

STAGES TO CHANGE

More than a generation ago the books of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross had a brief popularity. In one of her first books, *On Death and Dying*, © 1973, she identified stages the dying and those attending them go through: denial, anger, bargaining, acceptance (letting go, goodbye). Kubler-Ross may be forgotten, but others have described the same or similar stages of human adaptation to sudden, or even expected, great changes. Losing one's job, one's home, having to flee to another country, a brush with the many arms of numberless laws, and many more sudden shifts in circumstances that bring on similar reactions in the same sequence of stages.

Whole cultures seem to be going through the early stages, as if deep in our *collective subconscious*, as psychologist C. G. Jung called it, we are aware that collectively, as a culture, or even as a species, we are rushing toward a major transformation. The end of one kind of being human to an as yet unknown but probably very different kind of being human.

—Whole segments of populations are in **denial**. We deny that anything is happening. global warming is a fiction, evolution is but one of many theories. Things are just as they were before, everything is fine. Be positive, be “up.”

—A growing number of people is **angry**. Since there is no acceptable way to express anger, others label anger as radical, liberal, socialist, terrorist, fundamentalist. It manifests in spontaneous mass demonstrations and vicious oppression of mass movements.

—Who do we **bargain** with when it is we ourselves we know to be leading us on this path to some unknown but feared major change: climate change, 2012, some kind of transformation, a “higher” consciousness? The rich and powerful corporations are buying votes, seeing to it that money flows up to them, not down to the masses. Some bargain to adapt to change early enough to make a difference, others bargain to prevent adapting at all costs. In America bargaining is called lobbying, elsewhere it is called corruption.

—It seems few have yet come to **accept**, and yet, that is the only stage where we can perhaps make, or could have made, a difference. The only stage where we can, or might have made, a meaningful adjustment to our profligate life style, a life style that is so obviously unsustainable.

What happened? What changed? Many changes happened, all at once.

The previous century can be characterized by an enormous increase in the number of humans on the planet, and, of course closely related, an enormous increase in all manners of scientific research (including counting people). We invented chemicals that allowed a disastrous kind of agriculture and we invented other chemicals that allowed eradicating ancient diseases. We invented machines that gave us the power of the gods of yore. We literally changed the face of the earth just in the last 60 years.

The increase in human population did not start 60 years ago, but accelerated manyfold in the last century. All the web sites I found dealing with world population, started with the year 1950. Figures from before that date are estimates.

The estimates read as follows:

—For ninety-plus percent of the at least 100,000 years scientists think we were a distinct species, there were probably no more than half a million humans spread very thinly in a few areas of the planet.

—Until 6-7000 years ago, the age of the Pharaohs, ancient China, India, there were few what we now would call “civilized” people who may have had an average life span of more than 30 years. The great majority of humans never lived much beyond age twenty-five.

—It took until the year 1804 to reach an estimated one billion (a thousand million) humans. The average life span began to rise, but not everywhere.

—One hundred and twenty-three years later the population of the world doubled to an estimated two billion (2,000,000,000); 1927

—It took 33 years to increase to three billion in 1960

—Fourteen years to four billion, 1974

—Thirteen years to five billion, 1987

—Twelve years to six billion, 1999

—And probably a little more than ten years to seven billion in early 2010

* 1 billion in 1804	
* 2 billion in 1927	(123 years later)
* 3 billion in 1960	(33 years later)
* 4 billion in 1974	(14 years later)
* 5 billion in 1987	(13 years later)
* 6 billion in 1999	(12 years later)

Today there are three times as many humans as there were at the time of my birth; a 300% increase in one life time.

The reason for the increase in numbers is not that more babies were born of course, but more survived. There are more of us because we live longer. We learned the importance of clean water, safer waste disposal, we “conquered” some diseases. In short, we learned to change our immediate environment.

We no longer adapted ourselves to the environment we found ourselves in, but adapted our environment to our needs and inevitably to our wants. Some of us knew that for centuries. What changed after World War II is that suddenly everyone in the world came to believe that we could change our own circumstances.

The avalanche of humans is almost certainly unique, because we did it ourselves. We learned to live longer by controlling our environment. We invented chemicals to grow more food on less land, we learned to control pests and soil destruction. We learned to find and use sources of energy that allowed us to change the biosphere, the thin layer of land, air and water in which all Life lives.

One single species of all the trillion species on earth was able to change the planet so radically that it overwhelmed the planetary ecology. One single species eradicated

thousands of plant and animal species, mixed plants and animals, destroyed half of all rain forests that are thought to play a critical role in what we call "climate." The planet is adjusting, as all ecologies do, but such a major adjustment may change the planet so radically that our own survival may be in question.

More people, and older populations, are not just statistics, they are in our awareness. We cannot help but feel the press of bodies. Almost everywhere on earth people know polluted air, unsafe or not enough water, mass displacement because a dam is to be built, the ravages of war. Every 60 seconds 10 children die from hunger—not because there is not enough food but because we spend our wealth on wars, not food distribution.

Not long ago humans lived in small villages; their grandchildren live in megacities of 20 million people stacked vertically. The person who lives in Mumbai, or Jakarta, or Los Angeles, is a different kind of human than her grandfather who lived in a village.

When we lived on a family farm, or even in the village, nature was a reality. We lived by the sun, the moon, the seasons, the growth of crops, animals around us. The person living in an apartment, 37 floors up, flying across the globe a few times a month, has lost all contact with the earth, the seasons, even time. The population of the planet is becoming a mix of global citizens and refugees. Most of us have lost our roots. I am convinced that this rapidly increasing disconnect is causing much of the dysfunctions of our world: here "world" meaning the man-made structures we designed on top of, but without regard to, the planetary ecology.

Seemingly overnight we are told that water is becoming something we can no longer count on. We are told to expect more ferocious storms. We are becoming all too aware that most of us are becoming rapidly poorer while a very few of us are getting immensely richer. Change in almost every aspect of our lives is coming faster every month. There is no question that we, all of us, are feeling this.

The first humans lived in, and thought themselves part of, Nature. They lived on what food and shelter they could find in their immediate environment. That meant they probably were nomads, they moved around. The essence of their awareness was an intense connection with the living environment they lived in. They had an intimate knowledge of all Life and not-Life around them, That is how we survived the first hundred thousand years as humans..

Then, perhaps ten thousand years ago, we invented agriculture, which meant settling in one place, and producing enough food to survive on that one area. With settling came owning (land, plants, animals, people) and hierarchies: a vertical order of power, men ruling other men, women..

I think that the shift from wild nomadic human to settled human also involved a shift from mostly right brain awareness to mostly left brain awareness. First slowly, then more and more rapidly..

The Left Brain

The left brain is associated with verbal, logical, and analytical thinking. It excels in naming and categorizing things, symbolic abstraction, speech, reading, writing, arithmetic. The left brain is very linear: it places things in sequential order — first things first and then second things second, etc. If you reflect back upon our own educational training, we have been traditionally taught to master the 3 R's: reading, writing and arithmetic — the domain and strength of the left brain.

The Right Brain

The right brain, on the other hand, functions in a non-verbal manner and excels in visual, spatial, perceptual, and intuitive information. The right brain processes information differently than the left brain. For the right brain, processing happens very quickly and the style of processing is nonlinear and non-sequential. The right brain looks at the whole picture and quickly seeks to determine the spatial relationships of all the parts as they relate to the whole. This component of the brain is not concerned with things falling into patterns because of prescribed rules. On the contrary, the right brain seems to flourish dealing with complexity, ambiguity and paradox. At times, right brain thinking is difficult to put into words because of its complexity, its ability to process information quickly and its non-verbal nature. The right brain has been associated with the realm of creativity.

Left brain thinking is “progress;” right brain thinking is sustainable.

We, humans, as all other species, have evolved, are evolving. Not only biologically but psychologically, culturally. We are not the same beings we were 100,000 years ago, or 10,000 years ago, not even the same humans we were a thousand years ago. Somewhere I read that in the last sixty years—that is, the years after World War Two—we, humans, have made as many changes to the planet as occurred in the previous 200,000 years without our intervention. Such a statement cannot be proven, of course, it's a cartoon, a slogan; but it may well be true. We have developed any number of sciences that allow us to make significant and enduring changes to all environments. We have invented and produced substances that never existed and that are not, or only extremely slowly bio-degradable. Our sciences have given us powers that indeed have changed the face of the earth.

If nothing else that means the planet we were born of, no longer is. If we feel uprooted, or un-rooted, we are.

I know that my life is not at all unusual. The first half of my life was lived on three continents, speaking three different languages, in four distinct cultures; the second half of my life I lived on a small island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, thousands of miles from anywhere. There are millions and millions of people who have and had similar experiences.

It is probably totally unimportant whether we “believe” in global warming, manifesting as something we call climate change. However, nobody can deny that the world of today is vastly different from the world of even ten years ago. The great majority of humans alive on this planet today experience, daily, the stresses of change. We cannot help but sense change in what is going on around us. And because the changes (plural) are so sudden and so enormous, we are unsettled. Let’s face it, we are scared.

Our world today is full of great changes that burst into our lives. We are scared, uncertain, lost, because the changes too often are like a kind of death. Many of today’s stresses make us feel threatened in our deepest selves, our humanity. Millions of young people, even children, fighting in wars—which means killing people—suffer what we call PTSD, a disorder that is not healed easily if at all. War rudely awakened us to a way of being that is inhuman. Refugees and the so-called “displaced,” millions of them, feel rudely cut from their roots, probably hungry, lost, forced to be less than human. And there are the millions who are making a very good living in ways that have nothing to do with making useful things, growing food, or caring for each other, but by illusionary transactions that are but words, numbers and lies. They may get rich, but they too feel less than human. Isn’t that why we overdose on coffee, alcohol, sugar, drugs legal and illegal? To forget, to get some relief from being in the dark about who we are, where we are going, who we belong with. Isn’t that why we select only the violent, vindictive passages from our holy stories that used to warm our hearts and lift out souls?

Do we even remember what it was to be human? An honest life, a simple life: enough to eat from what grew in our own garden, our orchard. Neighbors who helped us put on a roof, we helped them catch a runaway pig. Children who explored the woods, learned spinning, straightening used nails. We knew herbs, making poultices. We were aware of the smell of Spring. We received unexpected guests with welcome, interest, and no judgment. There was a time when wild animals were not threats but our guides. Once we believed that Thou Shalt Not Kill means just that. We knew that we could not eradicate any kind of plant or animal because they are part of the world; even weeds have their place in the All, which we now know as the planet’s ecology, everything related to everything else.

In the beginning we did not own. “All our relations,” as Native Americans said. Everything all around a part of us, and we part of everything.

When we owned we made fences. We might bicker with our neighbors but we knew them well, we helped take care of their sick child, they helped us fix a broken cart.

Now we make walls; on the other side of the wall is the enemy.

Denial, anger, bargaining, acceptance — what will we be after the great Change?

It is written, *the meek shall inherit the earth.*