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Dear Reader,

Over the past months I have received feedback from some readers. They included "I noticed the articles are really changing...", "It used to be all about leadership and now it's more about other topics".

Yes, indeed. Driven by my personal evolution and passion, I have become over the past years more curious about the present state of our planet, people included, and the future that we are creating. I realized that the selection of articles and my own writing followed that direction, and that I had little interest left in traditional leadership or organizational topics. They seemed to me irrelevant and superficial, given the major challenges we as humanity were facing. While corporations definitely try to stay focused on the quarterly results, on boosting sales or on beating the competition, not looking beyond these issues feels to me like dancing on the sinking Titanic. The difference is that unlike the passengers of the Titanic, I believe we still can do a lot to prevent major disasters. It just takes awareness, and looking beyond the demanding albeit narrow daily focus.

So my answer is yes, the articles of this newsletter have changed. So has our world. I decided to speak up and write about it. I invite you to read and think about it. That may be a good first step.

In this issue, I'm pleased to share an article by Professor Chris Bache. The surprise is the date of this article: 2001^[1]. Be surprised yourself with how current his thinking is.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

"There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving and that is your own self."

Aldous Huxley
(English writer, 1894–1963)



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SUSTAINABILITY MEANS TRANSFORMING OURSELVES

by Chris M. Bache, PhD

The challenge of transforming ourselves into a truly sustainable civilization will be the defining global challenge of the twenty-first century.

Beside it, everything else fades into near irrelevance, because if we fail here, all our other accomplishments, however noteworthy, will come to naught. It's that simple. To succeed will require the best from all of us—artists, scientists, educators, physicians, engineers, politicians, social activists, clergy, and citizens. It will demand extraordinary vision, courage, and daring. This challenge has the capacity to draw from us accomplishments that are breathtakingly beautiful and could change the course of human evolution.

I also believe that humankind must speed up and redirect our technology to render harmless the technology we have already set loose on the world and to assume our role as responsible stewards of the planet. Yet, at the same time I am concerned about the potential shadow cast by what could be construed as a technology-driven solution to sustainability. I am concerned because I don't think such an analysis pushes deeply enough into the core of the sustainability issue. I think we must go further to examine the inner state of consciousness that has generated this catastrophic imbalance with our world.

One of the things that makes this crisis so difficult to get one's arms around is how multifaceted it is. It is a crisis of technology, politics, ecosystems, economics, and religion, to list only a few. Because it will be a comprehensive test of our viability as a civilization, it will touch every aspect of our collective and individual lives. Yet, we must try to penetrate the many layers of the puzzle and identify what the core of the problem is.

I believe that the sustainability crisis is at its core a *crisis of consciousness*. Without being overly simplistic, it can be described as a crisis that is being generated by our lack of deep self-awareness. In this sense, one could say that it is a crisis of unconsciousness, of not knowing fully who and what we are, of "disconnection from source." It is a multifaceted crisis created by a species that, in awakening its individual genius, has not yet integrated that genius into the ground of existence.

In his book, *Promise Ahead*, Duane Elgin describes the sustainability crisis as a developmental threshold for humanity. We are, he says, like adolescents, filled with the growing power of our might but not yet ripened to mature adult self-awareness. An adult takes responsibility for the broader impact of his or her actions on the entire community of life in a way that we collectively do not. An adult considers how her or his actions will affect generations to come, while our culture focuses on quarterly business statements and the next election cycle.

We need to look deeply into what is keeping us anchored in this short-term, adolescent perspective when we desperately need to adopt a long-term perspective that balances the needs of self and other, present and future, more equitably. To do this, I suggest that we look at the truth-stories we have been telling ourselves about the universe we live in and our part in it. These stories are the over-arching meta-stories that anchor our cultural "common sense." They also tell us a great deal about the state of consciousness of the beings who created these stories.

Let me put my cards on the table. I believe that if we are to respond powerfully and effectively to the sustainability crisis, our response must be grounded in two ways. First, it must be grounded in a *deeper understanding of the universe* and our place in it. Secondly, it must be grounded in a deeper experience of our being and our connection to this universe. The sustainability crisis cannot be solved by the same state of consciousness that created it. A shift in consciousness is required.

The story that emerged to guide Western civilization, starting about three hundred years ago, included the following themes: Existence is the result of an inexplicable explosion, not a conscious, intelligent choice. Our lives are largely the result of luck because life mindlessly evolves according to blind chance tested by the survival of the fittest. There is no deeper logic to our lives than physical survival, no "purpose" or intelligent "design" behind the specific challenges we face, just the powerful shaping forces of chance and necessity. Furthermore, we are just our bodies. Our minds can be mapped onto our brains, and in the end, all our noble qualities and aspirations reflect mere biochemical processes, nothing more. Our individual existence begins when we are born, and no one knows what happens to us when we die. The notion that there is any world other than the material world is denied or rendered deeply suspect.

This is the "enlightenment story" still being taught at most of our universities today, even though its axioms have already been challenged by scientific research. It is a story created by persons who experience themselves separate from, cut off from, and not an integral part of the universe that surrounds them. This story of a "dead universe" that miraculously produced self-conscious life underpins our secular culture, with its fevered pitch of "happiness by consumption." If we are just our physical bodies, then it only makes sense to seek happiness by consuming material things. This is a reasonable strategy, given the story we have been telling ourselves. If death is truly a mystery, then it only makes sense that our best chance for happiness lies in grabbing as much as we can while we are alive. If we are just our bodies, then logically our peace of mind hinges on taking care of our private selves, not on also securing the well-being of other persons, let alone other species.

But what if this story is fundamentally flawed? What if we are not separate from each other but actually interconnected? What if consciousness survives bodily death? What if we are repeating players in the drama of creation? In order to rise to the challenge of this moment in history, our culture needs to find a new story based not on wishful thinking but on the best observations of science and consciousness research, a story that is true to both the physical evidence and our inner experience.

Such a story began to emerge in the last century. It is a story of a living universe, of quantum connectivity, systems interpenetration, and ecological networking. It is a story of nonlinear dynamics, emergent properties, and self-organizing systems. It is a story of enhanced sensitivity to the subtle threads that weave the larger patterns of life, of holons and non-local connections. It is a story of learning nature's ways, of biomimicry, symbiosis, and recycling. It is even a story of the recycling of consciousness across multiple incarnations, of carrying forward everything we learn, of extending the human story into the story of the soul. It is a story of learning to "see into" and commune with the previously invisible world of spirit.

This story is emerging out of, and evokes from us, a very different state of consciousness, one that is more participatory and organic. When we begin to orient our lives inside this new story, many things shift all at once. All of the world's spiritual traditions have asserted, for example, that human beings possess an instinct to connect with something larger than themselves, to find our place in a larger tapestry of intention. It is as though each of us carries a vestigial memory of wholeness that we keep seeking to actualize. In the old story, this instinct had no place and was ridiculed. In the new story, this instinct has a legitimate place. It is thought to be that in us which mirrors the holism that we now recognize underlies life's burgeoning diversity.

In addition to forging a deeper understanding of the universe, we need also to cultivate a deeper experience of the universe—most importantly, the universe inside ourselves. We need to deepen our contemplative life and engage the universe head-on, so to speak, in our very person. Almost by

synchronistic good fortune, the ancient skills of inner contemplation today surround us everywhere. We are virtually flooded with potent methods of transformative engagement, refined over centuries in the contemplative laboratories of mountain caves and monasteries.

At a time when over-consumption is causing the breakdown of our planet's basic life-support systems, finding an experiential connection to the ground of existence becomes a social as well as personal imperative. Never has it been more important for us to take up the transformative practices that can awaken us to this interior connection. Never has it been more important to make these practices available on a wide scale.

The world's wisdom traditions unanimously agree that in order to satisfy our innate hunger to connect with the essence of life, it is necessary to simplify our material lives. Practitioners do so not because the physical world is bad but in order to create the clarity and focus that inner exploration requires. Here the imperatives of sustainability and spiritual realization converge, for simplicity rebalances both our inner and outer lives.

Isn't it a general rule of thumb that the deeper one's spiritual realization, the more lightly one walks upon the earth? Those who are nourished by deep interior experience tend to make fewer demands on the physical world. Beings who have rediscovered their connection to the web of life, who have experientially recovered their essential identity with the totality, do not gouge the Earth to sell off its pieces. In the end, the only lasting solution to the sustainability crisis may be our collective awakening to a deeper and more mature mode of consciousness.

If we are self-aware beings in a living universe, if the power that courses through our individual lives is part and parcel of the power that courses through all life, then to remain unconscious of this connection is more than just a personal tragedy. It is also a *collective tragedy* that feeds the cultural insanity of our times and encourages the continued stripping of our planetary home. Conversely, if a person were to become experientially conscious of this connection, it could be more than personally liberating. According to Rupert Sheldrake's concept of formative causation and morphic fields, it might contribute *directly* to the emergence of a higher order of cultural sanity in the human family as a whole.

People may debate the severity of the ecological crisis or how soon it will impact us. In this debate, AtKisson^[1] and I are in agreement that its impact will be both severe and soon. Indeed, it has already begun, if one knows where to look. We also agree this will be a defining moment in human history, one that will demand the very best we have to give. I place more emphasis on the need for an interior revolution at the level of consciousness to ground the new civilization to which this crisis will give birth. My training as a philosopher and a student of consciousness has persuaded me that as part of this historical transition, it is likely that humanity will undergo a deep intellectual and spiritual transformation beyond the technological and social transformation AtKisson describes. The challenge ahead is for humanity to take the next step in its maturational process. We must become more conscious than we presently are.



About the Author

Chris M. Bache, PhD, is Professor of Religious Studies at Youngstown State University for over 3 decades, adjunct faculty at the California Institute of Integral Studies, and Director of Transformative Learning at the Institute of Noetic Sciences 2000-2002. His work explores the deeper dimensions of human nature including the dynamics of collective consciousness in the

classroom, and the philosophical implications of transpersonal states of awareness. He authored three books: *The Living Classroom*, *Dark Night Early Dawn*, and *Lifecycles*.



[\[i\]](#) This article was published under the title The Noetic Core of Sustainability in the journal IONS Review # 57, Sept-Nov 2001.

[\[ii\]](#) See Alan AtKisson's article [A Quest for Sustainability](#)

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Editing Support: Tony Pearson
21205 Yacht Club Drive, Suite 708
Aventura, FL 33180, USA
Ph/Fax: +1 (305) 692-4586
E-mail: newsletter@LIMglobal.net
<http://www.LIMglobal.net>

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