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Dear Reader,

These times are challenging us, uncertainty dogs us and we find ourselves seriously questioning many long-held assumptions. In the midst of so much confusion, it's perhaps appropriate to step outside our daily concerns, and to try to take a more objective view of our predicament. We are watching so many falling trees, that it's time to pay some attention to the forest. What is the larger picture we are missing?

Enjoy the reading, and have a powerful new year.

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

*"Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over,
it became a butterfly."*

Anonymous



Issue 101

January 2009

The Shift

by Isabel Rimanoczy

The month of December is always a special month for me. Although I'm a naturally reflective person, I take a special pleasure in triggers that give me reason to pause and ponder, and December is one of those.

December is the end of the block, which means we are about to make a decision: to cross or to turn at the corner. December sets the stage for an ending—which can make space for new beginnings, and it's up to us to make them or not. It's also a time for celebration, for connecting with our emotions and feelings, with our spirituality.

So I spent the last days reflecting on what the next issue might be. I thought of the pink slip tsunami^[1] that is altering lives of so many wage-earners in so many organizations. I thought of the recent event sponsored by CNN that took place in Hollywood, where prizes were handed out to nominated Heroes of the Year. I thought of the latest data about how our planet is in peril, with for example only seven hundred fifty gorillas left worldwide. I thought of the First Global Forum on the Principles for Responsible Management Education, a UN initiative that is altering the paradigm of how business should be conducted and people should be prepared for it. It was difficult to make a decision on what topic to select. But then I suddenly got it: it was about all of them, because it was about the Shift.

What is the shift?

I first heard about the term some months ago, when a colleague sent me a link to a *YouTube* video about a movie that was called *The Shift*^[2]. It showed images of the big planetary problems confronting us, how people in different parts of this world were gathering together to act for change, to intervene and influence the direction we were going. It listed some aspects of our crisis: genocidal wars, spreading violence, starving children, mass extinction of some species, global warming, greed, social division, and terrorist acts. A forbidding catalogue. Biology teaches us that organisms at war with themselves risk their death. And we are at war with our planet, its resources and its multiple manifestations of life, plants, animals and people included.

But then the movie shows that a reaction was taking place. The video shows how people of different races, geographies and ages are forming into countless groups, small and large, to tackle some aspect of our challenge. As one of the people portrayed in the clip puts it "What does it mean to look in the face of a world that seems to be going rapidly in the wrong direction, and say 'No, we're going to switch course, and I will help'. As I watched the clip, tears ran out of my eyes. Yes, I was saddened by the stark images of what we are doing to ourselves; this was not new to me and has motivated my writing, research, and actions for some years now. I have learned how to talk about that. But there was something new and I finally found the wording to name what was happening. A shift! Yes, that was it! That is what was happening! My tears were a strange combination of anguish and joy. I realized the importance of having words to name what was going on, because words create a community of thought, and thought creates action. I sent the link to my friends.

Multipliers

Shortly thereafter, a friend sent me a book, called *Blessed Unrest*, by Paul Hawken, an environmentalist, author of several books and frequent speaker. The impetus for this book emerged as he was going through the many business cards he had collected over the years from people attending his presentations. As he studied them he noticed they were very heterogeneous. "These people were working on the most salient issues of our day: climate change, poverty, deforestation, peace, water, hunger, conservation, human rights. They came from the nonprofit and from [...] civil society; they looked after rivers and bays, educated consumers about sustainable agriculture, retrofitted houses with solar panels, lobbied state legislatures about pollution, fought against corporate-weighted trade policies, worked to green inner cities, and taught children about the environment. They were students, grandmothers, teenagers, tribe members, businesspeople, architects, teachers, retired professors, and worried mothers and fathers." He wondered if anyone had truly appreciated how many groups and organizations were engaged in progressive causes. He

developed a feeling that something large was happening, a significant social movement that was eluding the radar of "mainstream culture". (Well, maybe not?)

Hawken began to count, and using various methods to access records in different countries, he estimated that there were some 30,000 environmental organizations around the globe, but when he added social justice and indigenous people's rights organizations the number exceeded 100,000. The more he searched, the higher the number climbed. By 2007 he estimated that there are over one million—and may be even two million—organizations working toward ecological sustainability and social justice^[3]. He arrived at the conclusion that what we are witnessing is the largest social movement in all of human history. No one can clearly define its scope, and it doesn't have a single leader. It's taking place in different locations, evolving organically. Tens of millions of people are self-organizing to make change happen.

Doors opening daily

Every day I come across some new network or website manifesting the shift. Launched only a couple of years ago, CNN championed a campaign titled "*Impact your world*", where today numerous initiatives are hosted and promoted, offering the site visitors a wealth of opportunities to contribute, volunteer, or donate to make a difference.^[4] What I find interesting about that resource is that it provides easy access to detailed information about the seriousness of our problems and puts the opportunities to act right on our desk.

Related to this, there are some other CNN initiatives: the *Heroes* series, a campaign that promotes altruistic behavior that are not receiving the notice they deserve. People from any place in the world can nominate a person they admire because of their exceptional acts, and the public vote decides the ranked importance of that person's efforts. The impact of this series is interesting, since it allows people to relate to others who have equal or fewer resources, yet are making a difference. It helps also to counter a trend that developed over the past decades in the media, where the assumption held was that only violence and tragic news sells, and media outlets therefore focused on sending journalists to cover those type of events. It's certainly important to report such events, yet to skip the events that are happening every day and that are trying to make this world a better place is to be biased, unrealistic and to fail painting the whole picture of reality. A new approach to journalism is emerging, with more people reporting on positive and inspiring stories. This also creates our perception of the world. As Paul Hawken indicates "if you look at the science that describes what is happening on earth today and aren't pessimistic, you don't have the correct data. If you meet the people in this unnamed movement and aren't optimistic, you haven't got a heart".

Another initiative evolved from the first report on *Planet in Peril* television program. Aimed at providing information and creating awareness of the dire situation of our planet, it developed into a website (<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2008/planet.in.peril>). I grew up at a time when you had to sit in front of the TV at a particular moment if you didn't want to miss something. There were no ways of saving the program, no copying facilities available to regular viewers, and when the program ended, that was it. Now technology and the Internet allow us to make information and news constantly available online, expanding communication by inviting visitors to comment in blogs, providing connected resources, openings to other links, and, as in this *Planet in Peril* case, offering materials for parents and educators.

The Internet also paved the way to give voice to individuals all over the world, through blogging, You Tube, the numerous social networks like Facebook, MySpace and dozens of others, and providing ways to send their own information, as in *I-report* (<http://www.ireport.com>), a site that has today 213,352 individual reports posted from across the globe.

A colleague from Peru recently attended an international coaching conference in the US, and was surprised to see that all the pre-conference workshops were on the topic of coaching and sustainability. He shared with me the link of an organization called The Pachamama Alliance, that set up an initiative called *Awakening the Dreamer*.^[5] This initiative aims at bringing an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling and socially just human presence to Planet Earth. They have figured out a way to scale their impact by training facilitators who can start networks and multiply reflection and action on these issues, raising awareness.

UN initiatives

In January 1999 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for the creation of a "Global Compact" between the business community and the United Nations. Economic practices had been identified as having a role in the pollution of water, air and soil, in dubious or unacceptable labor conditions, in violations of human rights, corruption, hunger and poverty, violence, ethnic persecution and the spread of diseases. If economic practices can result in these consequences, it was essential that business and civil society partner to address global business practices.^[6] It is a voluntary organization, where to this date around 5000 corporations from 130 countries have signed up to abide by the Compact's Ten Principles in the areas of human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption.^[7] Corporations have to present their reports, or they get de-listed, as happened recently to 635 organizations which failed to comply with their reports of progress.

Since business practices are strongly influenced by financial markets, in 2006 a group of international investors defined and committed to the Principles for Responsible Investment (<http://www.unpri.org>), supporting the Global Compact principles. This consists of a set of six guidelines that recognize the need to look after the long term interest of society, environment and corporations.

In one year the number of signatories doubled, to 381, covering over \$14 trillion in assets. This is also a voluntary organization, with the obligation to present reports.

And what about the people who manage business? The world is requiring a radical change to the "business as usual" approach, but this requires a different mindset, a thorough review of the ethics of business practices, and a new way of working. To respond to this, in July 2007 UN sponsored a new initiative: the Principles for Responsible Management Education (<http://www.unprme.org>). Educational institutions from around the globe are invited to learn the new principles, which address the purpose of business, the values, the methods, and the contents that will prepare the leaders the world needs. A few weeks ago the First Global Forum of PRME took place at the UN Headquarters, bringing together over 270 participants from 43 countries: deans and professors eager to learn how to bring those principles into their institutions.

Change is underway

Yes, the news is troubling. The global economic crisis is far from over, and the solution doesn't look neither easy nor fast. Yet, we may be witnessing a global adjustment to a different way of being, to interacting with nature and with each other, a way that is in better harmony with life. Paraphrasing Elisabet Sahtouris,

"When a caterpillar reaches a certain point in its own evolution, it becomes over-consumptive, a voracious eater and it eats everything in sight.

At that same time, in the molecular structure of the caterpillar, the "imaginal cells" become active. While all this gorging is going on, those imaginal cells wake up, and they look for each other inside of the caterpillar's body. When enough of them connect (they don't need to be in the majority) they become the genetic directors of the future of the caterpillar. At that point the other cells begin to putrefy and become what's called the nutritive soup—out of which the imaginal cells create the absolute unpredictable miracle of the butterfly. What's possible is that we're the imaginal cells on the planet right now."^[8]



[1] Pink slip refers to the pink form that employees receive in the US when they are terminated in their jobs.

[2] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL_VTdxvWac

[3] See the World Index for Social and Environmental Responsibility www.wiserearth.org

[4] See <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2007/impact>

[5] <http://awakeningthedreamer.org>

[6] <http://www.unglobalcompact.org>

[7] <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html>

[8] Quote from *Awakening the Dreamer* site, inspired by Elisabet Sahtouris

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