Reader Thoughts on Collapse, Part 3: What needs to be done before it's too late?

Contributed by Various Authors
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In April, Culture Change put out a call for reader responses on three questions about collapse. Here in Part 3, we publish responses to the question: Regarding collapse: What do we not want to leave behind unresolved; or, what needs to be done before it's too late to accomplish it?

We should harvest sustainability-focused knowledge from the current knowledge base before that base disappears.

As Dmitry Orlov suggests, security of nuclear and coal plants and waste. Social rehabilitation of inmates and poor disfunctional families. A national program or design to gear society towards a low-energy future as it relocalizes and becomes self-reliant. Seeds and instructions for permaculture practices.

Connection to ourselves as spiritual beings. Preparation for a new way of living.

What needs to happen is people need to honor the present moment and experience the pain of the conditions our imbalance has brought upon us. Then, we need to see how we got to this point, and choose, in the moment, what we can and are willing to do about it.

The Earth has to start rejuvenating, replenishing and recharging so we need to stop, not slowly incrementally decrease, the damage we are doing.

Seeing the problems (and opportunities) and then making the required mental shift is an ongoing process that is at the center of change for each of us. In that sense, I will never 'be ready' but it will also never be 'too late'. Most people will cling to the past, and I get a lot of blank stares when I talk to friends about the hardest part of change being psychological.

We need to understand and resolve the trauma that Western Civilization has caused all humans and all of the Earth community for thousands of years. We need to bring the shadow of Western Civilization to consciousness, transform it, and re-integrate the aspects of ourselves that have been marginalized and repressed in our culture. At least a substantial number of people need to do this if the human species is to survive the collapse of our civilization.

Outside the potential for obvious catastrophic lack of food and clean water, I will miss being able to travel, even modestly, to visit friends and family. If we can get a reinvigorated passenger rail system back in service, along with a flexible and capacious bus system, such travel will still be possible but will take more planning and time.

I need to get much more knowledgeable and skillful about survival. I need to develop my network of people who are prepared to face collapse instead of live in denial until the bitter end. I need to better understand what will be of value in the future (as opposed to paper money).

Safety of or protection from nuclear waste and nuclear weapons; gradually bring manufacturing and power generation systems down to safe conditions compatible with a low-energy world; develop lower-energy alternatives for transportation of people and things by land and sea, especially during a transition period; develop our low-tech holistic healing skills; downsize or peacefully put to sleep our large-scale governmental systems in favor of local, participatory decision-making.

At the minimum, we do not want the cornucopian attitude that there are no resource limits, or the panglossian philosophy that global carrying capacity will accommodate our present numbers – absent the geological energy subsidy that we have gotten used to in the last few centuries-- to survive.

We have to launch public education campaigns that bring ecological limits to the attention of the global electorate.

We desperately need to regain relationship to a set of eternal cycles, to engender balance and relationship, to bring out the best in everything around us so everything can thrive. We need to be all about healing and restoration, such as transforming isolated neighborhood zones into living villages; to help each other learn how to listen, to share, to focus. This is how we are hardwired--to help and support each other and to see ourselves as part of our environment. Instead of making STUFF, we need to be making PLACE with a sense of purpose so that our lives and work become real and meaningful.

I suspect we need to use the energy of fossil fuels and the power of our industrial machine to build windmills and solar energy systems, as well as to create some (small amount of) infrastructure in the most impoverished countries. Some of this is medical, as we must address the need to reduce our population humanely—otherwise it will happen inhumanely and catastrophically. Also, it’s very important that we leave nuclear weapons and power plants in some kind of deactivated, safe state. I have mixed feelings about biological weapons, as I fear they may be the only realistic means of population reduction and of (thereby) an end to civilization before it destroys much of the richness of the biosphere. Rational, cooperative measures would be great but are extremely unlikely to actually be adopted. Our inability to make collective decisions is our species’ fatal weakness

It would be too bad to leave unresolved the conflict between the haves and have-nots, the conflict between those with rigidified mind-sets and those whom they wish to control. Prosecute the torturers, the bankers, the corporate assassins? It's important for us to bring an understanding forward of what we have been culturally and why. I think our new ability (through media technology) to witness as one unified consciousness, unprecedented and emotionally devastating global events will result in a consolidation of core human values. Then it will be possible to do what needs to be done before it's too late: 1.) resolve or contain toxic waste sites, 2.) create a non-industrial means to carry on the internet phenomenon globally with only easily-accessed locally renewable resources.

We are a very mobile society, my children and grandchildren live thousands of kilometres/miles away from each other, and me, I could not endorse a system that did not allow me to visit them at least once a year, having said that we need to be where we plan to be before “it” happens.

All my life I have covered myself, insured against whatever could happen, paid a small fortune to protect myself and now I have to ask myself, AGAINST WHAT?

For the last 6 years I have been putting my nest egg into ethical investments, namely trees, almonds and eucalypts, many, many thousands of dollars, my future, my insurance against having to live on welfare.

NOW IT IS ALL GONE, THEY HAVE GONE INTO LIQUIDATION, HOW CAN THIS HAPPEN, WHERE IS MY MONEY, WHERE IS MY BELIEF THAT WHAT HAPPENS IS WHAT YOU DESERVE, MY FUTURE AS A CONSUMER IS GONE, INSTANTLY WIPED AWAY, WHERE ARE THE THOUSANDS ALREADY INVESTED?

So everything has changed, future plans, legacy for kids and grand kids, my ability to pay and protect myself in the future.

Is it just, is it fair, no way, but the scary thing for me is that no-one has as yet contacted me, to talk about the implications, so my projections are that it is all a fairy tale and there is no real implicationl

So, protect yourself, cover your arse is as trite as it sounds.

I think it's important to resolve the differences between the various factions and sides in the old energy, resource, and

climate debates. We need to resolve the issue of accountability for those who were the climate destroyers, the energy hogs and energy wasters, the rampant materialists... like a truth and reconciliation commission. I think it's important to stay away from retribution in this process and move toward a truly compassionate way of relating to one another. After all, virtually everyone is responsible here, and no-one's to blame.

We need to put the brakes on habitat destruction, species extinctions, and reverse the atmospheric carbon and GHG loading before we find ourselves riding the avalanche to global collapse.

a) How do we prevent the Earth from becoming largely uninhabitable in a matter of decades, due to abrupt climate change/ altered oceans/ general environmental degradation. The answer is obviously a rapid reduction in the use of fossil fuels.
b. How do we prevent mass malnutrition/starvation when the industrialised agricultural system goes into terminal decline? The answer is obviously a rapid switch to permaculture/organic food production.

However, vested interests will prevent the solutions being promoted and implemented for as long as they are able to prevent them being promoted and implemented. (The town in which I live is run by oil companies, hoteliers and bankers, for the benefit of oil companies, hoteliers and bankers. The country in which I live is run by multinational corporations and money lenders, for the benefit of multinational corporations and money lenders).

Because of my dependance upon tech (computers and gadgets that enable me to overcome disabilities and lead a "normal" productive life), I do not want to see Green technologies (energy and hardware) be left behind or suppressed by the neo-Luddite purists among us. I want to see survivable sustainable models and accessible ways of living offered to the lower classes before the owning-class pulls up all ladders and ropes behind themselves and they hunker down leaving people like me exiled to suffer the consequences of their decisions.

I want to see a bioregionally based, ecologically functional, directly democratic, consensus-process skilled path forward put into place before it's too late and I want to see all of that accessible to lower class people as equals to the owning class dominants before it's too late.

Given that all of that is still largely the purview of a certain upper class that still doesn't recognize the need to be class allies, I don't hold out much hope. I have lived my entire forty-three years at or near the bottom of the heap. I've learned that I'm on my own, regardless of upper class people's promises or feelings. What the owning class Lefty sees as GenX cynicism is my lower class lived reality, informed by 43 years under imperial dominance. I wanted a Green future, something more like Callenbach's Ecotopia (Hah!) and I've done everything a person with a very very small canvas can do.

I guess I'll just have to do the best I can before it all goes away. Once it does, I can only hope my two attention-different wired children can weather it better. They've been taught how to make do. Hopefully they will.

Restore our salmon runs and deal responsibly with nuclear wastes. Neither of them will take care of themselves in an immediate cultural-social collapse. Salmon will experience a recovery much faster if we complete the modifications for it that are almost thirty years underway already. In this light we cannot simply walk away from the job now and consider it done. That means we might need to continue to work within something resembling stable social constructs for a while longer while we systematically deal with some of the pollutants and polluting factors we've created and released into the world. The biggest and most dangerous of all these, of course, is nuclear waste. When we developed and released plutonium, into the world, for instance, we inadvertently built in a very conservative element. Someone needs to monitor and guard the stuff while we figure out what to do with it in the long run, responsibly. Without accomplishing these steps a cultural collapse will more likely wreak untold havoc onto the world rather than release us from the bonds of a destructive social contract. So there is a good deal of work to be done before we can let the old dispensation simply go.

I don’t really think this is a question worth investing our energy into. I mean, there are places that are lost to us, effectively forever.. damages and poisons that will continue killing longer than history will tell the tales of their origin. There’s so

much we could do.. radioactive waste, dams, bioengineered crops… but we’re not going to, in our rush to survive, once we wake up to the reality of our situation, we’ll be too focused on just trying to get through the winter, construct some kind of insulated shelter and protect our meager food stores from our hungry neighbors to worry about cleaning up ‘someone else’s mess.’ This thing isn’t going to happen to everyone at the same time.. the poor have always struggled, as things deteriorate larger and larger numbers of the population will find themselves with limited access to the basic necessities of life, conflict will arise between those not yet in that situation and those new to it. The otherwise poor can be hired to defend the rich even against their own families and communities if it means having their own basic necessities provided for. In the end we’ll be too busy fighting for the scrapes of what was to focus heavily on what will be. In small groups, sure.. some preparation for the future will take place, but even that will focus on providing for the basic necessities... large scale cleanup efforts to mitigate past mistakes? That would require organization and acknowledgement of the circumstance that we don’t seem to possess.

When I thought of the question "What do we not want to leave behind unresolved; or, what needs to be done before it's too late to accomplish it?" I was sensing that our choices are starting to become more and more limited as collapse accelerates. So I thought we should at least share the feeling and see what variety there is in wishes for tying up loose ends. If collapse is quick enough and thorough enough, we will no longer be able to jet to the other side of the world for any purpose (selfish or enlightened). Another limitation is going to be in regard to long-term plans that involve the active participation of courts, for example, to issue judgments in dollars that are no longer available. In general, governmental and financial pursuits and remedies will be harder to attain. The same goes for academic goals. So, we need to pick our final objectives during the closing window of feasibility, or acknowledge them as yesterday's fixations and move on into the changing world. - Jan Lundberg, founder Culture Change

Reader Thoughts on Collapse

- Part 1: What we are acting toward? Or, what main outcome might we be looking forward to?

- Part 2: What do we relish leaving behind, as collapse begins or as it will intensify?

- Part 3: What do we not want to leave behind unresolved? Or, what needs to be done before it's too late to accomplish it?