

THE TRULY SUSTAINABLE *human* HOME

PERCEIVING THE REAL CHALLENGES OF THESE TIMES

It is a small but dramatic shift in perception to consider that the challenges we seem to face in the outer world are mere shadows of more important internal challenges that we all face within our selves.

As an example, there is much talk about the unsustainable life styles we live and that the diminishing resources in our world will force us to either dramatically scale down our living standards or face uncertain and probably dire consequences in a not too distant future. With an estimated global population of 9.5 billion people by 2050 (up from 6.3 billion today) there is little sense that we are yet seriously addressing these challenges.

No one can fail to have been forced to consider the diminishing energy resources, the widespread pollution and the consequent global warming – so why do we not yet seem concerned enough or urgent enough to take the necessary steps to address these challenges? Could it be that the focus of our awareness is misplaced and that we don't quite perceive the real challenges?

The awareness of the catalogue of challenges that we face can cause us to feel overwhelmed not just as individuals but at governmental level where inconceivable trillions of dollars are being spent to try and repair every tear in the canvas of what we have come to expect is the stable landscape of our daily lives.

But what if we were aware of the wrong issues with the wrong parts of our nervous system? What if doing nothing in reaction to all these seemingly pressing issues was what was necessary, to enable us to perceive the more fundamental issues that could bring about real change that lie behind the obvious ones?

Of course doing nothing seems unthinkable in the face of mounting problems and yet resisting the tidal wave of pressures that would have us act externally to find solutions is exactly what it required in finding a new starting point from an 'integrated' level of self rooted within.

A New Template for Change

Real change begins within and if the mindsets and thinking that has caused our current crisis is the source from which the actions that have got us into this mess have arisen, then applying these same ways of thinking to solving the problems is illogical. As Albert Einstein famously put it, 'To continue doing the same thing and hope for a different result is the definition of madness'.

The constant round of altering positions and reactions to the awareness of crisis externally works against the realisation of that inner still point where the perception of the real challenges that we can undertake in our ways of thinking (feeling, perceiving, developing values) can begin to be found.

A very simple and common example bears out this thesis that the outer issue is a shadow of the inner real issue – making our homes 'sustainable'.

Developing a truly sustainable/generational home from within

In the external side of the metaphor, each one of us lives inside a house of some kind, small or large, 10 bedrooms or one, on the right or wrong side of the track.

We are aware that the global resources available to sustain our homes are not unlimited and this awareness causes an increasing number of us to want to be responsible in our use of those resources. Make no mistake, I don't disagree with this but only question whether our focus externally may not be masking a more fundamental issue internally.

We are encouraged by government and the simple arguments of our perceived situation to use energy saving technology, to develop practices that are not wasteful and so on all with the overtones of restraint. So we live the same lives as we have done before but with more restraint – we don't actually change our lives. Even the restraint we may exercise is tempered with the anticipation of the return of 'better times' again soon and the release from restraint to renewed abandon in the way we spend our resources.

Let's now take the same issue and consider the inner corresponding meanings of living in a home and see if we can perceive the issue of change as opposed to the general alteration of external behaviour (the restrained and then abandoned use of resources). After all, it was only about 10 years ago that most people didn't see anything wrong with living lives that generated huge amounts of waste, pollution and the like – so in our life times' we have seen the swing from one side to the other.

Our First Home – Within



The External House

The House (in which we live)

It is a contentious issue amongst psychologists and neuroscientists as to where exactly our sense of self resides but few would argue that we have an abiding sense of self that lives within - somewhere. Who after all is reading these lines on the page? Are you not aware of both the words on the page and the self reading them?

Our experience of living in our bodies is remarkably similar to the way we live in our own homes (thought vastly inferior in technology and acumen). The self inside, the world and others outside – each effecting the other through a subtle membrane of senses and nerves and as yet other unverifiable yet highly refined systems that convey thoughts, ideas, impressions and intelligence across the boundaries from within to without and vice - versa.

The brain acting as storehouse (memories), processor, context maker and so forth – all building the unique signature of self that we feel to be the stable and coherent and recognizable 'I' at the centre of the stage.

Our early awareness of our selves' is that we live inside a house – most obviously our body and that sense of self even has access to the overall 'body shape' as it is called. We have a constant awareness of the confines of our physical homes. Close your eyes for a moment and you can easily access this sense of the whole of the body – even those who have lost limbs maintain the same overall sense of the body shape as a permanent feature of awareness of self.

Perhaps the word temple or sanctuary as some religions and spiritual traditions refer to it is a better concept than 'body' since we occupy this space as we do our homes and apartments and therein we enact our lives, our practices and our ceremonies.

Our sense of self is emergent. At birth, it is small and grows through discovering that it can do in ways that are not that different to the way we develop a sense of our self when we move into a new home, checking the neighbourhood, the garden, the rooms... we affect the 'house' that then can affect the sense of our self.

Nowhere is this more obvious than the effect that our thinking, our ability to program our brain, causes the brain to be wired this way or that. In fact a whole branch of Neuroscience, Neuro-plasticity, has arisen to explore precisely the ways in which our brain can adapt to new programs.

Our early years are so vital in this respect as we (with the guiding influence of others) lay down neural pathways that are not only present throughout our lives but often trigger behaviours learnt in our early childhood. I tend to watch behaviour and rather than judge it as good or bad, try to locate the 'age' in the arc of human maturing from which it arises.

We are all born inside an already constructed house that is pre-programmed to bring essential resources to the occupant: air, sensory impressions and so on and our most primitive sense of self operating through our most ancient brain regions, has the impulse to seek food, light, water and contact with those dependents (our parents) who most obviously provide these.

The brain, as we know, is hardwired at birth to seek to bring air and food and water to the 'house' in which we find our selves along with the array of sensory data through eyes, ears, taste, touch and smell. Any disruption to these essential services is a threat to our very existence. So our initial sense of self is within the safe haven of this first 'childhood' home, where food and air and all the colours shapes and sounds that we process are delivered by unseen hands and sustain our survival.

Depending where our house is located, the sights and sounds that colour the external landscape will reach us and will be uniquely nurturing of our 'sense of self'.



It is only by 'living' in that house and living includes in our early life the natural impulses to 'try out' every function in the house that these functions of the house reach their optimal function. We exercise vigorously in our early years hardly aware that by so doing we are actually growing the house's ability to bring resources home and to lay down abilities to later in life bring resources to ourselves unaided.

Consequently if we do not exercise our selves within the growing of the house to its full function (or are prevented from so doing) the house loses some of its potential faculties.

Consider the way the human eye grows wires to the brain by the very act of seeing and if we were to cover up the eyes of a child in it's early development stages this function would not develop through lack of usage (the wires would simply not grow from the eyes to the visual cortex). So our sense of self is one of using and fully and actively engaging with the facilities of the house – and that is in fact its relationship – each relies upon the other to grow.

So by the time we enter adolescence, all the main functions of the house are in place and developed and the most notable shift that signifies the completion of the childhood sense of self, the 'building the house' phase, and the beginning of the adolescent 'responsibly occupying the house' phase is the activation of the sexual function. Our ability and responsibility to co-create new 'houses' that will invite new tenants to emerge therein is a very different 'age' from childhood reactivity. Responsibility is the signature theme of adolescence.

The purpose of the first house is to guarantee our survival and continuance and our emergent sense of self is self-centred to feed and provide ongoing safety by reading the immediate environment in ways that ensure we do. Through the ages of hunting and gathering, the emergence of the agrarian and industrial ages, our major concerns have been to explore ways to guarantee our basic survival and for some the 'luxury' of being able to explore the meaning of living beyond mere survival.

Let's call this sense of self our first self, reactive and self-centred seeking those resources that guarantee our survival and see the next part of this sequence.

Our Second Home - Planetary



The second home is planetary – to grow and explore the environment (and the natural laws that attune us to its values) and is personal and collectively formed

By the time we reach adolescence, the awareness has grown that it is our task to take over responsibility for sustaining these various 'foods' that sustain us in the home in which we live and that our sense of self cannot escape that responsibility.

Responsibility, the ability to respond, is not just limited to the obvious need to hunt and gather (or whatever that might mean living in a city going shopping in a supermarket and having the means to pay for already packaged food). It is a responsibility to explore the external environment, to interact on different/more independent terms with others and to explore the basic opportunities of living, thinking, feelings, perceiving, interacting with others and so on.

The onset of this phase is correspondingly born out by the slowing down of brain activity and growth. The physical house is largely formed and the occupant, our sense of self, connected to the main survival processes that will allow it to self-preserve. The 'growth' of the brain is largely in the way we exercise our selves in living from this point onward.

The sense of self that develops in these adolescent years is one that serves the purposes of being a forager/explorer, responsible to interact with the outside world on terms and agreements that underpin the social contract of which we are all a part and that we all are responsible for.

The self is more able to be aware of and responsible for the ongoing experiments in living – asking always 'what does this mean to have a life? In what way am I to form myself to make of this opportunity something meaningful? In what way do I form relationships with others and the world around?

Again, the same principle is true – it is only by the exercise of 'self' in this exploratory phase that we are able to release our full potential into function – but exercise here is less and less about the physical testing out of our faculties and more and more about forming our sense of self.

If Neuro-plasticity has shown one thing it is that the ability of the brain to adjust, adapt and alter has been a far more pervasive faculty of the brain than ever we first realised. New studies show that practices such as yoga, meditation, prayer, even simple acts of contemplation can actually alter the structure of the brain in remarkably short periods of time. As little as 15 minutes meditation for two weeks, as an example, can recognisably alter the brain function and this gives a neurological basis for the universal truth that 'you become what you think about'.

The exploration of the 'self' within the home, once it has taken care of adequately providing for it's needs (which as we have seen generally means over-providing for it's needs) then still seeks to find some value for the living process. Just sustaining is not enough.

This second phase in which the self is explorer, experiences the house in which we live as not just a place of shelter and protection, but as a house of 'values' as we come to more complex early conclusions about the way we want to be as individuals (the way we want to think) and the way we want to be (our character as it has been called). We are forced to make choices about what is important and what is not.

This adolescent phase of living is characterised by exploration of the broader human experience– looking and searching to find new foods that renew the systems beyond mere survival – new thoughts, new perceptions, new feelings, new ideas that enrich the sense of self living within the second home – it is a hunger for value based on what we deem to be meaningful whereas the first hunger is one driven by the need to 'fill up' with the various foods upon which our survival and continuance depend.

As the hungers that first drove our lives in our early years ebb in our middle years to be transformed into deeper considerations about who we are and what purpose our lives really is to serve.

Every new generation asks the same questions afresh driven by an existential emptiness and hunger to find a home for our self that is more permanent than our physical home. Our second home is to live inside the values of being a human (that one has uniquely come to from one's own exploration).

No matter what we may come to, we do not genetically pass our conclusions on to the next generation so this is very much the permission of our self to make a fresh attempt that is on our own credit card – so to speak. The core of our individuality is that it does not become part of the gene pool but is a unique exploration from the sense of self that we are here alone to decide. We can 'play safe' and follow the example of previous ages, parents, culture, or we can make an individual quest from our own unique search – the sense of self that derives from this second phase.

The powerful question before us in a world where conformity has been practised so successfully upon us all as a means of control is: are we strong enough in our sense of self to make this exploration from the original sense of our selves or will the persuasion of the external environment determine the course of that quest – at our peril?

Materialism may be perceived to be an external behaviour that to a very large extent seeks ownership and control of resources but it is driven by an internal hunger that was learnt in our childhood phase of self. When we knowingly 'choose' to devour, use, damage and destroy the world in the name of acquiring resources we are developing a sense of self based in negative values (greed, insatiable hunger, covetousness...) and this is where a further aspect of self can be perceived that unless addressed will continue to 'run' the world and culture.

The biblical advice to 'put away childhood things' holds true – if in this second phase of the evolution of the self we 'knowingly' greed and hunger and destroy – it is on our own credit card – on our heads.

The urgent need for hungers to be filled in childhood is natural and proportionate to the growth of the child's body and faculties. The hunger that is pre-meditated and calculated conditions the self to be divided – we live lives that are underpinned with values that are not sustainable – as we know very well today where the life style of many 'advanced' cultures would need several planets to sustain their requirements.

To live inside the second home and not know 'what to do, how to go on, why to live is a torment that can only drive us on to aspire to new heights or to regress to our first self state that seeks to greed and glut upon all available resources to stimulate an adequate sense of self.

Not only are we living in an age where there is a growing global awareness of these lack of 'external' resources to accommodate such greed, but we are evolving into a new age with a new consciousness. Not surprisingly, the age of hunters and gatherers gave way to agrarian life, industrial revolution and the age of technology and now we are on the edge of a new 'spiritual' age – a new consciousness – that is born from the hunger and emptiness from within.

No surprise then that many people are not too willing to look inside but prefer to act vigorously in combating external challenge trying to effect and change the outer world from an un-evolved inner sense of self.

A new appearing consciousness

There is a growing evidence that many people today are beginning to turn away from this external greed and find a new consciousness of our human part in living and to explore new values and new principles of living. That underdeveloped countries' should think that it is now their right and their turn to despoil the planet and claim unending resources can only mean a quickening of the destruction of our planetary environment.

One of the inevitable outcomes of a recession is that there is a search for new values, it being impossible to continue to 'grow' the economy endlessly – which is in defiance of natural law.

Those thought leaders who have evolved new 'human' values based in principles of integration and respect for all life rather than the usage of life are central to the retraining and evolution of the human endeavour and next steps.

Educational programs must be tailored to amplify this inner awareness of self – that we are the answer to our own problems that we are the resource from which we can draw new understanding new feeling a new sense of self and not from being controlled to restrain our selves. In carefully structured circumstances, nurturing programs that allow individuals to tune in to the inner quest can have huge benefits – it is here that real change can commence.

Using less resources, damaging the planet less is not a value expressed it is an altered behaviour in reacting to external signals of problem (danger, threat and all the old evolutionary triggers) to which we attribute some merit or value but it is not a core value only a peripheral or derived value.

Imagine an abusive relationship where one partner expresses a resolve to 'abuse less' anticipating this will endear the person to them. It is only when we know from what principle (higher truth) that we can extend real sustainable /generative contracts to other forms of life, people, animals or the planet itself and this brings us to the third home each one extending the parameters of our sense of self from the body (senses and hungers) to the larger environment (through a growing awareness of our responsibility in a larger environment) to the 'unlimited' sense of self as a universal life in which our 'particular actions resonate a higher truth and principle.

The Third House - Universal



The universal home – home to our spirit and consciousness in which the self seeks to serve to bring higher consciousness of the principles that govern all life in which the human part in evolution becomes clear – we are a partner in evolution

The human search to find values, moral positions and a truly 'human' position within the affairs and lives of all forms of life can only lead to a sense of acquiescence to the sacredness of life and the inter-connective web of which we are all a part. The search for values exposes our thinking, feeling positions to questions as to its authenticity. The 'authentic self' has been identified as one of the most enduring qualities of a real leader – that they are real.

To arrange one self within ones second home is for a very long time to find peace in the not knowing – but the becoming. These positions cannot be learned but only grown developed over time. This the spiritual pivot point around which a newly evolved level of consciousness can grow – the not knowing self that makes an honest search to discover what it means to be human and responsible for being human.

It is this spiritual pivot point that has reverberated through history through the lives of the great and the good, the saviours and the sages – right up to this time. This is the beginning of our adult life – and the corresponding emergence of an adult self, a spiritually conscious self.

The third home, some may call it the universal home for the spiritual self is founded in the simple principle that we 'return' to our greater home by affirming that we are essentially spiritual beings living in a universal home and that our planetary life is but a 'human experience' that is temporary and fleeting. The meaning of our spiritual life is in contributing to the place in which we find our selves born

When we sublimate the identification we have in being attached to local life and circumstance, we can derive meaning from a far greater purposes, we can essentially affirm through our self those behaviours that would add value to all life – in all the many available domains that living presents us with.

It is only when we serve a greater purpose that we join the human team and sublimate the sense of individual self in the service of a greater mission.

The universal truths and principles are the great home in which our sense of self seeks only to serve – this is the third hunger, the hunger to be of service to the appearance of a more illuminated state of affairs and a greater sense of humanity in our span of life.

Returning to the Thesis

Lest anyone think that this article diminishes the good sense in being careful stewards of the planets resources or is dismissive of many of the considered ways we can all participants in being good stewards of the planets environment, let me say:

It is not what we do or even how we do, it is why we do that most counts.

An external reaction to, say, the desecration of the Amazon forests because it is causing the release of huge amounts of CO₂ and all that that may imply is very differently aligned from the adherence to an internal principle to respect the planet and to ensure that we do not leave any situation lesser than when we found. This principle guides our daily actions and is a principle of human behaviours that is truly illuminating of a new world.

If children learnt that every situation is one that they can exercise themselves in that principles they would be developing into good and reasonable world citizens from an early age.

Every dealing, with ones family with the person in the supermarket, with colleagues is an opportunity to exercise oneself in that principle – to no leave things in a lesser state than one found them and if one can actually enhance each situation then we are actually ‘building’ or generating a new world and not making ‘sustainability’ the highest aspiration of human life.

Once our sense of self occupies our internal home aligned to the emergent human opportunity to serve and contribute, we become truly world citizens who can exercise our incredible intelligence to illuminate a new humanity.

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