled materials: useful skills.

Imparting this knowledge to other members of your family, especially children, is hard; one of the most difficult things we will all have to deal with sooner or later. Denial is a very common reaction, of course; you will be laughed at by some, although events of the recent years very much prove the point about what is happening, if only people will stop to see it for what it actually is. We can now point to the rapid effects and consequences of high oil prices: food riots, transport problems, unprecedented rates of company bankruptcies, and of course, a consequential world recession. Some people are ready to listen, but some never will, and beyond a point, you just have to leave them behind. Hard, but you cannot force anyone to understand, accept or act. You can only raise the subject, and it might lose you friends. But this is not about evangelical preaching; it's not a religion, or a belief we can adopt if we so choose; it's a reality that's coming whether we accept it or not. Unfortunately one of the first reactions is the apparent removal of hope, and this has to be countered with the many positive outcomes of the new arising.

To create the best possible future then, personal re-skilling must develop into a more comprehensive necessity; that of lifeboat-building. Think of society as the Titanic, with too few lifeboats because they were deemed unnecessary and unattractive; that's where we are now. So build a lifeboat, or maybe an ark. If

lots of us do this, the means to help others, by demonstration, will be in place, which is help that government will never provide, not until it's too late. No-one will get this completely right, there is no perfect way, and not everyone will succeed, but some will, in some measure and in that lies hope for us all. Eventually new, smaller, societies will emerge, necessarily local in their reach, yet with global wisdom and hopefully, some degree of global communications and awareness still intact. From this comes the possibility of a new world based upon fresh, or maybe timeless values: respect, co-operation, moderation, community; aspects that by and large, are missing from modern society.

It's easy to see why people grab hold of 2012 and talk of the end of the world; people love a drama to distract from their daily cares or monotones. I predict that the world will *not* be hit by meteors, solar radiation or the four horsemen of the apocalypse, and the Mayans themselves never stated that the world will end. Yet if this all collapse stuff sounds like stepping back into the dark ages, it would be, but for one thing; we *are* on the cusp of new emergence of spiritual consciousness.

## **Rising Consciousness**

We might think that a change in "levels of consciousness" is a far-fetched idea, yet we have seen absolutely massive changes in our thinking modalities and awareness over the last hundred years; perhaps more so than at any other time in the preceding two millennia, including the industrial revolution. These are nothing less than shifts of consciousness. I'm no historian, but let us look backwards for a moment over just the last 100 years:

In 1911, we were entrenched in Victorian attitudes; life was tough, strict, with clear social hierarchies which pretty much dictated your lot in life, and this essentially was the way it had been for centuries before that, albeit with differing cultures and surface values. People were struggling to emerge and find freedom with, for example, the Suffragettes' movement for women's rights to vote and be heard. In Germany and Austria we had the Arts movements which sought a more profound expression of life, such as Art Nouveau. The First World War saw the beginning of the end of a mindset which had dominated for centuries. In that awful war, men were shot as cowards when suffering from shellshock and pilots were refused parachutes as they were considered a sign of cowardice. After the war the wounded and disabled were not cared for either in mind, body or soul as we should do now (some might argue this is still the case). Collectively, the mindset was of low consciousness, of the societal level, but with little regard or rights or needs of the individual.

The 1920's - the roaring twenties - saw perhaps as an escape from the horrors of war, mental and moral liberation for the privileged few - but only for them. For the rest of society, structures of class and opportunity still remained and constrained, though much altered. Art took on more linear expression with

movements like Art Deco. The 30's saw more suffering with the great depression. Again, there was little by way of safety-net or concern for the individual.

Only in the 1960's and 70's did the language of self take on recognition in the larger society, with the emergence of professions like personal psychology and psychiatry. At last the self had accepted status, but when the global effects of the OPEC oil crisis finally receded, the 1980's self-obsessed culture took over and became a runaway train.

### **Spiritual transformation.**

In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many see the rise of human consciousness to higher levels as a transformative process that is already underway, a sort of cultural undercurrent which is developing into a massive groundswell of change, parallel to the chaos of societal disintegration, but moving in the opposite direction. Why should this happen? One reason may simply be the freedom to communicate that new technologies have given us, plus lifestyles where many of us (in the "developed" world, at least) no longer struggle to survive.

The last 15 years has seen the rise of the mobile phone and the internet, and whilst these things certainly have their negative sides (for the masses, technology replaces inquisitive thinking and reduces independence), they are also a force for massive change and enlightenment in our personal search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world. It is an odd paradox that the technology that is created as a consequence of scientific, reductionist, linear, consumer-led, self-obsessed society is also a tool that is setting many people free in their questing for a more profound experience of life. A simple example of this freedom is the fact that I am sitting on a train writing this on a small notepad, connected to the world via the internet and my email, blogs and twitter; all ways to spread the idea of change. A better example might be the struggle for freedom we are currently witnessing with the Arab Spring, where repressive regimes can no longer keep people in ignorance of other, more desirable, ways of being.

This spiritual consciousness then is not about religion, about choosing a belief, or following a routine, nor a Guru (I've tried all those things). It is not about depriving yourself, being chaste or wearing hair shirts. To me it is about experiencing *directly*, the possibilities of a spiritual way of being, and I mean experiencing. Theory is not enough; an idea of spiritual bliss elsewhere/when is not what I want to think of. I want God within my soul and I want it right now. We all do, those of us who look beyond the Dance of Maya, the illusion of our daily lives and demand that there be more. In fact, I want to be One with that

universal presence, whatever you might call it; no longer the illusion of God, with the rest of us as separate, for separation arises only from the ego, "I think, therefore I am". I think it important to understand that there is no separation, that there are many different ways of perceiving the universal oneness, that there is no absolute or right and only path. Religion, or rather the (human) powers behind religion, has caused too many wars with this kind of elitist thinking. There can only be one, omnipresent and omnipotent force or being; that it has many names and paths towards it is a no-brainer to me. Many roads lead to Rome, but God may not be a Catholic.

In a world of new and arising consciousness therefore, we must open ourselves up to new experiences and new understandings of the nature of the universe. Out must go the linear-reductionist line that life is just a chance of chemical combinations, to a deeper realisation that the universe is energy, and that energy created life to express consciousness. This is not though, about replacing one ideology with another, for we can make these up to suit the mood of the time. This is why we have to understand the higher consciousness, not as a theory but as a direct perception. Only then can we know what is true. Meantime, humanity is likely in for a rough ride, the outcome of which can only be uncertain. Fasten your seatbelt, brace yourself, but look up for the light. Tunnels only exist in the linear mind.