

LETTING GO OF A WORLD IN COLLAPSE

THE CONVERSATION WE'RE TOO AFRAID TO HAVE



BY: DEB OZARKO

“*Courage is an inner resolution to go forward despite obstacles; Cowardice is submissive surrender to circumstances. Courage breeds creativity; Cowardice represses fear and is mastered by it. Cowardice asks the question, is it safe? Expediency ask the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? But conscience ask the question, is it right? And there comes a time when we must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because it is right.*”

—Martin Luther King Jr.

A few weeks ago an email from a podcast listener arrived in my in box. It read as follows:

Deb,

I've recently discovered you and your work. Your work is amazing, however it's filled with too much hope in today's world (Hopium). We are already in the 6th mass extinction with tipping points long passed. There is NO saving the ocean, saving endangered species, saving the forests, saving humans. It's too late. THIS is the message that needs to be shared... how we live and die at the end of human civilization.

Love, AV

My initial read through triggered a wave of irritation peppered with self-righteous indignation. How dare anyone tell me that my message is filled with “too much Hopium”.

When the wave passed however, what remained was a feeling of deep sadness. I realized that the initial irritation emerged from a part of me that didn't want to be called out on my denial. In my heart and in every cell of my being, I knew that she was right.

In recent monthly posts, I've alluded to the rapidly imploding, pressurized global energies I've been feeling with heightened intensity. For the record, I don't profess to be psychic. I don't channel non-physical entities, swing pendulums, or commune with guides, angels, ET's, or fairies. I have no crystal ball, magic

wand, tarot cards, or ouija board. I'm fully embodied and plugged into my heart and the energies of the Earth—deeply grounded in my profound love for Gaia.

After numerous conversations with others who are intuitively connected, including local indigenous wisdom, I know that I'm far from alone in feeling the alarming Earth energies that are playing out in more profound ways. Although my heart knows how dire the planetary situation is, I've sidestepped the deep inner truth that I carry. With receipt of AV's recent email however, I know that I've been called out. I feel that it's incumbent upon me to now step in to where I've been too fearful to go.

I confess that I've mastered the art of procrastination with the paralytic inertia I've felt while writing this post. I've been grieving, feeling, and processing my own denial as I navigate the collapsing energies that have descended on my heart. This is why an April post wasn't written. I've been struggling for the proper words for this month's blog post/essay, figuring out a way to give voice to a tough conversation that scares me. But the thing about tough conversations is that, well, they're tough conversations. The only way to say what needs to be said is to just tell it like it is. I've finally reached a place of acceptance where I'm able to write this post from a place of transparent authenticity.

IT'S OVER

Over the past few months I've been feeling a deeper sense of grief over the state of the world with the accelerating breakdown that is playing out in every aspect of life on Earth. I'm finding it increasingly difficult to navigate this Gaia Grief as I call it, knowing that everything I love so dearly—animals and the natural world—are being mindlessly consumed, commoditized and destroyed with entitled abandon. Joanna Macy calls this breakdown **The Great Unraveling**. The word that resonates most with me is collapse.

I'm blessed to live in a stunning location that is energetically charged by rainforests, mountains and ocean. I live in a state of perpetual awe for the beauty that still remains in this part of the world. As such, I'm aware of the "thinness" of this magnificent place, where the veil between the physical and non-physical world is virtually non-existent. Unlike a city with its denuded, unnatural landscape and the incessant noise from honking cars, blaring music, car alarms, machines, construction, techno-distraction, and the mental static of worry, busyness, fatigue, anxiety, and irritation, Earth energy is much easier to feel here—especially for the energetically sensitive like myself. I feel what is unseen and unheard by the collective, and which is subsequently ignored and denied by our culture. The Sunshine Coast is a true barometer for what's really occurring in the world on a non-physical level. For me, this is truth.

The internal guidance I've been receiving is arriving with a clarity that is beyond what I'm used to. The message is clear: **get out of the system**. Collapse is upon us. It's no longer some distant event. It's happening now and it's happening faster than anyone can predict.

Along with the clear message to extricate myself from the system, are repetitive premonitions that won't let up.

These premonitions have a persistent ocean theme that come with two words, "It's over."

My intellect is grasping, trying to understand what the "it" is that's over. Is it literal: the collapse of our oceans? Is it our dominant patriarchal worldview of separation? Is it our consumptive culture of infinite growth, ignorance, distraction, and relentless destruction? Is it our biosphere? Is it humanity? Is it life on Earth? There's no doubt that we're collectively committing ecocide, is it more?

As my mind struggles for answers, my heart doesn't care. Content is irrelevant. To my heart it makes no difference if the "it" is cultural, economic, ecological, or human collapse. Rather than allow my mind to exhaust me with possible future scenarios, my heart has chosen to be fully present with what is. In this acceptance, I've unleashed a force from within that knows that no matter how it all plays out, it's ok, because the love in my heart remains steadfast through it all.

IN PRAISE OF MORTALITY

Despite our widespread willful ignorance, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that a consumptive way of living that devours non-renewable "resources" with reckless abandon cannot last.

If "it's over" means the end of life on Earth, there are worse things than the end of Earth's surface humanity—such as continuing in a way that systemic tyranny and desecrating consumption reigns, while free-will, freedom and awakening to unity consciousness is forsaken.

As **Peter Russell** says, "There's no blame for the crisis we are in. Any intelligent technological species has the potential to become a magnificent flowering of consciousness, but the side effects of its rapid evolution mean that it only has a short window of time to complete it's evolutionary journey.

Facing the end of our species could in itself be the wake-up call we need.”

One manifestation of our collective insanity is that we’ll do anything to deny our own mortality. We’ve all known since early on that we’re going to die and that our mortality is ensured, but ironically, we have a death-phobic mindset in a culture that is driven by a compulsive urge to destroy life. This is insanity.

Most people exist as if they’re never going to die—invincible—immortal. Yet they don’t really live either. The level of anxiety and depression is profound. The world is filled with hopeless, unhappy, self-loathing people. By avoiding all conversations about pain and death, slavery is ensured and the masses never break free from their own misery.

Facing our own mortality can be, in many cases, a radical awakening into a more sacred connection with all life. In my own life, the most liberating, expansive and transformative experience was the untimely death of my mother. As painful as it was, it altered my perception of reality and connected me to a deeper love for life.

I believe that if we faced the fact that we may be coming to the end of our incredible evolutionary journey as a species, we can live with more love in our hearts than we’ve ever known. To me, this is a beautiful thing.

As Joanna Macy says, “There is absolutely no excuse for making our passionate love for the world dependent on what we believe the outcome will be: whether life continues on or not. In this uncertainty, we come alive.”

COLLAPSE

I realize that warnings of ‘collapse’ and the end of civilization are often viewed as fringe or controversial, but I believe that on some level, we’re all feeling it. To the naked eye, things may look “ok”, but lurking below the surface, we know something quite different.

Collapse is not a new concept. Civilizations have risen and fallen repeatedly throughout history. The difference this time however, is that collapse is not isolated to a particular civilization, it extends to all life on earth. It is the **sixth mass extinction event** that gets little airtime in our truth suppressed world.

We’ve had endless opportunities to wake up and alter our course throughout history. Instead, we’ve chosen a deeper coma of separation by remaining slaves to our cultural conditioning. We now have more babies, more consumption, more violence, more ignorance, more denial, more entitlement, more arrogance, more selfishness, more depression, more anxiety, more addiction, and more distracting and destructive technology to drive us further from our souls. The increase in human population is directly related to the escalating violence and destruction in our world.

As Derrick Jensen writes in his book, *Endgame*, “The culture as a whole and most of its members are insane. The culture is driven by a death urge, an urge to destroy life. From birth on, we are individually and collectively enculturated to hate life, hate the natural world, hate the wild, hate and fear animals, hate women, hate children, hate our bodies, hate and fear our emotions, hate ourselves. If we did not hate the world, we could not allow it to be destroyed before our eyes. If we did not hate ourselves, we would not allow our homes—and our bodies—to be poisoned.”

If we could only stop the war on our souls, we would stop the war on the Earth and everything else.

Our dominant culture is built on the foundation of separation and violence. Rape of the Earth is rewarded, peace on Earth is punished. Lies are honoured, truth is vilified. Ignorance is accepted, wisdom is ridiculed. Noise is coveted, silence is feared. Even the so called ‘awakened’ remain trapped in the conditioned entitlement that perpetuates the slavery, oppression and slaughter of animals for their

flesh (meat), ovulations (eggs), and maternal secretions (dairy). Everything that represents the feminine/life—particularly animals and nature—is fair game for obliteration in our anthropocentric patriarchal culture. Sadly, with women influencing more than 85% of household purchasing decisions, and unconscious decisions as the norm, the destructive forces of patriarchy infect us all.

With a rapidly growing critical mass in a coma, our ecocide is rendering planet Earth uninhabitable. The planet cannot regenerate itself as quickly as industrial culture is destroying it. Even the antiquated notion of linear Newtonian science brings with it alarming predictions. What Newtonian science fails to recognize however, is the organic, non-linear nature of Gaia. Gaia is a living organism, and linear scientific predictions just don't work for the rapid acceleration we're now experiencing. We've set off so many positive feedback loops that we're officially on a runaway train to a greater hell than we've already created. And as we free-fall over the cliff, we must realize that it's far too late to apply the brakes. When the web of life breaks down, collapse accelerates and there is no certainty—no predictability.

Newtonian science speaks from a linear cause and effect worldview. If "x" continues to happen, then "y" will happen in 10 years they tell us. It always seems like a distant event that may or may not happen should we decide to curb our consumptive ways. We tend to face problems with facts, figures, statistics, extrapolations and rationale. We think that we can master the world with a three pound hunk of watery flab—our almighty brains—but this only serves to distance us from the source of our greatest potential and the place where we most need to go: our hearts.

We're not only living through startling ecological, economic, system and cultural collapse, but most frightening of all, we're living in a state of collapsed consciousness, where fear, denial and ignorance reign supreme.

Our cultural story of separation/patriarchy has been fundamentally contradicting truth, love and life for several thousand years. It is therefore, contrary to the essence of who we are. As such, we're confused about who and what we are as a species, especially within our modern, narcissistic technological civilization. Because we're so unsure of our identity as a species, we've lost our sense of belonging in Nature. This disconnect from the web of life has sadly brought us to where we now stand today.

Lately, I've been wracking my brain trying to figure out what the purpose of homo sapien is—and always has been for that matter. I keep coming up empty. Biologist Jonas Salk said, "If all the insects were to disappear from the earth, within 50 years all life on earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the earth, within 50 years all forms of life would flourish." Such a tragic statement about how far we've strayed from the web of life.

While every other form of life on this planet intimately knows its place in the web of life, what the hell happened to us? Surely we were not created with the sole purpose of forgetting who we are so we could gobble up everything in our path leaving a trail of toxic trash in our wake while destroying the biosphere in the process. Despite everything pointing in that direction, I have a hard time believing this could be so. Despite my own imperfections, I know that it's not so for me, but do I confess that I'm confused. According to Eknath Easwaran's translation of the Bhagavad Gita, "Since the Self is the core of every personality, no one needs to acquire goodness or compassion; they are already there. All that is necessary is to remove the selfish habits that hide them."

So the problem is not a lack of goodness and compassion, the problem is a lack of interest in expressing goodness and compassion—especially in ways that are not conditional or fragmented.

For most of my life, I've felt like I've been shouting love and compassion for animals, the Earth, and the human soul into a hurricane hoping for someone ... anyone to hear me. But sadly, love and compassion are not big sellers in the paradigm of separation. Six pack abs? Latest iPhone? Selfie sticks? For sure! Sixth mass extinction event? Meh. Scarf down another bacon cheeseburger, chase it with a beer and Prozac and all is well.

On a deep visceral level, I know that the world I now live in is nothing like the world I grew up in. The degradation of human consciousness that has accompanied the population explosion is significant. Despite my lifelong work for a kinder, more compassionate world, I now wonder if it's worth the effort anymore. I feel the bittersweet pain when I sit by the ocean with my partner and dogs admiring a beautiful sunset knowing that the oceans are plasticized beyond repair and are now nearly devoid of life. Spring comes earlier every year, flooding is more intense every year, heatwaves last longer every year, larger algae blooms choke the ocean every year, drought descends earlier every year, fire burns more aggressively every year. And yet we still do nothing to change our ways.

As comedian Jimmy Kimmel says, "2014 was the warmest year on record. Until 2015 was the warmest year ever. Now 2016 is already turning out to be warmer than either of the previous two years. You know how you can determine if climate change is real? When the hottest year on record is whatever year it currently is. That's how you know. We've had 15 of the 16 hottest years ever since 2001."

If we're really honest with ourselves, as was written in the email from AV, tipping points are well behind us and there's no hope for salvaging our broken world anymore. Quite frankly, why would we want to continue on with what is so blatantly cruel and destructive toward life anyways? Because it's familiar? I don't think so.

We've had ample opportunities for transformation. So many wide open doors to walk through, and each time we've chosen to slam the doors shut, throw on the deadbolts, toss the keys, and relocate every piece of furniture to ensure our containment. With our refusal to walk through however, we're now locked from the outside as well. In his book *Endgame*, Derrick Jensen asks, "Do you believe that this culture is going to undergo a *voluntary* transformation to a sane and sustainable way of living?" Most of us know that the answer is a resounding NO. With our collective indifference and denial, we've thrown away all opportunities for a global transformation in consciousness.

We've had all of the knowledge, technology, creativity, ancient wisdom, and inspiration to create a beautiful new world for several decades, if not much longer. Instead, we've chosen the familiar coma of our antiquated separation-based worldview. The only changes we've experienced are those that clearly show how far we've strayed. The explosion of humans on the planet—all indoctrinated into the paradigm of separation—is the perfect recipe for biosphere collapse.

We're rigid in our worldview and refuse to look outside of our mechanistic conditioning. We persist in having having the same old conversations that we did hundreds of years ago. Sexism, speciesism, racism, and many other 'isms are as prolific as ever. Climate change deny-osaurs abound. Quite honestly, I wouldn't be at all surprised if there were many who still believed **the world was flat**.

As I write this post, Fort McMurray Alberta, the infamous oil and tar sand hell, is **burning up**. How tragically ironic. And while desperate conversations about **anthropogenic climate change** spring to life, the denial-infected masses angrily pounce on the harbingers of truth, denouncing their message as "preying on tragedy to further their climate change 'agenda'". WTF?

While this armageddon unfolds in my neighbouring province, red tides are **choking out** life in the ocean, **coral reefs are dying**, and the ever so eloquent **Sarah Palin** (sarcasm intended), in the full-on glory of her ignorant arrogance, bloviates about the great climate change hoax. Yes folks, 97% of scientists are wrong because Lady Palin said so. If that's not enough, her bloviating partner in ignorant arrogance, **Donald J. Trump** is a few steps away from accepting the keys to the white house.

Methinks we ain't seen nothing yet.

THE SAME OLD, SAME OLD

Like a perpetual looping track, history persists in repeating itself. Throughout the millennia, the same old story of separation plays out. Consciousness deteriorates. Civilizations collapse. Extinction events eradicate life. And here we stand again: collapse, extinction and a collective consciousness that has flatlined. Are we some kind of cruel cosmic joke—a 200,000 year old failure, an outlandish biological mistake? Is it possible that we rendered all other known planets uninhabitable before being plopped on our beautiful Earth for one last ditch effort to get it right? Why do some of us remember who we are while the collective remains trapped in the mental illness of separation that disconnects them from life ... from their souls? What kind of world do we live in where the masses care more about the size of Kim Kardashians ass than they do the dwindling size of arctic sea ice?

The tentacles of culture have a death-grip on our psyches that have all but destroyed our conscience.

The sad reality is that the cultural system and those who control it are hell-bent on destroying the planet, and the masses don't give a damn. Most people are too distracted by the daily minutiae of their own lives to care about the

state of the world. Despite the low grade unease that relentlessly tugs on their hearts, every day is 'business as usual'. Make money, pay the bills, Facebook, text, a selfie here, a selfie there, buy stuff, eat, tweet, sleep, text, down a beer, a glass of wine, watch tv, text, repeat. The monotonous machine of relentless distraction that silences their hearts and swallows their souls.

Only by healing ourselves will the Earth stand a chance of healing herself with humanity still in residence. The grim reality is that the masses are unwilling to even acknowledge their wounds, let alone dive headfirst into their pain. If this were not so, the widespread afflictions of anxiety, depression and addiction would no longer be rampant, and synthetic emotional suppressants (read: pharmaceutical anti-depressants) would no longer be a food group. It's a lovely, feel good thought to believe in an epidemic of kumbaya healing, but let's face it, the odds are greater that Ted Nugent would give up his arsenal of weapons, embrace compassion and go vegan long before that ever happened. We've been broken, tainted and corrupted by centuries of separation-based patriarchy, and there is no way out of a mental illness so deeply embedded in the collective psyche unless we allow it to die. But we won't. Our compulsion for abdicating all personal responsibility in every aspect of our lives ensures our disempowered servitude.

The greatest crisis facing the world today is not war, terrorism, or even climate change. The greatest crisis facing the world today is the crisis in consciousness that traps us in the paradigm of separation. As such, we live in a self-created, life-hating, death phobic, zombieified planetary asylum where everything beautiful, good and real is mindlessly consumed, commoditized and destroyed by its compliant inmates.

Our culture rewards destruction and punishes love. We've traded our humanity for profit. For anyone with a trace of critical thinking skills, it's impossible to deny that the earth is

terminally ill, humans are completely insane, and a rapid acceleration of extraordinary collapse is occurring. It's both confusing and disorienting as we careen our way toward an uncertain abyss.

The truth is that we're long past the feel-good "change your lightbulbs, bring your own cloth bags, shorter showers, ride your bike and recycle" mindset. Most people can't even bring themselves to do these simple actions anyways. And let's get real about the "salvation" of solar, wind, and renewable energy. What for? To fuel the very same consumption consciousness that got us into this mess in the first place—only this time with a green hue? If everyone on the planet chose to go vegan, live off-grid, grow their own food, and never buy a single plastic item again, it still wouldn't be enough (but that doesn't mean we shouldn't still choose to live this way). The runaway momentum from our destructive behaviour is well underway. In most cases, the damage is irreversible. The lag time between our past and our present actions, and the subsequent repercussions of these actions will likely play out for several millennia to come. There's no escaping the consequences of our willful ignorance, and contrary to our conditioned arrogance, we are not invincible, infallible or immortal. Let's get real here, we've screwed the planet and ourselves. Surely I'm not the only one who gets this?

For the city dwellers who've read this far and haven't tuned me out, please don't allow yourself to believe that you're insulated from collapse. One only needs to bear witness to the escalating intolerance, road rage, arrogance, entitlement, rudeness, selfishness, anxiety, depression, addiction, irritation, short-fuses, traffic, tailgating, long lines, finger-flipping, stress, agitation, busyness, and endless noise to know that something is very, very wrong with our 'civilized' ways. This may all be 'normal', however it's anything but natural. Collapsing energies are playing out in a plethora of dysfunctional ways.

In the dogma of our arrogant ignorance, we've betrayed the insects, we've betrayed the fish, we've betrayed the reptiles, we've betrayed the birds, we've betrayed the mammals, we've betrayed the Earth.

We've betrayed ourselves.

We stand alone, isolated from life, love and truth on our soulless island of separation. We *are* the zombie apocalypse we so deeply fear.

We've chosen, and the sooner we can accept what we've done to the planet and ourselves, the sooner we can connect with our deepest core essence and be fully present for whatever comes next.

THE NEED FOR GRIEF

For thousands, perhaps even millions of years, we've allowed our separation-based mindset to rule our interaction with life. The problem has never been the human condition, it has always been the conditioned human. There is no way that a species steeped in separation sickness could possibly have a glorious future. Even as a child I knew the Earth would never allow it.

The collective coma of the conditioned human mind runs deep and we've taken it too far. It's long overdue for this nightmare to end. There is no changing antiquated patriarchal systems built on the foundation of the wounded inner child. There is no 5th dimensional consciousness, age of Aquarius, feminine uprising, new age awakening or extraterrestrial deliverance to save us. There is only the irreparable damage that we've inflicted on animals, the Earth and our souls. There's only the inevitable cultural collapse and fall of humanity.

In his book, *Endgame*, Derrick Jensen writes, "The material world is primary. This does not mean that the spirit does not exist, nor that the material world is all there is. It means that spirit mixes with flesh. It means also that real world actions have real world consequences. It

means we cannot rely on Jesus, Santa Claus, the Great Mother, or even the Easter Bunny to get us out of this mess. It means this mess really is a mess, and not just the movement of God's eyebrows. It means we have to face this mess ourselves. It means that for the time we are here on Earth—whether or not we end up somewhere else after we die, and whether we are condemned or privileged to live here—the Earth is the point. It is primary. It is our home. It is everything. It is silly to think or act as though this world is not real and primary. It is silly and pathetic to not live our lives as though our lives are real.”

If we would only just allow ourselves to slow down and breathe, we would connect to the heartbeat of the Earth and feel the depth of her pain. This is the only way back to our love for the world.

The question for many of us right now is how to remain engaged and activated in a collapsing world without falling into despair, depression or apathy. How do we remain present to it all?

In our pain is our compassion. In our compassion is our love. When we run away from pain, we run away from love. By stepping into our pain, it transforms. It doesn't remain static. It only remains static if we refuse to look at it. But when we look at it and bring it into our hearts, it reveals its other face, the face of our love for the world—our absolutely inseparable connectedness with all life.

I cry for the Earth every day. I don't know if there is anyone on the planet who has shed more tears for Gaia than I have—whether in awe for her breathtaking beauty, or in grief for the gut wrenching devastation. I'm intimately familiar with the power of this continuous flow of tears. When I cry, I'm cleansed. When I cry, I'm connected. When I cry, I find joy much easier. When I cry, I know that my heart and my mind are twinned.

It's ok for our hearts to be broken. In fact, we need our hearts to be broken to allow our grief

to be transformed into an inexorable love that cares—not because there's a sliver of hope for a happy ending—but because love is the essence of who we are—the force that plugs us back in to the web of life.

I believe that we all carry an overwhelming amount of grief in our hearts. For the childhood we never had, the dreams we never lived, the calling we never expressed, the love we never shared, the people, animals and relationships we've lost too soon along the way, and for the dire state of the planet that we know—either consciously or unconsciously—is teetering on the precipice of irreversible collapse.

We only grieve what we love, and contrary to the cultural shaming of our pain, grief and pain are powerful motivators for transformation. In our pain phobic culture, is it any wonder that we stand where we do today? When we fear the immensity of our grief, we shut down and move into a state of denial.

In most cases, denial is the manifestation of suppressed grief—a refusal to look at the severity of what we've done to the world because the pain is too great. Suppressed grief is unexpressed love, and I think we can all agree that we live in a world devoid of true, essential love. Our “don't worry, be happy, everything will be ok” culture of denial promotes our disconnect from the Earth and each other. Denial traps us in the status quo and prevents us from taking the action required to think, feel, choose, and live in a way that is more aligned with our true nature.

In a recent conversation someone once said to me, “Boy, that sure is some dark, heavy stuff.” I found this rather amusing. My take is that it's only “dark and heavy” when denial is the primary modus operandi. The truth of our current world is pretty dark and heavy, but it gets (somewhat) lighter when not denied or ignored. There is no happy ending anymore (was there ever?), and this realization has brought up more real moments of joy, presence

and tenderness, like epic moments with goofy dogs and cats, 'lip licking' acorn barnacles (so cool!), dive-bombing bald eagles, curious sea otters, playful seals, wispy cloud formations, stunning sunsets, and breathtaking starry night skies. I notice all of this because I don't fear the pain, duality and truth. I now see the importance of savouring moments, and it's beautiful thing.

Our ignorance, indifference and apathy all stem from our fear of pain, which is rooted in our fear of expressing the immensity of our love. Our invitation to dance with despair is an invitation to be present with our grief and our love for the Earth.

When we move beyond our own denial and the false sense of hope that holds us captive to a complacent mindset, and when we accept the severity of our situation, only then can we open our hearts to the pain of our grief—the gateway to our deepest love for the world.

FREEDOM FROM HOPE

Since emerging from the womb, I've had a passionate love affair with Gaia. I've consciously participated in the healing of the Earth through ongoing activism as well as my personal choices and actions. Although I'm not perfect, I have a tireless hunger for living as close to my essence as possible. With that in mind, I'm always willing (though not always eager) to examine my own inconsistencies, conditioning and separation. This is the only way to reclaim my wholeness. It's an ongoing evolutionary process.

Accompanying my love for the Earth is a heightened sensitivity and awareness that has allowed me to feel and see what most people don't. Sadly though, the things that bothered me as a child, bother me even more so today. There were 3.2 billion people on the planet in my birth year of 1963. There are now almost 7.5 billion people a mere 50 years later. Because of humanity's aggressive population growth, there are exponentially

more of us doing more of what has always upset me. We're a prolific species in our ability to reproduce ourselves, but we fall flat in our willingness to disengage from the coma of consumption and denial. As a result, each new child birthed to the world is indoctrinated into the soul-destroying machine that perpetuates the paradigm of separation. More humans equals more violence and destruction toward animals, the Earth, and each other. The hardest part to swallow is that never had to be this way.

It hurts.

I used to believe that I could be an influential voice for the transformation of this world. I used to believe I could make the world a better place for animals and for Gaia. I used to believe I was an integral player in the uprising of consciousness inspired by the 'emerging feminine'.

I even bought into the whole caterpillar/ butterfly metaphor, where humanity is said to be in the final stages of the consumptive, destructive caterpillar phase before cocooning its way into the magnificent butterfly it has always been meant to be. But the truth is, caterpillars are biologically created to become butterfly's. They have no choice. We do.

I wanted so badly to believe that homo sapien couldn't possibly be vacuous enough to destroy its very own life-support system. I just couldn't allow myself to believe that evil—meaning, ignorance, denial, apathy, and indifference—could prevail. It's been unbearable to witness how a species with so much potential for kindness, empathy, courage, and love would choose an identity that was anything but.

For much of my life, hope was a tenuous thread that bound me to magical thinking and wishes for a kinder world. In my heart, I knew better, but I just couldn't go there. If I didn't know hope, what else was there? How else could I navigate my way through the darkness of a world built on the foundation of conformity,

consumption, compliance, entitlement, narcissism, scarcity, denial, fear, judgment and indifference—the flatlined consciousness of separation. How else could I cope without this beacon of light? I was desperate to believe that compassion would cleanse the human psyche of the blight of separation and set free the forces of the essential soul. I wanted to do more than just imagine the world that John Lennon sang about, the world that still makes me cry every time I hear that song.

I used to believe I was a significant player in the creation of a new story for humanity—a story based on the essence of who we’ve always been meant to be. I used to hope for a happy ending for all.

I duped myself.

I tried on so many different versions of hope that I could almost convince myself they were true had it not been for the persistent ache in my heart telling me otherwise.

I now see how the real story is being written by the billions of fish, birds, mammals, trees, plants, fungi, insects, reptiles, amphibians, coral reefs, and phytoplankton who are needlessly dying because of human ignorance, greed, entitlement, bloodlust, appetite, indifference, and inaction.

The real story is being written by the escalating wildfires, droughts, floods, cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes, sinkholes, hurricanes, heatwaves, ice storms, record snowfalls, desertification and ocean dead zones.

The earth is bleeding and we’re doing nothing to tend to her wounds. Until the blood soaks our front yard, it’s just not our problem. And even then, we look for others to blame.

With abrupt climate change rapidly engulfing us, and with a culture collapsing at an accelerated rate, I no longer believe that we have it in us to evolve to the consciousness required to create, as Charles Eisenstein says, “the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible”. Our hubristic sense of

entitlement has fragmented our consciousness and severed our ties to everything good and real. Our obstinate persistence to remain trapped in an anthropocentric mindset ensures that we remain infected with the sickness of separation.

A stroke of midnight miracle would require a massive upgrade in our collective consciousness. It would mean taking ownership for everything in our lives and making choices aligned with our souls rather than our patterns, history, wounds, fears, and conditioning. But this is not a new message. Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tzu, and so many others had first dibs on it centuries ago, and we still haven’t caught on.

Sometimes I feel like a dunce for believing that *homo sapien inertia* could possibly evolve into *homo sapien awakening*. I’ve wondered why the collective repeatedly chooses the cultural coma over all else. I’ve wondered if our inertia is impenetrable because we refuse to talk about it. I’ve wondered if we refuse to talk about it because we’re too busy pretending that everything will be ok—pretending that we have hope.

But what is hope? A desperate wish for a future that looks better than the past or the present?

As Derrick Jensen writes in *Endgame*, “We’ve all been taught that hope in some better future condition—like hope in some better future heaven—is and must be our refuge in current sorrow. Hope serves the needs of those in power as surely as a belief in a distant heaven; that hope is really nothing more than a secular version of the same old heaven/nirvana mindfuck.”

For those who cling to the hope of some epic awakening, spontaneous consciousness shift or utopian new world (been there, done that, drank the Kool-Aid), or for those still living in denial that it can’t possibly be that bad, my question is this: What is it that you’re *really* hanging on to?

Let's get real here, how many people do you know (yourself included) who endure unbearable relationships, jobs, or situations because of the hope that things will change?

How many people know deep down how screwed we are but refuse to talk about it because they hope things will miraculously improve? Hope binds us to intolerable situations and blinds us from truth. Hope has us believe that things are getting better, but they're not. They're getting much, much worse.

Hope gives us permission to drag our feet with baby steps that feed the illusion of "better", (i.e. free-range, grass-fed, cage-free, organic, all-natural, green, humane, sustainable, blah, blah blah), but feel good labels warp the mind and fertilize hopium, yet they do nothing to heal the Earth. Hope blinds us with this fantasy of change, but in reality, it's no more than a distorted perception of the same old, same old.

Hope traps us in our deeply conditioned sense of entitlement. We may take action to save the Earth and hope all will be well, but damn, don't take away our bacon, burgers, fish, chickens, turkey, cheese, eggs, etc. or we get mean and ugly.

Let's be honest: any species that enslaves/ domesticates, commoditizes, tortures, and slaughters sentient beings by the billions (and trillions including aquatic life) every single year—from the micro backyard farm to the macro factory farm—is delusional to believe that it has the ability to save itself from its own demise; is delusional to believe that it can infinitely operate outside of the web of life; is delusional to believe that it has the capacity to pull off a miracle well past the 11th hour.

As long as we hope our way to a better world and still feel entitled to take life—directly or indirectly—we will always be trapped in the purgatory of separation.

What we need right now is a quantum leap in consciousness. Hope will never get us there.

From *Endgame* by Derrick Jensen, "Hope is partly what keeps us chained to the system. Firstly there is the false hope that suddenly somehow the system may inexplicably change. Or technology will save us. Or the Great Mother. Or beings from Alpha Centauri. Or the second coming of Jesus Christ. Or Santa Claus. All of these false hopes—all of this rendering of our power—leads to inaction, or at least to ineffectiveness."

When I look back on hope in my own life, I see how it held me captive to denial. Yes folks, *hope is denial in drag*.

Hope trapped me in a low grade state of inertia that I wasn't aware of until I let it go. It pushed me just out of reach of the present moment so that I didn't feel the severity of it all. Yes, it motivated my personal actions and impassioned activism (or so I thought), but would my actions and activism have been more effective if I were present rather than looking toward an illusory future?

An amazing thing happens when you let go of hope, which is you realize that you never needed it in the first place. You realize the burden it has always been.

When we stop hoping for external assistance, or that the catastrophic situation we're in will somehow rectify itself, or that things will not get worse, that's when we liberate ourselves to really start doing something about it—even if its too late. When hope dies, presence springs to life and real, meaningful action finally begins.

By liberating myself from hope, *I stopped lying to myself* and reclaimed so much more of my soul. As a result, I've connected to the deepest authenticity of my unadulterated presence.

You may be asking, "What if everything she writes about is wrong?" To which I respond, "What if everything I write about is right? What if humanity does have a finite number of days on planet Earth? What does that mean for you as an individual? How does that influence how

you live your life? Are you happy as a corporate or government drone in an office surrounded by computers, fluorescent lights and recycled air while pushing empty words and digits around? Is that your version of a meaningful way to live?"

What if we stopped living in hope and instead lived from the acceptance of what is, despite how gloomy it may seem to be?

I do admit that I remain open to quantum leaps, quantum physics, spontaneous awakenings, consciousness shifts, tipping points, the 100th monkey effect, the more beautiful world my heart once thought was possible, the second coming of Jesus, miracles, and anything above and beyond my limited realm of awareness. But I no longer hope, wish, dream or otherwise attach myself to these long-shot outcomes.

The reality is that the present moment is all we have. The more present we can be with what is transpiring *right now*, the more authentic, engaged and loving we are. If we believe in a false future, we're living a fantasy, and fantasyland doesn't inspire action. Hope is a fantasy that prevents us from feeling the pain of our reality. Hope feeds inertia. Presence inspires action.

You may be asking, "Why bother with action in a world that's going to hell in a hand basket anyways?" As Guy McPherson says, "If you're damned if you do and damned if you don't, **then do**. Do something. Action is always the antidote to despair, even if it's too late, especially if it's too late. Let's act as if moments matter, not in a hedonistic fashion, but in a meaningful way that connects us deeply to the planet."

I can hear it now, "But Deb, if there is no hope, what is there to live for?" And I reply, "Presence. Live fully for the present moment." This is when we come fully alive!

It's ok to not be brimming with hope. It's ok to not be optimistic. Many ancient teachings tell us that the ongoing maintenance of hope will burn us out. When we hope, it's not enough.

But when we're present, it's more than enough. In our presence, we're activated. We show up in ways that allow us to discover ever more capacity to love this world. The biggest gift we can offer the world is our full on, activated presence.

ORCAS AND MOUNTAIN RAPE

A few weeks ago, my partner and I witnessed two orcas and a number of sea lions swimming in a beautiful bay near our home. The distant snow capped mountains of Vancouver Island, along with clear sunny skies and a calm ocean created an arresting frame. Under "normal" circumstances, I would feel immense joy from this beautiful display of nature in action. Instead, I was heavy-hearted, irritated and angry. Interrupting this magnificent natural spectacle was a jarring sight: an ugly, loud, smelly, dirty, tanker ship making its way to a nearby private dock to be loaded with gravel and sand to be shipped to China.

For years, a local mountain range has been **raped for profit**. Sand, gravel, crushed stone, and concrete are the final products. Where majestic mountains once stood, there is now only desecration: rusty scaffolding, an endless convoy of trucks and bulldozers, relentless dust and noise, and a merciless conveyor belt that runs to the loading dock where blood-soaked 'resources' are shipped to distant lands.

I miss nothing. The ocean and the tanker ship. The orcas and the mountain rape. Beauty and destruction. Life and death. There's more however. I'm painfully aware of the precarious state of the ocean. This is the focal point for my premonitions. The ocean is dying and it's happening fast. It is our link to life—the true lungs of the Earth. When the ocean collapses, it is the end of life on Earth. Ocean collapse is well underway. Mass fish die-offs. Mass sea bird die-offs. Mass sea turtle die-offs. Mass sea lion die-offs. Mass starfish die-offs. Mass whale die-offs. Mass fish stock collapse. Mass

coral bleaching. Dying mangroves. Endless oil spills. Plastic pollution. Chemical pollution. Noise pollution. Warming, rising, dead zones, deoxygenation, acidification. It's bad. Really, really, *really* bad.

There's a bittersweet quality to witnessing life in a dying, polluted ocean. With mountain rape added to the picture, it becomes that much more painful.

The experience with the orcas and the mountain rape struck a deep chord in me. It was pivotal to where I'm at today. It was the catalyzing experience that peeled back the curtain on my own denial. It implored me to look more deeply at where we really stand within the collapsing story of human separation. It forced me to finally realize the severity of my premonitions.

On May 16, 2016, my partner sent to me this email:

"I saw a dying sea lion in Davis Bay on my way to work. I stopped to watch her for 10 minutes, one flipper was up in the air the entire time and she would come up for a breath every minute or so and it looked like a real struggle. There was nothing I could do but talk to her and send her love and apologize for what humans have done. My heart is so heavy. It hurts so much. I wish we were just killing our own species—why do we have to take everyone else with us."

I read this message and began sobbing—from the depths of my soul. My heart—so very, very heavy. I spent most of the morning in tears. My premonitions are coming true much faster than imagined. There has also been **news of red tides** along the eastern coast of Vancouver Island. The blood is soaking my front yard and it's spreading quickly.

To be honest, some degree of this dire reality has informed and motivated my lifetime of animal and environmental activism. The difference now though is that I no longer believe that there is time to shift human consciousness. With our prolific breeding

abilities, our voracious hunger for destruction, our penchant for ignorance and denial, and our absolute refusal to change, it's over.

I often feel like I'm the only one on the planet who sees and feels it all. The masses see the orcas. I see the orcas *and* the mountain rape *and* the dying ocean. The masses see the bacon sandwich. I see the bacon sandwich *and* the terrified, screaming, blood-soaked pigs. The masses see the cheese omelette. I see the cheese omelette *and* the imprisoned, grieving dairy cows, the discarded by-product baby calves, the exhausted, sickly chickens, and the violation of the feminine through the consumption of the maternal secretions and ovulations of brutalized female living beings. The masses see the shiny white paper, I see the shiny white paper *and* the chemical pollution, the corporate greed, and the clearcut forests. The masses see 'normal'. I see insanity.

I feel like I'm part of a tiny minority who knows the world is round in a collective that remains steadfast in their belief that the world is flat. It's a lonely place to stand.

As our neighbours mindlessly power wash their driveways with the very real potential for a more aggressive drought this summer, and they casually flip their bacon cheeseburgers while flippantly chatting about which trees to cut down on their property because they take too much water from their pesticide-laden lawns, I grieve for the Earth and the animals. For my entire life I've tried to make sense of it all. What caused us to sever our relationship with the natural world and animals so that we feel such an arrogant sense of entitlement that serves only to perpetuate their ongoing destruction? Why, why, why?

When we love the Earth, we are the Earth. We refuse the blinders that prevent us from feeling and seeing it all. We hold the beauty and the destruction; the love and the grief— together. When we love something or someone that is unwell, we don't turn away, because our love unites us in deeper ways. Essentially, it is only

when we fall deeply in love with the Earth—and our own souls—that we will end our destructive ways.

PLANETARY HOSPICE

When I look back on my life, I clearly see how I've been skirting the edges of this conversation since childhood. My innocent young mind could never understand why humans were so cruel and indifferent toward animals, the Earth and each other. I never understood why kindness, compassion and caring were so fleeting, fragmented and compartmentalized. It confused me then. It pained me as I became more aware.

As I grew older, I'd impulsively blurt out deeper aspects of this conversation to anyone willing to listen, but my intolerance for the willful ignorance of the denial-infected masses triggered my pain. I'd flare up, consumed with anger and despair—railing against the system with my rage-filled activism—only to cause more of what I wanted to see the end of ... separation. It was exhausting.

Eventually I realized that resistance begets greater resistance. I realized that changing a deeply entrenched culturally conditioned worldview was akin to flying without wings. It just isn't possible. On the other hand, inspiring a return to truth, love and wholeness sparked a remembrance—a unity and a willingness to listen—and potentially awaken. I knew that I'd found my calling. I hoped that it wasn't too late, but deep in my heart I knew the odds were always stacked against me.

I've since let go of all defences (including hope—*especially* hope), and my heart has been freed to speak without interference. The message has come through loud and clear and I've accepted my role as a pioneering member of the planetary hospice movement. The essence of my work remains the same: living with passion, purpose, love, compassion, presence, activation, kindness, and grace.

What differs now is the “why”. Before, my work was to inspire the creation of a new world story based on who we've always been meant to be. Now, my work is to inspire leaving the world as who we've always been meant to be. It's about going big *and* going home and living fully *right now*.

ACTIVATED PRESENCE

This post/essay has taken me more than six weeks to write. As I've been writing, I've been healing. I've moved through the inertia of my own denial, grief, sadness, despair, and anger to finally reach a place of acceptance.

As I've been writing and healing, my love for the Earth has deepened, yet at the same time I've been feeling an increased detachment from the physical world. Not in an apathetic or indifferent way, but in a way that reminds me of the times in my life when faced with the looming transition of a loved one—that liberating moment when acceptance finally brings peace to my heart. It's a sacred time. Heartbreaking and beautiful. Sad and tender. It's a special time that reminds me of both the beauty and frailty of life.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross pioneered the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Unlike the mainstream interpretation of her important body of work, the five stages of grief are organic, non-linear, and don't always appear as defined. In the processing of my own grief, I realized that hope was my way of bargaining. The energies of anger, sadness, frustration, joy, awe, and acceptance move through me like breezes, gusts, tornadoes ... and then stillness. Until it starts up again. I knew nothing of my own denial until I stopped hoping. In giving up on hope, I reached acceptance. With acceptance, I've touched my essence, and my grief has morphed into activated presence.

This has brought up a number of important questions such as: “Who do I choose to be in

the face of collapse?”, “How do I choose to live in a dying world?”, “What does it look like to live fully, purposefully and lovingly in a world in collapse?”, “How do I choose to live my life in the face of uncertainty?”, “How do I find beauty and joy in a collapsing world?”

With repeated consistency, there’s only one word that comes to me: Love. Love is the answer—the salve for every wound—the force that inspires courage, creativity, purpose, trust, joy, acceptance and activated presence.

Activated presence is a radical paradigm shift in a distracted and indifferent world. It’s about engagement, tenderness, passion, purpose, being, doing, laughter, tears, and noticing the absolute sacredness in the smallest moments.

It’s about deepening connections with like-hearted community. It’s about unapologetically feeling the depths of grief and despair and emerging with salty tears, snot, and grace. It’s about being comfortable in the uncertainty of collapse without collapsing in it. It’s about doing what I love and being the change in the face of devastation. It’s about living more fully and loving harder than ever before. It’s about asking my heart what really matters, and listening deeply. And it’s about living on the razors edge of knowing how dire our planetary situation is, while remembering intimately, viscerally, deeply, the profound sacredness of life.

Activated presence is an embodied awakening to my deepest essential nature—my primal, unconditioned, undomesticated, deeply connected, wild animal soul-Self.

It’s one thing to fight for the rights of animals and the Earth to be free from the blight of humanity’s separation. It’s something quite different to feel myself inextricably connected to all life within every cell of my being. This shift has helped me realize that I’m not being called upon to save the Earth, because saving only implies superiority. Instead, I’m being called upon to activate my love, and as Ram Dass says, “Be love now”. To me, this means being love in action. Being love in action frees

me from the burden of hope and the pain of attachment to specific outcomes.

As Carolyn Baker writes in her book, *Dark Gold*, “What if instead of acting on the basis of hope, we act because we feel drawn to a particular cause, knowing that it is the right thing to do or because we feel unable to do otherwise? What if our passion alone and the satisfaction we receive in taking action compels us to persevere? What if we knew with certainty that our efforts would make absolutely no difference long-term, but we felt we could not do otherwise? What if we act for the sake of acting?”

In the expanse of our deepest humanity, we unite with our core spiritual essence— and with each other.

In her book, *Coming Back to Life*, Joanna Macy writes, “The deteriorating conditions of our world and the plight of other beings impinge on us all. We are in this together. Never before have our destinies been so intertwined. The fact that our fate is a common fate has tremendous implications. It means that in facing it together openly and humbly, we rediscover our interconnectedness in the web of life. From that rediscovery springs courage, a deeper sense of community, and insights into our power and creativity.”

This is activated presence.

The dire state of the world and the subsequent uncertainty is calling us out on our greatness and our smallness. Crisis can bring out who we truly are.

For the longest time, I wanted to be sure about how it would all end. I was afraid to be unsure. I was afraid of what could or would play out in the uncertainty. I wanted to be able to say with conviction, “It’s going to be ok.” But I’ve since realized that this helps nobody. First of all, nobody knows. More importantly though, even if we can be convinced that everything will be ok, would that evoke from us our deepest love, compassion, courage and greatness? Would that inspire our activated presence?

By teetering on the precipice of uncertainty, we come alive to our truest power. This is when we step into our deepest love for the world and experience life from a place of activated presence. With this profound internal connection, it no longer matters that there are no guarantees for a happy ending. Let's face it, there are no guarantees for happy endings in any aspect of life. There are no guarantees when we fall in love that the relationship will last. There are no guarantees when we take on a job that it will provide happiness and security. There are no guarantees for health despite how clean our lives may be. There are no guarantees for ample sun and rain to bring us a bumper garden crop. Other than death, there are no guarantees for anyone or anything. Uncertainty is the nature of life, and by stepping into it, we step into radical, activated presence. Embracing uncertainty connects us with the soul of who we are—the part of us who lives for the present moment and could give a damn about tomorrow. Uncertainty activates life, love and truth.

In a recent meditation, I asked the Earth what she needed from me. The answer was immediate, "Be yourself." I sobbed. So loving. So simple.

Every night before I go to bed, I sit under the stars with my canine soulmate, Francis. I breathe deeply into my heart, taking in the immensity of the sky, listening closely to what she has to say. Remembering the stardust that I'm made of. I close my eyes and see the Earth. She weeps. I weep. I wrap my arms around her, offering the only solace I know. I give myself fully to her—the only gift I know. It rarely feels like enough, yet she makes it clear to me that in standing in the truth of who I am, I am more than enough.

Gaia may bat last, but when she does, we realize whose been in charge all along. With or without us, she will prevail. I choose to give myself fully to her, regardless of outcome.

As Joanna Macy says in the documentary, *Planetary*, "What instantly touches the heart-mind—and it's sudden and you can count on it—is the kiss of the Universe when you glimpse its beauty. It strips you of all your explanations and all your notions of who and what you want to be as an achieving individual. And you're struck with such a gladness at that beauty and the originality of life that you don't have time to think about "how is it going to turn out?" All you know is that you will serve it to the last breath."

I end with this offering: Activate your presence. Live for moments, not for wishes, dreams or future outcomes. Savour the moments that lift you, bring joy to your heart and fill your life with meaning. Let go of hope, embrace your tears and love like never before. Choose to be extraordinary in ordinary moments and do what feeds your heart. Do what you love. Not for recognition, riches or fame, but for no other reason than because that is who you are. Even if it seems pointless in a sea of disconnect, never, ever stop loving the Earth. For the love of your soul, be fiercely committed to your truest self and choose gratitude for every sacred breath of life. I guarantee that no matter how it all plays out in the end, you will not regret it.

Perhaps this is the miracle we've needed all along.

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“The heart that breaks open can contain the whole universe.”

—Joanna Macy