

IT IS THE DIRECTION THAT COUNTS;

IMPLEMENTING THE DIRECTION, ONE STEP AT THE TIME, MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

1) Our life direction: our choice

Visions of life are of an ultimate kind. They appeal to our heart, the core of our being; they address the fundamental direction of our lives and our core values. That is the nature of ultimate appeals, they are of *a total nature*; they address our conscience, our spirit, our values, what we have set our heart on. They address the direction in which we are walking in life: 'Go to the right and not to the left; if you do, you will find well-being and peace, instead of disintegration'.

Every day there are at least a dozen 'cautionary tales' in my email intake box, stories of both 'good and evil'. The majority of the messages are accounts of life threatening and disintegrative forces and practices. Globally and nationally we are surrounded in every area of life by the deification of Progress, economic growth no matter what the consequences. In this environment, how can we live a radical alternative way of life that promotes harmony, justice and peace? That is our struggle, our perplexity, and at times our despair and suffering.

Besides our perplexity and discouragement there is another confusing issue. Ultimate appeals are of a *total nature; they are directional*, 'go this way and you will find life'. But generally we don't experience life in this total, black and white way, wholeness versus disintegration. There is a lot of grey with black and white spots. Whatever destructive ways there are, they are not total. Whatever may be wrong in this world, there are still many good things in life. There is still much healing, love, caring, joy, compassion, fairness, sharing, community, they are like fireflies in a dark night.

We can compare this daily experience of good things versus the total direction in which our society is moving with the image of a train that is headed for disaster. On the observation deck we can see in the distance that the tracks are broken up and that the bridge is out. People are shouting down to the conductor and the engineer, but no one listens. Meanwhile in the dining room good food is served, there is pleasant music and conversation, some people are still in their sleeping berth and just waking up, children are playing a game, the scenery is beautiful, the coaches are nicely decorated, the chairs are comfortable, all seems well, but the train is headed for disaster.

There is another image that may help us understand this difference between the general direction in which we are going and our day to day experience. That is the image of climate change, with its increase in erratic weather, rising sea levels, expanding deserts, melting glaciers and permafrost, the slow decline of the oceans, soil, fresh water, loss of forests, lands, species, fish, and so on. It is a slow disintegration of all aspects of life, including democracy, freedom, equality, social justice, education, health care, social services. Countless people are suffering, isolated, enslaved, violated, imprisoned, and without hope. Many scientists and researchers have raised the alarm for the last twenty or thirty years, but the main direction of our global economy is still business-as-usual, with some limited adaptations to manage the worst effects of the decline. The deification of Progress and Profit goes on without let-up, including in Canada. It is truly a deep faith or ultimate conviction. To change direction requires a change of heart.

2) *Implementing the direction: step by step*

It is in this total social and ecological environment that we are urged to follow the life-giving directions, guideposts or touchstones that are given in our experience that lead to integration, harmony and well-being. For us the challenge is to implement and give form to that choice each day. In the face of today's idolatry that is often a difficult journey. Other people's journeys can encourage and humble us, but that does not change the fact that we each face our own struggles, our own fears, our own despair at times. For our encouragement there are also many accounts of life-promoting efforts in my email inbox; probably many more everywhere than I am aware of. There are countless positive efforts by many ordinary, dedicated and courageous people and communities. Our direction may be clear, but the implementation from day to day remains our challenge. It is a step by step journey each day again. That is all anyone can ask each of us; each in our own way, to be on the way, step by step. Even when we falter or are afraid, it is the direction that counts. And if we stray, we can retrace our steps and find our direction again. This journey requires our *ultimate trust* that the experiential 'guideposts' of life will not let us down because the Creator of life and Mother Earth are behind it.

It is a journey we do not have to travel alone. There is a great throng of people, men and women, children and young people, young adults and aging ones, black and white, gay and straight and in between, important people and seemingly insignificant ones, in wheelchairs and able-bodied, intellectually delayed and smart, traumatized and free, imprisoned and at liberty, anxious ones and confident, timid ones and heroes, all travelling in the same direction, a great throng of people. To persevere in our ultimate commitment we need a community of fellow travelers to help us not to lose courage. We need to seek out and join in with other like-minded people.

We can know that history is what we create in the present for better and for worse. The future is now, in our response to the evocativeness of life, guided by an experiential ethic, the signposts that show us the way. This hope allows us to stand firm, keep our feet on the ground and join hands with the Standing Rock nation, young and old, and countless other indigenous people. We don't know what will happen because of our human distortions but our witness will stand. No one can take that away from us.

ULTIMATE CONVICTIONS THAT DRIVE PEOPLES' ACTIONS:

- Humanism:** Enlightenment values: equality, democracy, freedom, self-determination, rule of law, science, reason
- Neo-Liberalism:** Market values; science, technology, governing in the service of the economy, individualism, pragmatism, efficiency,
- Marxism:** Class struggle, power over means of production,
- Eco-Marxism:** Primacy of ecology,
- Socialism:** Collective, guided economy,
- Eco-Socialism:** Primacy of ecology,
- Holistic View:** Integrated vision, giving every dimension its due; First Nations, Indigenous Peoples, Subsistence Farmers, Via Campesina, Eco-Humanism,
- World Religions:** Each with their own economic values, critique of Neo-Liberalism and ecological concern and actions,
- **Judaism**
 - **Christianity**
 - **Islam**
 - **Buddhism**
 - **Hinduism**
 - **Confucianism**
 - **etc.**