Reader Thoughts on Collapse, Part 1: What are we looking forward to?

Contributed by Various Authors
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In April 2009, Culture Change put out a call for reader responses on three questions about collapse:

- 1. What we are acting toward? What main outcome might we be looking forward to?
- 2. What do we relish leaving behind, as collapse begins or as it will be intensified?
- 3. What do we not want to leave behind unresolved; or, what needs to be done before it's too late to accomplish it?

In this article, Part 1, we publish responses to the first question:

Regarding collapse, what we are acting toward? What main outcome might we be looking forward to?
Responses

I look forward to the world breaking up "into small colonies of the saved" (Robert Bly). I look forward to a simpler, less neurotic life for me and my children. I would like to think that my children, while their chances of survival may be lower, their chances of happiness will be higher.

Right now the answers to that question are still hazy and distorted, as if we're just waking from centuries of sleep, but overall I'd say we're trying to re-member who we are. There are so many things missing, so much has been stolen from us. We grieve from enormous loss, and because of that loss we are so much less than what we could be. Whatever the outcome, we all yearn, whether we realize it or not, to re-connect with lasting meaning and personal worth.

Working towards some sort of mass awakening or realisation that the capitalist system is tottering on its last legs. That Government keeping us under control by encouraging us to consume more, even giving us financial incentives to the point that we are almost sedated by consumerism, is no longer effective.

That issues like Climate Change are critical and we will not put up with prevarication anymore.

The main outcome of this realisation would be a form of minor revolution. The people would unite and demand action and governments being essentially populist and with the next election in mind would become conciliatory. Then by a sort of deliciously ironic reverse osmosis process, they would relax into their own sedating complacency of giving the people what they want, paving the way for an appealing strong people power movement to emerge, gain popularity and become a real threat in terms of the democratic process.

In this bioregion there is still need to educate people on the "triple threat". After many conversations with the "drill, baby's", and the "nuke builders" I believe that they are manifesting a lot of denial. I try not to waste too much time with them, but admit that I haven't found an effective way to engage them, if such a strategy exists. Others are poorly informed by our local press which tend to print a lot of GW skeptics and deniers. I've done quite a few programs (including three presentations at my HS alma mater) and find that people will accept the bad news if they know I'll follow it with good news.

The main outcome I'm working towards is closer bonds between neighbors, private enterprise, and local governments, as well as more effective actions from local government through our Environmental Advisory Council. This includes forging

more partnerships with local schools and civic groups, and neighboring towns. Creating a Relocalization Transition Town here will take time and patient action. I'm looking forward to the fallout from better national leadership, and some inevitable bad news (likely coming from the cryosphere) possibly as soon as this fall. When it comes it will provide a lot of grease for the skids and will undercut the skeptics, creating new allies (I hope).

The central change I would like to see is abandonment of the addictive, frenzied, exploitative American way of life in favor of a tribal, cooperative, relaxed way of life that puts responsibility toward other species and the Earth, as well as other human beings, first.

We are acting towards a post-industrial earth-and-psyche healing. "Industry" will continue to shrink and with it the mind-set of egoistic acquisitiveness and the human species' unconscious dominance/submission, objectification stance towards nature, each other, and within individual minds. The main outcome I look forward to is the resurgence of a pristine, detoxified ecology worldwide, into which we blend human culture seamlessly, losing nothing already learned, and finding a new, huge, informing mutual Love, leading to the next golden age.

One word sums up what we are acting out now - "Koyoniskatsi" = an Indian term meaning, "Life out of balance". It's been going on for thousands of years and only recently brings our survival into question. The outcome I wish for is Life IN balance and sane, peaceful and sustainable societies.

An authentic life that is centered around people and not things. Revival of things spiritual and not material.

Learning how to live with each other and within the larger community of our bioregions and ecosystems in a way that is intimate, honest, humble, and humanly and ecologically sustainable. That includes restoring viable community life, economic and ecological relationships and systems - living systems.

For the past decade I have been working toward persuading ordinary people (via writing books and articles, giving speeches, contributing to websites etc.) that we have serious energy and environmental problems (really a predicament), and that we have to change the way we live. I have also been challenging the community plans of district councils on a more or less continuous basis for 6 years. I have now more or less given up on both counts, because people 'do not want to know', and councils are primarily concerned with serving vested interests. At one time I had hoped for a culture change, but I am now convinced it will not occur until after the collapse (most people are basically ignorant, stupid and greedy, exactly as they have been trained to be).

I am working with others toward establishing a “transition city” in Columbus, Ohio. There are a number of sustainability groups, including healthcare and food re-localization groups, and a nascent Rob Hopkins-inspired transition city effort. I would like to see my employer, Ohio State, become a “Transition University” to serve as a hub for the various activities underway.

The emergence of a true planetary culture in which humans live in communities that are not at war with the natural word but rather cooperate with it.

meaningful work and functional intertwined communities cooperating in establishing ecologically-sound economies and rejuvenating ecosystems.

The end of mass society and high-energy technology. The beginning of local communities using appropriate sustainable technology.

Population reduction orchestrated by One Child Per Family behaviour, the efficacy of which has been voted upon by a democratic majority. Compliance with the will of the majority would be rewarded handsomely with tax credits, cash grants and privileges.

Non-compliance would be penalized with extra taxes, fines, withdrawal of privileges, and possibly imprisonment with hard labour.

The primary outcome of the transition will be a more sustainable human population. There are two primary ways this could be accomplished, and the end result will likely be a combination of the two depending on the location and the choices made by the people in that area. First is by a change in our social and economic structures that will allow us to live in healthier relationship with the land that supports us. Second is through drastically reduced numbers so that we can continue living a slash and burn existence, but with smaller ecological consequence because of the relative size of the population doing so. Personally, I look forward to the socio-economic-ecological consciousness that will allow us to

transition into healthier (physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually) relationships with each other and the natural systems that support us. I imagine this being a more meaningful and rewarding way of life than what we have known recently.

It's difficult to know what "we" are acting toward, and who exactly are "we" to begin with? I know who "I" am and frankly without specific timetables and other reliable indicators of what horrors-may-come when, I--as a lower-class, financially ruined, low-income forty-something with a college education and zero "prospects" and two kids with escalating weekly medical costs--can pretty much do next to nothing to insulate myself from many of the predictions for "collapse." I have no land I can run to and my owning-class landlord may kick me out long before my food plants can sprout, let alone grow to harvest. I rent, so I'm prohibited from doing things to the house we pay for to make it energy efficient or even energy independent and I'm prohibited by owning-class imposed laws from choosing to not water the lawn.

My mate is a private school teacher--cruelly and ironically working for certain families of California's ruling class of recent Sacramento fame who at whim, dole out fiscal ruin to the rest of us. That vital job pays barely enough to survive, but it's modest income is functionally better than nothing. And we know at some point in collapse, even that will end.

Our only consolation is that we've been a backpackers and outdoors people from childhood and we DO know native edible flora. But what good that will do when we're prohibited from accessing the land by law enforcement, I don't know. All I know is, right now we're vulnerable and exposed and there isn't anything we can do about that, at least not while we're in southern CA, tied to that vital primary income producing job.

We live in a conservative ex-urban soCal city so there is very little "community" to work with towards a survivable and sustainable future, come whichever collapse actually strikes.

We'd love to work with others in cohousing type situations where seed collecting/saving and the like are the community's focus. But realistically, we don't know of any and we wouldn't have the means to be part of such a community anyway, as cohousing and intentional communities are chiefly the exclusive choices of the owning and upper middling classes, not us. I'd personally love to create a real physical library, archiving tech and other knowledge so the progress and literature permitted by the era of cheap oil isn't utterly lost forever. I'd love to be part of a think tank/organization that works towards creating post-collapse inter-community infrastructures that could be survivable and ecologically compatible. But I'm no engineer or scientist, and I'm poor.

We observe a lot of cultural creatives very much in denial about "collapse" and we see the ones that aren't in denial are generally people of privilege and means, and they're understandably focused on their own needs for survival. I don't see many class allies among them, despite the rich cultural creativity invested in them.

I guess I really cannot answer question 1. That's a question for those of the upper classes since they pretty much own and operate the world without the lower class' input, consent, or needs.

We are moving to more local economies. We are moving to a society where we work together for a common goal with honesty and trust rather than work individually for a personal goal. We are moving to families that are better connected and healthier.

As your editor I'm delighted to see the number of responses and the thoughtful quality. This survey's not representative because, in the first place, the out-to-lunch crowd is not reading reports like Culture Change's. And if one isn't out-to-lunch and is the opposite -- really informed, even cursed by knowing too much -- and one has a negative, dismal view, that's a fact Jack, and no response would be forthcoming.

Since I thought up this survey and the questions, I thought I'd wrap up this first installment with a great answer to #1, if I only could: "What we are acting toward? What main outcome might we be looking forward to?"

I hope we'll have more music (our own, acoustic), take the time to watch plants grow, learn interesting stuff from one another every day, and do the ongoing ecological restoration with mutual support as an independent/interdependent tribe. This implies the end of giant nations, transnational corporations, and time-wasting work for questionable ends. If we have to accomplish some travel and exchange, may it be in a slower, relaxed fashion -- via sailboat, for example -- so as to enlarge the universe as we traverse it. We'll bring back the full magic this planet has to offer -- or spend our lives trying.

To be realistic we need to first deal with serious threats to our survival which get more immediate by the day. Every day that we wait for others to change, or wait for a new government, or for our retirement and pension, or for whatever, we are making less likely any future Ecotopian age.

I'm in agreement with almost everything in the responses that we received. What's above was every response that came in; not one response was thrown out or unworthy. Perhaps we are working all together already more than we realize.

In solidarity,

- Jan Lundberg, Portland, Oregon

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