

# The Three Dimensions of the Great Turning

by Joanna Macy

## 1. Actions to slow the damage to Earth and its beings

Perhaps the most visible dimension of the Great Turning, these activities include all the political, legislative, and legal work required to reduce the destruction, as well as direct actions--blockades, boycotts, civil disobedience, and other forms of refusal. A few examples:

- documenting and the ecological and health effects of the Industrial Growth Society;
- lobbying or protesting against the World Trade Organization and the international trade agreements that endanger ecosystems and undermine social and economic justice;
- blowing the whistle on illegal and unethical corporate practices;
- blockading and conducting vigils at places of ecological destruction, such as old-growth forests under threat of clear-cutting or at nuclear dumping grounds.

Work of this kind buys time. It saves some lives, and some ecosystems, species, and cultures, as well as some of the gene pool, for the sustainable society to come. But it is insufficient to bring that society about.

## 2. Analysis of structural causes and the creation of structural alternatives

The second dimension of the Great Turning is equally crucial. To free ourselves and our planet from the damage being inflicted by the Industrial Growth Society, we must understand its dynamics. What are the tacit agreements that create obscene wealth for a few, while progressively impoverishing the rest of humanity? What interlocking causes indenture us to an insatiable economy that uses our Earth as supply house and sewer? It is not a pretty picture, and it takes courage and confidence in our own common sense to look at it with realism; but we are demystifying the workings of the global economy. When we see how this system operates, we are less tempted to demonize the politicians and corporate CEOs who are in bondage to it. And for all the apparent might of the Industrial Growth Society, we can also see its fragility--how dependent it is on our obedience, and how doomed it is to devour itself.

In addition to learning how the present system works, we are also creating structural alternatives. In countless localities, like green shoots pushing up through the rubble, new social and economic arrangements are sprouting. Not waiting for our national or state politicians to catch up with us, we are banding together, taking action in our own communities. Flowing from our creativity and collaboration on behalf of life, these actions may look marginal, but they hold the seeds for the future.

Some of the initiatives in this dimension:

- teach-ins and study groups on the Industrial Growth Society;
- strategies and programs for nonviolent, citizen-based defense;
- reduction of reliance on fossil and nuclear fuels and conversion to renewable energy sources;
- collaborative living arrangements such as co-housing and eco-villages;
- community gardens, consumer cooperatives, community-supported agriculture, watershed restoration, local currencies...

## 3. Shift in Consciousness

These structural alternatives cannot take root and survive without deeply ingrained values to sustain them. They must mirror what we want and how we relate to Earth and each other.

They require, in other words, a profound shift in our perception of reality—and that shift is happening now, both as cognitive revolution and spiritual awakening.

The insights and experiences that enable us to make this shift are accelerating, and they take many forms. They arise as grief for our world, giving the lie to old paradigm notions of rugged individualism, the essential separateness of the self. They arise as glad response to breakthroughs in scientific thought, as reductionism and materialism give way to evidence of a living universe. And they arise in the resurgence of wisdom traditions, reminding us again that our world is a sacred whole, worthy of adoration and service.

The many forms and ingredients of this dimension include:

- general living systems theory;
- deep ecology and the deep, long-range ecology movement;
- Creation Spirituality and Liberation Theology;
- Engaged Buddhism and similar currents in other traditions;
- the resurgence of shamanic traditions;
- ecofeminism;
- ecopsychology;
- the simple living movement

The realizations we make in the third dimension of the Great Turning save us from succumbing to either panic or paralysis. They help us resist the temptation to stick our heads in the sand, or to turn on each other, for scapegoats on whom to vent our fear and rage.

#### Personal Guidelines for the Great Turning

##### **Come from Gratitude**

To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe—to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it—is a wonder beyond words. Gratitude for the gift of life is the primary wellspring of all religions, the hallmark of the mystic, the source of all true art. Furthermore, it is a privilege to be alive in this time when we can choose to take part in the self-healing of our world.

##### **Don't be Afraid of the Dark**

This is a dark time, filled with suffering and uncertainty. Like living cells in a larger body, it is natural that we feel the trauma of our world. So don't be afraid of the anguish you feel, or the anger or fear, for these responses arise from the depth of your caring and the truth of your interconnectedness with all beings. To suffer with is the literal meaning of compassion.

##### **Dare to Vision**

Out of this darkness a new world can arise, not to be constructed by our minds so much as to emerge from our dreams. Even though we cannot see clearly how it's going to turn out, we are still called to let the future into our imagination. We will never be able to build what we have not first cherished in our hearts..

##### **Roll up your Sleeves**

Many people don't get involved in the Great Turning because there are so many different issues, which seem to compete with each other. Shall I save the whales or help battered children? The truth is that all aspects of the current crisis reflect the same mistake, setting ourselves apart and using others for our gain. So to heal one aspect helps the others to heal as well. Just find what you love to work on and take joy in that. Never try to do it alone. Link up with others; you'll spark each others' ideas and sustain each others' energy..

##### **Act your Age**

Since every particle in your body goes back to the first flaring forth of space and time, you're really as old as the universe. So when you are lobbying at your congressperson's office, or visiting your local utility, or testifying at a hearing on nuclear waste, or standing up to protect an old grove of redwoods, you are doing that not out of some personal whim, but in the full authority of your 15 billions years.

Source: <http://www.joannamacy.net/html/great.html#>  
See also: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwIXTAT8rLk>