



CREATING
A WORLD
THAT WORKS
FOR ALL



SHARIF ABDULLAH

Introductory Essay by Václav Havel

An Excerpt From

Creating a World that Works for All

by Sharif Abdullah

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President of the Czech Republic vii

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Note by Sharif Abdullah:

When I started thinking about who might provide an introduction to this book, only one person came to mind. Václav Havel's writing has been such an influence on me, both personally and professionally, that he was the indisputable choice.

Havel stands apart from all other influences. It's one thing to talk about revolution; Havel actually catalyzed one. It's one thing to talk about values; it's quite another to apply those values, from a position of responsibility and leadership, in the world of the mundane and the practical. Havel has elevated the phrase "walk the talk" to the level of national and international politics.

I believe President Havel has written some of the most important political analysis of the past 250 years. Not since Thomas Jefferson has a political figure presented with such power and clarity the need for a new way of doing politics.

I believe the following essay is Havel's clearest statement of the philosophy embodied in the "Velvet Revolution." I remember first reading it in my favorite coffeehouse, smiling at every paragraph. Even before I had finished it, I knew it would be perfect as the introduction to this book.

In this essay, we find not only Havel's deep understanding of our current global predicament but also his crucial insight that the solution lies in a new set of planetary values rooted in the realm of the Spirit.

My thanks to Havel for being a major guiding light in the movement for a world that works for all and for granting me permission to use his essay as an overture to this book.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY



VÁCLAV HAVEL
President of the Czech Republic

HUMANKIND TODAY IS WELL AWARE of the spectrum of threats looming over its head. We know that the number of people living on our planet is growing at a soaring rate and that within a relatively short time we can expect it to total in the tens of billions. We know that the already-deep abyss separating the planet's poor and rich could deepen further, and more and more dangerously, because of this rapid population growth. We also know that we've been destroying the environment on which our existence depends and that we are headed for disaster by producing weapons of mass destruction and allowing them to proliferate.

And yet, even though we are aware of these dangers, we do almost nothing to avert them. It's fascinating to me how preoccupied people are today with catastrophic prognoses, how books containing evidence of impending crises become bestsellers, but how little account we take of these threats in our everyday activities. Doesn't every schoolchild know that the resources of this planet are limited and that if they are expended faster than they are recovered, we are doomed? And still we continue in our wasteful ways and don't even seem perturbed. Quite the contrary: Rising production is considered to be the main sign of national success, not only in poor states where such a position could be justified, but also in wealthy ones,

which are cutting the branch on which they sit with their ideology of indefinitely prolonged and senseless growth.

The most important thing we can do today is to study the reasons why humankind does little to address these threats and why it allows itself to be carried onward by some kind of perpetual motion, unaffected by self-awareness or a sense of future options. It would be unfair to ignore the existence of numerous projects for averting these dangers, or to deny that a lot already has been done. However, all attempts of this kind have one thing in common: They do not touch the seed from which the threats I'm speaking of sprout, but merely try to diminish their impact. (A typical example is the list of legal acts, ordinances, and international treaties stipulating how much toxic matter this or that plant may discharge into the environment.) I'm not criticizing these safeguards; I'm only saying that they are technical tricks that have no real effect on the substance of the matter.

What, then, is the substance of the matter? What could change the direction of today's civilization?

It is my deep conviction that the only option is a change in the sphere of the spirit, in the sphere of human conscience. It's not enough to invent new machines, new regulations, new institutions. We must develop a new understanding of the true purpose of our existence on earth. Only by making such a fundamental shift will we be able to create new models of behavior and a new set of values for the planet. In short, it appears to me that it would be better to start from the head rather than the tail.

Whenever I've gotten involved in a major global problem—the logging of rainforests, ethnic or religious intolerance, the brutal destruction of indigenous cultures—I've always discovered somewhere in the long chain of events that gave rise to it a basic lack of responsibility for the planet.

There are countless types of responsibility—more or less pressing, depending on who's involved. We feel responsible for our personal welfare, our families, our companies, our communities, our

nations. And somewhere in the background there is, in every one of us, a small feeling of responsibility for the planet and its future. It seems to me that this last and deepest responsibility has become a very low priority—dangerously low, considering that the world today is more interlinked than ever before and that we are, for all intents and purposes, living one global destiny.

At the same time, our world is dominated by several great religious systems, whose differences seem to be coming to the fore with increasing sharpness and setting the stage for innumerable political and armed conflicts. In my opinion, this fact—which is attracting, understandably, a great deal of media attention—partly conceals a more important fact: that the civilization within which this religious tension is taking place is, in essence, a deeply atheistic one. Indeed, it is the first atheistic civilization in the history of humankind.

Perhaps the real issue is a crisis of respect for the moral order extended to us from above, or simply a crisis of respect for any kind of authority higher than our own earthly being, with its material and thoroughly ephemeral interests. Perhaps our lack of responsibility for the planet is only the logical consequence of the modern conception of the universe as a complex of phenomena controlled by certain scientifically identifiable laws, formulated for God-knows-what purpose. This is a conception that does not inquire into the meaning of existence and renounces any kind of metaphysics, including its own metaphysical roots.

In the process, we've lost our certainty that the universe, nature, existence, our own lives are works of creation that have a definite meaning and purpose. This loss is accompanied by loss of the feeling that whatever we do must be seen in the light of a higher order of which we are part and whose authority we must respect.

In recent years the great religions have been playing an increasingly important role in global politics. Since the fall of communism, the world has become multipolar instead of bipolar, and many countries outside the hitherto dominant Euro-American cultural sphere have grown in self-confidence and influence. But

the more closely tied we are by the bonds of a single global civilization, the more the various religious groups emphasize all the ways in which they differ from each other. This is an epoch of accentuated spiritual, religious, and cultural “otherness.”

How can we restore in the human mind a shared attitude to what is above if people everywhere feel the need to stress their otherness? Is there any sense in trying to turn the human mind to the heavens when such a turn would only aggravate the conflict among our various deities?

I’m not, of course, an expert of religion, but it seems to me that the major faiths have much more in common than they are willing to admit. They share a basic point of departure—that this world and our existence are not freaks of chance but rather part of a mysterious, yet integral, act whose sources, direction, and purpose are difficult for us to perceive in their entirety. And they share a large complex of moral imperatives that this mysterious act implies. In my view, whatever differences these religions might have are not as important as these fundamental similarities.

Perhaps the way out of our current bleak situation could be found by searching for what unites the various religions—a purposeful search for common principles. Then we could cultivate human coexistence while, at the same time, cultivating the planet on which we live, suffusing it with the spirit of this religious and ethical common ground—what I would call the common spiritual and moral minimum.

Could this be a way to stop the blind perpetual motion dragging us toward hell? Can the persuasive words of the wise be enough to achieve what must be done? Or will it take an unprecedented disaster to provoke this kind of existential revolution—a universal recovery of the human spirit and renewed responsibility for the world?¹

PREFACE



WE ARE IN DEEP TROUBLE. We live in a world that works for only a few. As for the rest of us, we live in an insecure world, a world threatened by violence, lack, and spiritual malaise. We live one paycheck, one crop, one relationship away from disaster. We may be threatened by men with guns who invade our communities and our peace with threats of violence. Ethnic hatred, from Los Angeles to Djakarta, from Russia to South Africa, threatens our way of life. The world doesn't even work for the materially privileged. Increasing uncertainty, family violence, cancer, a polluted environment, and a diminished outlook for all of the world's children cloud the future for us all.

However, in the midst of this unprecedented disharmony, we have an opportunity that may not come again for another millennium: to craft a society that actually reflects our deepest values. In a world seemingly going in a million directions at once, we can, and must, choose a direction, a focus, an intention. At no other time has it been so clear: our future is our choice.

Our grandchildren will look back at this moment and marvel at the courage, foresight, and plain common sense we demonstrated in pulling ourselves back from the brink of global collapse. Instead of cursing us for our selfishness and shortsightedness, it is

my hope that they will offer us their blessings. *Creating a World That Works for All* is my gift to them—a testament of hope.

For me, writing this book has been, paradoxically, both an act of supreme arrogance and an act of deep humility. The arrogance lies in the audacious belief that I have something to say. The humility comes from the realization that none of this is “mine.” The knowledge, learning, analysis, and experience that have gone into this book do not belong to me; if anything, I belong to the book, and all of the other books by all of the other authors who have encouraged us to be better than we are. In the words of the Sufi mystic Jelaluddin Rumi,

*Do you think I know what I'm doing?
That for one breath or half-breath I belong to myself?
As much as a pen knows what it's writing
or the ball can guess where it's going next.²*

Rumi talks about the contrasting qualities of a stone and a jewel. The stone blocks light, a jewel transmits it, shaping and coloring it but knowing that the Source of the light lies elsewhere. Arrogance is the stonelike belief that “I” wrote this book. Humility is recognizing that “my” ideas actually come from elsewhere. I hope to be clear enough for the light to shine through.

The life experiences that have prepared me for this project are not ones that I chose. I did not ask for poverty, welfare, an emotionally distant mother and a nonexistent father. I did not ask for my teenage years to be filled with sadistically racist cops and a school system ranked as the worst in the nation. Had I been in control of my circumstances, I would have programmed a happier beginning—and middle.

Humility comes, in part, from realizing that my nightmare upbringing—worse than some, not as bad as others—served as the catalyst for this book. Everything in life conspires to bring each of

us to this moment in time, with this consciousness and these understandings. If our painful experiences are to have any meaning in the world, it is to shine a light on all those things that desperately need to be changed.

In May of 1998, as I stood in the ruins of one of the killing factories at Auschwitz, surrounded by fields of daisies fertilized with the ashes of the slaughtered, my thoughts went to other killing fields, in Bosnia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Vietnam . . . If we are to honor the slain of Auschwitz and every other site of barbarous inhumanity, we must create the consciousness that makes such slaughter impossible.

The past is our teacher. The proof that we have learned its lessons will come when our present horrors become unthinkable in our time. Obviously, we have much to learn.

Appreciations and Acknowledgments

The Spiritual Ground

My spiritual house rests on four pillars: Rumi, Jesus, Buddha, and Lao Tzu. For thousands of years, they have been teaching us that the world can work for all.

The Students of Inclusivity

To all of the students, interns, workshop participants, trainees, and others who think they learned something from me. Most of what I know was learned from them.

Places of the Heart

Many times, a place can have as profound an influence on the direction of my work as a person. This book has been shaped by the places in which it was written, including the Sylvia Beach Hotel in Newport, Oregon; Bar Montserrat in Havana, Cuba (down the street from Ernest Hemingway's watering hole, the Floridita); and the Globe Bookstore in Prague.

Editors, Readers, and Reviewers

Steve Piersanti and Stanley Marcus, for displaying editorial valor above and beyond the call of duty. This book, in its present form, exists largely because of their continued patient editorial assistance. Over the years, Steve helped shape “a collection of profound ideas” into a book. And Stanley’s copyediting skills helped to make the book logical, internally consistent, and readable.

David Sweet, for key editorial assistance at a crucial juncture, as well as for being a fountain of quotable quotes. Chisao Hata, for reviewing from the right side of the brain. Scott Sherman, for his help with early manuscripts. Other reviewers include Gar Alperovitz, Kim Kelley, David and Fran Korten, Paul Niebanck, Gifford and Libba Pinchot, Richard Seidman, Brian Setzler, and Sarah Van Gelder.

Thanks to the reviewers commissioned by Berrett-Koehler and to the staff at Berrett-Koehler for additional value-added editorial assistance.

Personal Support

To Chisao, for being there consistently through thick and thin, through twenty-plus edits, high points, low points, psychotic episodes, moments of joy, delusions of grandeur, and delusions of minisculeur.

SHARIF ABDULLAH
Portland, Oregon
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INTRODUCTION



A CENTURY AGO, coal miners carried canaries down into the depths of the mines. The miners did not take their canaries into the mines because they thought they were beautiful. They did not keep canaries as pets. The canaries were present for only one purpose: to warn the miners of the poisonous but odorless gases that could asphyxiate without warning. The canary was there as an early warning system; if it died, the miners would abandon their work pronto, because they knew they were next. Their fate was inextricably linked to that of a small songbird.

Today, we live in a society littered with the bodies of dead canaries. There are ever mounting statistics, from a variety of sources, warning us that our social, ecological, even spiritual lives are out of balance. But few are paying attention. We do not see the relationships between our modern canary carcasses and ourselves. Some of us even think the canaries are the problem. The danger signals blaring all around us don't seem to mean anything. We have become deaf to the portents of danger, treating them like the car alarms that we routinely ignore on our urban streets.

If we are to stop our headlong rush to destruction, we must change the way we think and the way we act. It is time to attend to the canaries.

Our social and ecological statistics are telling us what we already know in our hearts: we have created a world that works for only a few. It does not even work for those it purports to serve. To change this, we must learn to act toward each other and our environment in profoundly different ways.

Though our crises have their roots in the distant past, we who are now living are all, paradoxically, responsible for them. Every day, you contribute to the mess. So do I. Collectively, we reinvent this society daily. Some of us may have more historical responsibility for our present conditions than others, but at this point it does not matter who set the house on fire, who carried the gasoline, and whether the blaze was accidental, intentional, or the result of gross negligence or stupidity. What matters most is that we figure out how to quench the flames.

The Central Theme

Our present world works for only a few. However, by shifting our consciousness, then our culture and institutions, we can create a world that works for all.

This theme will be developed as we move through the three parts of this book:

Envisioning an Inclusive World

From our earliest years, we are taught that the world is limited and cannot work for all. This is a prime assumption of our present society. Part One turns that assumption on its ear. Before providing an overview of what I call *The Mess*—our interlocked and mutually reinforcing problems, challenges, and crises—the book introduces the concept of *inclusivity*, the notion that our lives are inextricably linked to each other. Inclusivity is the basis for a world that works for all.

A New Analysis for a New Society

The accuracy of our vision depends on our tools of analysis. Most of us use analyses that are centuries old and based on flawed concepts of how the world works. For example, our present expenditure of billions of dollars on the Human Genome Project is based on the limiting Cartesian belief that the human body is a machine that can be understood best by taking it apart.

Part Two analyzes our analysis. It examines our need for a new *story* that will help us heal our society. A story is not a nursery tale, myth, or fable but the operative blueprint of how we function as a society. It reveals the rationale for our acting the way we do. Changing our story is the fastest and most effective way to change our world.

Part Two explores in depth the three major stories that have shaped the behavior of humans on this planet:

- The Original Story: “The Keepers”**
- The Dominant Story: “The Breakers”**
- The Emerging Story: “The Menders”**

The Breaker story, which tries hard to be the *only* story, has the subtitle “Creating a World that Works for Me.” This story is based on a thought, “I am separate,” and an assumption, “There is not enough.” Breakers are people who live disconnected from the Earth, from local ecologies, and from all other beings. Their consciousness breaks relationships at every level of existence.

Operating from within the Breaker story, humans try to control all aspects of life on Earth. This control is, among other things, military, political, economic, ecological, genetic, and scientific. It is the root of every one of our pervasive and interlocking global crises. Breaker thought, in other words, creates The Mess.

Breakers, although great at manipulating the physical environment, are largely blind to spiritual realities. Their “I am separate”

consciousness lies behind the demoralization, disenchantment, and spiritual starvation of our society.

Things have not always been like this. For over one million years, humans had another way: “Living in harmony with all I encounter.” This is the story of the Keepers, the indigenous people of the Earth. Keepers were, and still are, in intimate connection with their local ecologies and all other beings. They have maintained the ancient ways of living, perfected over millennia of co-existence.

Part Two introduces us, finally, to the emerging Menders story: “Creating a World That Works for All.” Menders are people who choose to live as conscious, integral parts of a vital, sacred planet. Their fundamental thought is “We are One,” and their guiding assumption is “There is enough for all.” Menders are functioning as the catalysts of a new society, consciously creating alternatives to Breaker excesses. Menders recognize that we can begin the process of restoring balance to the Earth and to ourselves *in this generation*. This book is for those catalysts.

Being a Mender is a spiritual discipline. As Menders, our focus is on a world greater than our individual personalities, families, or nations, greater than our sensory world. We act not just for ourselves, not just for other beings currently cohabiting the Earth with us, but also for future generations and for the Earth herself.

The Revolution to Inclusivity

Right now, the most widespread tools of social change on our planet include bullets and bombs. Regardless of the delivery system (a B-52 bomber dropping cruise missiles or a suicide bomber on a crowded bus), the primary method of changing consciousness is to silence those who disagree. But at the onset of the new millennium, we are beginning to realize that fear, slaughter, and oppression are ineffective as tools of social change. We are beginning to understand the operation of inclusivity: anything I do to

The Other comes back to affect my life. Seeing our lives as inextricably linked will bring us to nonviolence.

Understanding the problem is not enough. Even articulating a new story is not enough. If we are going to create a world that works for all, we have to take practical steps to manifest our story. Part Three explores these steps to the Mender era.

The Bell That Tolls for Thee

You may be wondering whether I am being alarmist. Or you may feel certain that I am exaggerating our problems. Things can't be that bad. Many of the Earth's ills have already been eliminated, and we'll take care of the rest soon. Perhaps you think that because I have had a hard life, I am inflating the difficulties faced by the rest of the world. Your own life is going pretty well. You have steady work you enjoy, comfortable living quarters, a loving family. You may think I need to "get over it." Well, if you choose to believe that if something has not affected you, it *cannot* affect you, this probably is not your book.

However serene your life may be, it can be shattered by any of a number of events triggered by The Mess:

- Suicide, or attempted suicide, by a loved one
- An attack by muggers that leaves you or someone close to you seriously injured
- Your child sickened by an industrial pollutant in the soil, air, or water
- A member of your family killed or maimed in a terrorist attack
- The discovery that someone you love is addicted to drugs

You will then start asking yourself some questions. What did I do wrong? How could I have been so blind? What is this world coming to? Why did this have to happen? What does it mean? In the context of such questions, this book will begin to make sense.

There are many books on the market that are designed to make you feel good, that are written to entertain you, to help you feel smug in your superiority over the “bad guys.” This is not intended to be one of them. Although, by the end of the book, I sincerely hope you will share my sense of optimism and excitement about our future, along the way you will be asked to explore some of the suppressed and unpleasant aspects of yourself and your actions.

This is your book if you understand that the conditions that affect any of us affect all of us. Regardless of whether I personally have been robbed or raped, I can still desire to create a society where robbery, rape, and all of our other social maladies are unthinkable.

Terminology and Names

A glossary of specialized terms is provided at the end of the book, but one term needs a brief comment here. When I speak of *America*, I am referring neither to all the countries of the continent nor to the United States as a political and geographic entity. I use the word to refer to a *culture* and *consciousness* that most people in the world have no trouble identifying as “American.” Under this definition, Americans are those people, regardless of whether they are citizens of the United States, who demonstrate certain identifiable cultural beliefs and values.

America is the driving force behind the worldwide spread of Breaker consciousness in our era. Americans are the trouble that is troubling the world. Therefore, this book focuses primarily on what Americans are now doing and what we can do differently.

Another point: the text sometimes speaks of “you,” sometimes of “I,” and often of “we.” Focusing solely on “you” might have given the false impression that I did not share the experiences I was discussing. Speaking exclusively in the first person would have created the impression that the book was an autobiographical cathartic confession and that I was *not* talking about you. And if

every statement had been couched in terms of “we,” you might have wondered exactly whom I was talking to and about. My solution has been to mix all three vantage points. However, when reading the text, feel free to change the pronouns and see how that affects your understanding of what is being said.

Finally, most of the people I mention in this book—friends, workshop participants, and others—appear under fictitious names (and sometimes genders) so that they can retain their privacy. The only exceptions are individuals who gave permission for their true names to be used or whose actions are a matter of public knowledge.

PART ONE



ENVISIONING AN INCLUSIVE WORLD

A human being is part of the whole, called by us “universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest—a kind of delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN³

I

THE VISION

[O]ur greatest strength lies not in how much we differ from each other but in how much—how very much—we are the same.

—EKNATH EASWARAN⁴

WHEN YOU WOKE UP this morning, you had a series of goals. Some were as simple as turning off the alarm clock, brushing your teeth, making sure you got to work on time. Other goals may have been more ambitious—writing the résumé that would land the perfect job, buying the right food for an important dinner, sitting in meditation for the sake of enlightenment. Your goals include the ordinary, the sublime, and everything in between.

Like people, societies also have goals. Some are as simple as making sure everyone has decent water to drink; others may be as complex as landing an astronaut on Mars.

Our goal used to be simple—stop Soviet expansion. The implosion of the Soviet Union also imploded our goal. Now, at the turn of the millennium, we must ask ourselves: What are we trying to achieve as a society? Without defining what we are against, what are we for? Goal setting is important: without a clear vision of an achievable goal, and an understanding of the philosophy and values

behind that goal, we run the risk of becoming sidetracked, confused, burned out, or cynical.

The Essence of Inclusivity

Simply put, the Mender goal is *an inclusive human society on a habitable planet*, a society that works for all humans and for all nonhumans. This means fulfillment both for those who are at the top of the society and for those at the bottom. Work, resources, responsibilities, spiritual gifts, and material goods may not be evenly spread, but everyone has “enough”; anyone could trade places with anyone else without feeling deprived or oppressed. Such a society is essentially benign and healing to both the human and the more-than-human world.⁵

All beings, all things, are One. Our lives are inextricably linked one to another. Because of this, we cannot wage war against anything or anyone without waging war against ourselves. Therefore, we are obliged to treat all beings the way we want to be treated. There are no “enemies”—all beings are expressions of the Sacred and must be treated as such. Some beings cause pain to others; this does not mean that they are enemies. Some beings are food for others; this is all the more reason to treat them as sacred. Once we understand that we are interconnected, we have the responsibility to create a world that works for all.

With this as our goal, the next question is obvious: how do we achieve it? How do we avoid sinking into despair or cynicism? And how do we avoid dabbling in utopian fantasies or engaging in “pie-in-the-sky” religiosity? In fact, we can change this world right now by shifting our consciousness and our values from a foundation of exclusivity to one of inclusivity.

This shift in consciousness is the core of the world’s major religions. The essence of the moral code they urge upon us is inclusivity.

What is hateful to you, do not do to others.

—RABBI HILLEL

Do not hurt others with that which hurts yourself.

—BUDDHA

Do unto others whatever you would have them do unto you.

—JESUS

None of you is a believer until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself.

—MUHAMMAD

Considering the clarity, simplicity, and consistency of these statements, one has to wonder what it is about the message of inclusivity that makes it nearly impossible for people to either comprehend or implement. Why are there Jews, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and many others around the world who are killing their fellow men and women when their traditions call for peace, nonviolence, and inclusivity? We will face these questions as we explore inclusivity in the following chapters.

A Turning Point

Do you feel the promise in these perilous times? Despite our many challenges, do these times feel hopeful to you in some way? Does it seem to you that something is ready to change? How are we going to capture the promise that lies within our present predicament as we stand on the brink of the twenty-first century?

The hard fact is that getting to a world that works for all will take a more rigorous analysis and more sophisticated actions, both internal and external, than our current political, social, and even spiritual leaders are advocating. It will take fundamental change

that must originate with you, as an emerging leader of the new millennium. If our current leadership were capable of it, they would have done it by now.

Such change does not take place at the surface, but deep within. It is already at work. We are all a part of it. The ice breaking on a frozen river is an indication of warming trends and currents that have been at work for a long time. The breakup at the surface is the culmination of a process, not its beginning. The breakup of ice on a river, the emergence of a butterfly from its chrysalis, a Declaration of Independence, each culminates a process that has preceded it by days or decades.

Prerequisites of Change

One of the mistakes many of us made in the Sixties was thinking we all just had to love each other and the evil system would go away. Despite our good intentions and hard work, we did not understand the processes of societal change. And we were at the mercy of those who did understand.

Systemic change does not miraculously bubble up from a change of heart. It is intentional, stemming from a precise and rigorous examination of present conditions and an understanding of the consciousness and spirit from which those conditions have emerged.

When Karl Marx analyzed capitalism, he did so with the same consciousness that created capitalism in the first place. Marx, as a Breaker scientist, saw an “I am separate” world, a world of limited resources, a world in dire need of human domination and control. This is what his consciousness was trained to see, and the system of communism was built upon that consciousness. He and Friedrich Engels inspired the creation of a political structure controlled by a small elite, an industrial empire that ecologically devastated the land, sea, and air in its never-ending quest for more resources. The system created by Marx’s disciples Lenin and Stalin

killed, jailed, tortured, and oppressed millions while being blind to its own contradictions or the aspirations of its people.

Communism was merely another manifestation of Breaker consciousness. What looked like a different system was only a different way of looking at the same system. Marx analyzed the conditions but not the consciousness. Same wine in a slightly different bottle.

What Is Exclusivity?

Exclusivity is the notion that “I” am separate from “you” (or any “Other”). This notion is what Einstein called a delusion of consciousness, a delusion that imprisons us. No beings other than humans suffer this delusion. And not all humans see themselves as separated entities. As we shall explore further, indigenous people see themselves as an integral part of their local ecology, making the notion of selling land as absurd to them as selling parts of their bodies.

In itself, exclusivity is not bad; the problem is being imprisoned in this myopic way of viewing self and world. A surgeon operates on her patient from an “I am separate” perspective, having the objectivity to cut open and manipulate the patient’s body. From the patient’s point of view, objectivity is a good thing.

Exclusivity is the root of all of our human maladies. It allows us not only to separate from others but also to oppress them. Racism, sexism, homophobia, slavery, all forms of hatred and bigotry, stem from the notion “I am separate from you—by virtue of skin color, ethnicity, behavior, belief . . .” It is exclusivity that allows a bomber to kill unarmed civilians—whether a suicide bomber on a bus in Sri Lanka or an Air Force bomber dropping an atomic weapon on a city. Of the 110 million deaths from wars in this century, two-thirds of them, 73 million, have been of civilians.⁶ For the proponents of exclusivity, this has been a very active century.

According to the teachings of exclusivity, a society that works for all is impossible. The Breaker story holds that a restructuring of

our priorities and our consciousness is impossible. The status quo is called “human nature.” Everything we have learned in formal education and in our culture reinforces the notion that the world can work for only a few. History, anthropology, psychology, politics, economics—and our fathers and mothers—strengthen the idea that the world cannot work for all.

Think back to your first economics course. On the first day, the teacher or professor said something like, “Economics is the allocation of limited resources.” You didn’t question it, you dutifully wrote it down—it fit your world picture. That laid the groundwork for all the later explanations of why some were millionaires while others were permanently unemployed.

Both winners and losers tend to believe that the world is limited and can work only for a few. Those on the bottom seek to make someone else lose rather than questioning the assumptions built into the system.

As Menders, we believe that an inclusive society is not only possible but is achievable *right now*, with the resources presently available to us. We don’t have to wait for more resources or better technology. For example, we know that every year, America produces enough grain to feed every hungry person in the world, and has the means to distribute it. We do not need more technological advances to feed starving people; we need a change of heart that leads to changes in our priorities and systems.

A world that works for all is *not* achievable without restructuring our priorities, our attitudes, and our culture. We cannot tinker with this; the change must be fundamental—an evolutionary shift toward spiritual compassion, and corresponding shifts in our actions. In short, a transformation of head, heart, and hand.

We must work on ourselves first, and then be prepared to do the work on our culture and institutions. As we will see in Chapter 3, the essence of this work is spiritual, part of our quest for the reality that transcends our ordinary experience.

The Three Criteria of a World That Works for All

How can we tell when we have reached our goal? How do we know when we've "won"?

In the realm of personal goals, the point of achievement is usually clear: you sign your name to a finished canvas, count your winnings from a slot machine. Some of our societal goals are also easy to measure. For example, America's goal was to put a man on the Moon. Ten years later, Neil Armstrong walked on the Moon. Goal achieved. However, other societal goals are impossible to measure. If we choose a goal like "absolute equality," we are setting ourselves up for disappointment, despair, burnout, and the illnesses associated with long-term frustration. A more reasonable goal than absolute equality is "full voting and civil rights for all Americans."

Conversely, setting goals too narrowly leads us to slip into a "quick win" syndrome and can be a precursor to cynicism, shallowness, and hollow achievements. "Defeat House Bill 2931-6B" does nothing to rouse our spirits to action.

Is "a world that works for all" an unmeasurable goal? What would such a world look like? The proverbial "a chicken in every pot and a car in every garage"? Universal color television for the world? Everybody with a job? Internet access for all? Clean water and decent food? In fact, none of these achievements would, in itself, indicate that we were living in a world that works for all.

For years, I knew intuitively that the world could work for all but did not know the criteria for such a state of affairs. Nor did I have any concrete examples of how such a world would operate, especially in a multicultural setting. I was particularly troubled that neither the implied meritocracy of capitalism nor the professed egalitarian ideals of communism were sufficient, on their own, to create a world that works for all. In order to discover the criteria for inclusivity, it was necessary to move beyond the confines of exclusive thinking.

Then, in 1997, on the other side of the planet, I witnessed a practical demonstration of a world that works for all.

The Sarvodaya Canteen

Twice in 1997 I visited the beautiful but war-torn island of Sri Lanka, to work with and learn from Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, founder and president of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. Sarvodaya began humbly forty years ago, when “Ari,” as a young high school teacher, took some of his students to poor villages to donate their labor. Since that time, Sarvodaya has become a large self-help development movement based on Buddhist and Gandhian principles, whose undertakings include orphanages for battered children, rural water and solar energy projects, legal services, women’s projects, economic development, Grameen-style micro-lending banks, and more. I learned much from the little man with the warm smile who is widely regarded as “the living Gandhi.”

It was in the Sarvodaya canteen that I could see a microcosm of a world that worked for all. For Sarvodaya workers and the foreign volunteers that the organization attracts from around the world, the canteen is a meeting place. They gather there for their meals and, twice a day, for supersweet British-style tea. Lunch is the grand confluence, with hundreds of workers, volunteers, and visitors sharing a meal.

In the canteen, foreigners are treated differently from the native Sri Lankans. To summarize the differences:

- Foreigners (visitors and workers) eat from china plates; Sri Lankans eat from wide, shallow bowls made of metal.
- Foreigners get served at a special table reserved for them; Sri Lankans eat at all the other tables.
- Foreigners are served “family style” from platters of food. Generally, they have twice as much food available as any human being could possibly eat. (If eating alone, a person

is served enough food for two on the platters; a group of six is served enough for twelve.) Sri Lankans get their food by going to the kitchen door, where they are given a plate heaped with rice and all of the same curries that are found on the foreigners' table. If they are still hungry after eating their first serving, they simply go back to the kitchen door for another plate of food.

After observing this system carefully, I came to the conclusion that it provided the best way to serve a large group of people representing different cultures, different gastronomic capacities and tastes, and different eating styles and habits.

Some Westerners, especially Americans who have been through "diversity training," see things differently. They loudly protest the "privileges" of having "more food," china plates, and table service. A few, totally disregarding Sri Lankan culture and courtesy, will try to get their food in the kitchen line, which confuses everybody. (Because it is a Sri Lankan custom to offer abundant food and hospitality to guests, the Americans who try to be "culturally correct" will *still* find a china plate and generous servings waiting for them after they have stood in line for a Sri Lankan plate!)

I remind the Western guests who want to reject their perceived "privileges" in food distribution that the system *works for the Sri Lankans*. It works because of three principal factors:

Criterion 1: Enoughness. *Everyone has enough, even though resources are not shared equally.* No one in the Sarvodaya canteen walks out hungry. Any Sri Lankan who wants more can easily get more. But in fact the initial portions are very generous and few people go back for seconds. Ask any Sri Lankan Sarvodaya worker, "Do you have enough food?" The answer is invariably "Oh, yes!"

Criterion 2: Exchangeability. *Trading places would be okay.* If foreigners and Sri Lankans swapped places in the canteen, no one

would feel deprived. The Sri Lankans, “forced” to eat from china plates, would be okay about it. The Westerners, “compelled” to line up at the kitchen door for their food, would make no complaint. (Exchangeability does not mean everyone would *like* or *prefer* the change. It means people would not feel they were being punished or stigmatized—or unjustly rewarded—by the change.)

Criterion 3: Common Benefit. *The system is designed and intended to benefit all.* No one is harmed by the Sarvodaya system; everyone benefits, even though some of the Westerners may not grasp this.

The Sri Lankans came up with the system for good, practical reasons, not because they are subservient or need to suck up to Westerners. Putting food on someone’s plate that they cannot or will not eat is a waste; putting it on platters lets the Westerners take as much or as little as they want. Offering guests abundant food is a cultural trait. Sri Lankans do this with each other in the villages. Why change the courtesy just because the guest is from another country?

If everyone has enough, if trading places would be okay, and if the system has been designed to benefit everyone, we have created something powerful: a world that works for all!

Applying the Criteria

Apply the three criteria to *any* of our current domestic or foreign issues and see how you judge them:

- Does the world work for a welfare mother? Does she have enough? Would you trade places with her? Was the welfare system designed to benefit her? (If you are inclined to answer yes to the last question, think again. No person in need of assistance would ever have designed a system that institutionalized poverty and despair for generations.)

- Does the world work for all the residents of your city? Would you be willing to trade places with someone on the other side of town? Would it be “safe” for you to do so? Do the residents of your city have enough security? Were your city’s institutions designed to benefit every citizen?
- Does the world work for a teenager who just attempted suicide? Does he have enough—in this case, enough love, understanding, respect or self-esteem? Would you trade places with him? Were local social and psychiatric services designed to benefit all age groups?
- Does the world work for a tree in an old growth forest, about to be cut down to feed the insatiable appetites of Breakers for more *things*? Does it have enough . . . life? Would you trade places and offer yourself for sacrifice to satisfy someone’s greed? Was the system designed to benefit this tree, or any tree?
- Does the world work for the average Iraqi citizen, oppressed on the ground by a ruthless regime and oppressed from above by U.S. warplanes dropping “smart” bombs? Does she have enough security? Is any part of her political life designed to benefit her? Would you trade places with her?
- Does this world work for our children? Do they have enough future? Would you trade places with them, given the risks, dangers, and uncertainties of the twenty-first century? Was the system through which we squandered their inheritance of resources while saddling them with our debts designed to benefit them?

We can apply the three criteria as we consider whether our current institutions or our proposed solutions are actually capable of reaching our goals.

A Paradoxical Moment

We find ourselves at a confusing crossroads: we know the old Breaker society does not work, but we have not yet created a new Mender society with which to replace it. As a result, paradoxes abound. Almost every major college in the United States now has a department or school of ecology, environmental studies, or earth sciences, yet major timber companies are still legally clearcutting forests at the rate of 16 million hectares per year.⁷ While the U.S. government spends money to discourage people from smoking and to treat those suffering from tobacco-related diseases, it also devotes millions of public dollars to the artificial support of tobacco prices.

At a transitional point such as this, it is all too easy to lose your sense of direction or lose heart. The imperative is to keep your fundamental intention clearly in mind and to doggedly pursue it. Over time, the old will yield to the new.

Our Problems Are Blessings

The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything except our modes of thinking, and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophes. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN⁸

Our problems are blessings in disguise, because they are leading us to think about solving our problems in very different ways. The complexity of The Mess is the impetus to search for more fundamental solutions.

Tumbleweed Dream

Recently I had a “teaching dream.” Most of my dreams are personal, but others are meant to be shared with those who appear in

them, and still others are clearly intended as teaching tools. This is one of the teaching dreams.

THE DREAM

In this dream, I am both Observer and Participant. I am on a road, blindfolded. As the Observer, I can see myself from above, standing on the road. As the Participant, I feel myself blindfolded and helpless. I am in a place like Kansas, with broad horizons and wide open spaces. Behind me there's a huge tumbleweed, rolling down the road. The scraping sound of this tumbleweed coming my way scares me, so I start running, still blindfolded. As I run faster, the tumbleweed picks up speed. I (the Participant) don't know what it is, or whether it can hurt me.

I run off a high cliff, the tumbleweed still in pursuit. I am in the air, falling. I am still trying to avoid the tumbleweed; I am afraid of being smashed on the ground. I am still blindfolded, so I don't know how far away the ground is.

As I am falling, I hear voices calling out to me: "Take off your blindfold and fly along with us!" I am afraid to take off the blindfold. I don't trust the voices. I don't believe people can fly. I know I am going to die; the blindfold protects me from the certainty of the moment of my death. Even though I know I will die, I still want to pretend that my death will be a surprise.

Although I am afraid, I remove the blindfold. I see people, thousands upon thousands of people, dressed in strange clothes, slowly flying around me. I am the only one falling. They say to me: "Follow our ways and you too will fly!" Their ways are foreign to me, but I do not see the alternative. As I follow them, the road, the blindfold, the tumbleweed are left behind, forgotten. The fear of crashing is a vague memory. I am flying.

This dream is worth pondering. What would have happened if I had taken off the blindfold on the road? Before the cliff? I would

have avoided the tumbleweed and the cliff edge, but never learned that I could fly. Paradoxically, if I had resolved my problems too soon, I would never have experienced transformation. My problems really were a blessing.

I see the Tumbleweed Dream as a powerful metaphor for the state of our society. We are blessed with our problems—blessed with poverty, with social decay, with The Mess. These conditions impel us to new, inclusive ways to connect ourselves with others. We are, in our “blind” state, being impelled to change, to grow.

What was the tumbleweed in the dream? The tumbleweed represented *fear*. This powerful image of impending doom was necessary to get me to jump off the cliff. Our fear leads us to take actions of which we have previously believed ourselves incapable.

The blindfold represented ignorance. Who put that blindfold on me? Perhaps it was self-imposed; or perhaps someone did it for my own good. Perhaps the blindfold is a form of divine intervention, a process (like childbirth) outside of my conscious control that is for the good of life. Whatever it was, it got me to fly.

Baby Bird in the Nest

Our interlocking personal, environmental, and social crises are like a mother bird pushing her young out of the nest when it is ready to fly.

Is this forcible ejection from the nest an act of cruelty or an act of love? It depends on which bird you talk to. From the point of view of the chick clinging to the side of the nest, or on her way down to the ground, being pushed is cruel. The baby bird detests this disruption of her cozy life.

However, we know that the mother bird is acting out of the depths of her love for the chick. She knows the capacity of her offspring, knows when it is time for the chick to fully mature. She cannot talk the chick into flying: “Cindy, those things hanging at

your sides are wings, like mine. Just flap them and you'll fly like me!" Yeah, sure.

The mother bird built her nest far enough from the ground that the baby would have plenty of time to figure out flying before impact. Building the nest up high, along with pushing the chick out, are acts of love. The baby bird has to be high enough to do three things:

- Recognize that she is facing imminent death.
- Quickly learn some basic principles of aerodynamics.
- Apply the principles before she hits the ground.

Our problems, like those of the falling chick, are so overwhelming that we are forced to find a new way of acting, to spread wings that we did not know we had. We've got a little way to go before impact—just enough time to figure out what we must do to avert a terminal splat.

Remembering that our problems provide the impetus for fundamental change allows us to remain optimistic about our future, despite The Mess. Things can and will get better, for us all.

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