

Positive Global Warming: Climate Change we can Live with
By Russell Delman **May 2013**

In Part 1 of this article, I emphasize that we all create a “climate” around us; through our thoughts, words and deeds; we influence the “atmosphere” of others; we can be responsible for our “emissions; there is a connection between our individual “climate” and how we as a species approach the planetary dangers connected to global climate change.

In part two I emphasize that fundamental to “positive global warming” is the experience of interconnectivity. Our daily interactions, our collective attitudes and our ecological decisions will be based in our inner sense of interconnectivity or disconnectedness.

Part 1: Positive Global Warming: Climate Change We Can Live With

Like most of us I am concerned about the atmospheric changes occurring on our planet. I believe the scientific consensus pointing to potentially life threatening changes. Human beings are beginning to address these issues. Though uncertain, I am hopeful for our capacity to take care of our home.

There is another kind of climate change that draws my concern. This revolves around how we directly effect our environment at each moment. We each radiate a personal climate that influences life around us. Our individual and then collective thoughts, feeling and actions help to determine the atmosphere in which we live.

When I think of my daughter leaving for graduate school in a couple of months, I am very interested in the “climate” of the people in her world. Is there a general sense of caring that extends beyond one’s intimate circle? How far out does this care emanate and might it even include those with differing views? Is there a general atmosphere of fear, apprehension, contraction or do people live with a kind of hopefulness and sense of possibility? What kind of climate will she bring into her new experiences.

How can we be responsible for the atmosphere that we emanate?
Choosing life-giving thoughts and actions means to have the freedom of choice. This is a rare capacity, reflective of a new level of consciousness on our planet. As many great teachers have shown, awareness is the essential requirement for freedom. Without awareness, we are bound to repeat the thoughts, feelings and actions of the past. We can call this the law of human behavior, sometimes called the law of karma.

Please join me in actively reflecting on these issues. Observe your influence on the beings around you in simple moments, going to the store, meeting the postal person or answering the phone.

- Do people usually seem uplifted, weighted down or not significantly influenced by your presence?
- What other words or images would you use for your effect on your world?
- Do you often feel free to choose new thoughts, feelings and actions in your everyday life?

Part 2: Climate Change We Can Live With

Interconnectedness

Your physically felt body is, in fact, part of a gigantic system of here and other places, now and other times, you and other people, in fact the whole universe. This sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is the body as it is felt from the inside.

Gene Gendlin

We are inter-being, we inter-are

Thich Nhat Hahn

The essential cause of "positive" climate change can be summarized in one word: interconnectedness. Interconnectedness implies wholeness, the sense of non-separation, harmony and relatedness. I think of this in two ways- interconnected within oneself and interconnected with one's world.

We are a multiplicity. We like to think of ourselves as a single entity, a self, yet within each of us there are many “selves”, voices and ways of being. Sometimes it can be helpful to think of ourselves as a single entity, other times as having multiple selves. When integrated, these selves function as a coherent whole, when divided against each other a toxic inner environment is created. The “Russell” writing this is both connected to and not the same as the one who speaks to his daughter, walks with his wife, reads the newspaper, gets angry, is aware of joy, gets defensive and who attempts to bring wisdom to this morning’s seminar. When one’s “parts” are in good communication, flowing harmoniously together, we feel whole. “Unity within diversity” is both the model of the healthy individual and enlightened society. In addition to harmonious interrelatedness between our various selves, wholeness requires interconnectedness with the outer world.

Grass and worms and squirrels and salmon are always at one with their environment. We humans can sometimes be in harmony with the world and at other times function as if separate from it. Think of how unique this is. The natural world functions from implicit interconnectivity, thriving when conditions are right, dying when not. How do we manage to form our illusion of separation when even our bones do not exist in separation from the outer world? Without the pull of the earth our bones would not form. When in outer space the bones of astronauts disintegrate at alarming rates if they do not exercise every day. Similarly, our cells require oxygen from the atmosphere and our body is fed from the bounty of the earth. We do not exist as an entity distinct from this world. An inner sense of separation is a painful fiction. It is not just that you need these elements to live, you are not “you” without them just as you are not you without your heart pumping. We are not simply dependent upon our environment, we are one with our environment. To really understand this distinction, opens us to a new way of being in the world.

To be whole is to experience our interconnectedness both within the boundaries of our skin AND in relation to the world. How does this work? As we have seen above, we do not exist only within the boundary of our skin? A person with a healthy sense of self can feel both the boundary of the physical body- their autonomy- AND sense that their self extends beyond the boundaries of their skin. Experiencing oneself

as larger than the physical body creates a different relationship to life and our planet.

Before there is “I” there is “we”

“You look in the eyes of your mother. She smiles. You smile. In her gaze a knowing begins”.

Interrelatedness extends beyond our biology and into our self as social beings. We do not exist outside of our interactions, outside of our relationships. We discover or invent a sense of self through attachments usually beginning with our mothers and fathers.

We are “pack animals”. Even the introverts amongst us rely on relatedness to form their identities. We are formed by our “situations” which includes the functions, roles and relationships that make up every moment. The “you” that is reading this is not the same as the one who will be speaking to someone later. “I” comes from “we” not the other way around.

In the following quote from great Zen Master Dogen the “ten thousand dharmas” refers to all things that you encounter: all objects, situations, thoughts and feelings:

To carry the self forward and realize (experience) the ten thousand dharmas is delusion.

That the ten thousand dharmas advance and realize (experience) the self is enlightenment.

Reborn Freshly in the Living Moment

Could it be helpful to think that “you” do not get carried from situation to situation but are actually formed by the situation? Think about this seriously. Might we, ordinary people like you and me, accept Buddha’s invitation to “put down the burden of carrying a solid self”? I suggest that it is possible and helpful to have a sense of being both a creative, autonomous self AND realizing that we are reborn freshly by the situations in which we live.

There is much freedom in this experience. To repeat, it is important to have a sense of continuity, a linking of the various manifestations of a self yet to live only as a solid self is a great burden. It is important, accurate and healthy to have both a sense of continuity and continual rebirth. One of the main functions of a meditation practice is to help each of these experiences of self and no-self to evolve. Each is needed for a healthy, authentic and evolving life.

Disconnectedness

If we are so obviously completely interconnected with our environment, how do we get lost in the tragedy of disconnectedness and isolation? Can we see that violence, environmental degradation and all selfish behavior come from this sense of separation? Imagine if we experienced ourselves as cells within a single organism. How would this change our relationships? Is losing the feeling of connectedness to both nature and others the necessary price we must pay for the cultivation of an autonomous, creative, free-thinking Self?

Some spiritual writers point to the “Fall”, the leaving of the Garden of Eden, as the time when humanity “traded” connectedness to all of Life for individuality. Others suggest that it is in the development of our post-tribal, modern consciousness that we began to grow the autonomous sense of self and lose our sense of connectedness. I believe that it is the task of modern humanity to simultaneously grow these dual capacities. We each have a different gift to bring into this world. We can grow this unique expression of self- thinking new thoughts, doing new deeds, creating new beauty- while also sensing oneself as part of a larger whole. Self and no-self. This is the thrill of evolving consciousness!

In the modern western world we can see the great gift of creative thought in our artistic, scientific and social development. Even with all our collective troubles there are more men and women on our planet who have the possibility of realizing their potential than ever before. People throughout the world are living longer with far greater health, mobility and potential. Though it is important to acknowledge the many troubling social events and abuses of power, it is essential that we also see how living has been improving for humanity over the last centuries.

For example, even with the horrendous violence against women that we read about every day, more women on our planet are casting off the shackles of patriarchy than ever.

We can also see how our planet is being destroyed by disconnected thinking in which greed is encouraged through our social and economic systems. Rampant narcissism and “me, me, me” philosophy destroys both our happiness and our planet at the same time. The key to integrating our individuality with our connectivity is to bring awareness to our capacity for disconnectedness.

Disconnected Thinking

*"God guard me from thoughts that man thinks in the mind alone"
He who sings a lasting song thinks in the marrow bone"
W.B. Yeats*

“Lost in thought, we drive down the highway, repeating to ourselves the same upsetting conversation from the early morning. Barely noticing the glistening sunrise we continue, functioning on automatic pilot”.

We have been raised to value thinking more than direct experience. It's as if the images in our minds, the representations in our higher brains have more reality than direct experience through our bodies. This was an unintended consequence of the scientific revolution's focus on objectivity. Many of us do not believe something is real unless it has been proven in a laboratory. While objectivity can be very helpful under certain conditions, it can also invite an alienation from one's living experience. Thinking, when in connection to life is a great gift. Yet, thinking when disconnected from life leads to disaster. We can see this on our planet and in our relationships. Being 'lost in one's head' destroys life. Recovering an embodied relationship to life is key to balancing this tendency.

Think of our modern educational systems in which analysis and deduction are emphasized. Recently a young mom said to me, “in kinder-garden my child is being asked to sit at a desk all day and read. There is little playtime and just one hour of music each week”. When we

overvalue that part of intelligence that divides things up, mostly through the left cerebral hemisphere, we lose our sense of wholeness. Think of how throwing balls together or dancing or singing requires both inner integration and connectedness with others. These are the capacities that the modern world tends to undervalue.

Disconnected Feeling

I don't trust my inner feelings, you know feelings come and go
Leonard Cohen

“Lost in anger, we say words we wish to take back. Once said they can never be unsaid.”

Back in the 70's, as a way out of this thought worshipping trance, many decided that getting in touch with feelings was the answer. While being in touch with feelings as a part of our total experience is invaluable, when disconnected from our wholeness, feelings are just as anti-life as thinking. Living on an emotional roller coaster does not create fulfillment. To identify one's self with feelings does not engender security, clarity or a sense of being whole. One simply goes up and down depending on one's temporary state.

Disconnected Sensing

Once obsession with the body is gone, you will revert to your natural state.
Nisargadatta Maharaj

“If only I could lose 20 pounds I would be happy. One more drink I will feel wonderful”

Worshipping sensations in themselves leads us down that same path of disconnection. When the body becomes the main vehicle for self-identity, we suffer. Bodies are unreliable as sources of fulfillment. There are three main ways that body identity fails us.

Pleasure Compulsion: Although physical pleasure can be wonderful, if we observe closely, we can see that pleasure divorced from wholeness creates discontent. Notice how often pleasure seeking becomes

compulsive and the source of more and more wanting rather than contentment. Confusing pleasure with true joy creates pain.

Impermanence: Bodies decay over time. Even the most beautiful or physically fit person will experience loss. If we strongly identify our value as a person with how we look or what we can do we will suffer.

Objectification: When we identify ourselves or others primarily as bodies, our human relatedness is lost. We then live in a world of objects. Implicit in this loss is a disconnection from our deeper soul qualities including love, joy and peace. Deep longing then is our constant companion. As the world becomes more affluent, hatred of one's body becomes more rampant. When asked, a large percentage of teenage girls said they would rather be thin than discover a cure for cancer! Hatred of one's body becomes hatred of one's self.

The compulsive "thinker" who gathers self-identity from thoughts, the "feeler" jumping from one emotional state to another or the body-obsessed "senser" who identifies exclusively with how their body looks or feels is bound to experience disconnectedness from wholeness. This disconnection from self is also a disconnection from the world.

Integration

"Sitting here, sensing my bottom in the chair and cool breath coming in, I notice a feeling of curiosity as I think about you reading this article and wonder about your response. My chest tightens a bit as I imagine it being too long and then eases as I notice a soft satisfaction in not shortening it".

The antidote to disconnectedness is integration. To be integrated four components must be alive at the same time. First, we need to have a quality of presence or awareness- one is in touch with the living moment. Experiencing our bodies is key to this. Notice that to sense your left foot right now you must enter the present moment. Our bodily sensing is a doorway to presence. The same body that can lead us astray when disconnected can be open us to the living moment. This is the ground for a sense of interconnectedness.

In addition to sensing our bodily state we also need connection with our feelings in a given moment. We always have some feeling-tones that can

be sensed if we pay attention. Together the sensations and feelings form a “felt-sense” of the moment. For this felt-sense to enter consciousness we need some kind of symbol, a word, picture or image to frame the moment. Thinking is a form of symbolizing, a way of creating a representation of reality.

When sensing, feeling and thinking/symbolizing are all alive in a single, living moment, we have the experience of wholeness or integration. Our thinking becomes “heart thinking”. Our feelings include reflection. Our body sense infuses our thoughts and feelings. From this self-aware state, people can function in harmony with self and world. This is the key to radiating a warm personal climate in which people feel sustenance from your presence. It is also the key to a sense of interconnectivity that is needed for our harmonious living on this planet.

“In those moments when awareness succeeds in being at one with feeling, senses, movement and thought, the carriage {i.e. our skeleton} will speed along the right road. Then man can make discoveries, invent, create, innovate and “know”. He grasps that his small world and the great world around are but one and that in this unity he is no longer alone”.

Moshe Feldenkrais, “Awareness Through Movement”, p.54

