

Health

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The first step in protecting the Earth is to change your thinking

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There is a growing culture of solidarity and social responsibility sweeping across the planet. Faced with growing problems and shared threats, people around the globe are pulling together to form associations and networks to pursue their dreams of peace and environmental sustainability.

What are referred to as "alternative" cultures are devoting themselves to imaginatively rethinking the priorities, values and behaviors of society, giving particular attention to how we can improve environmental sustainability and human ethics. A number of grassroots movements, from global justice to holistic health to spiritual exploration, are already blazing the trail away from the usual assumptions of mainstream culture. The people involved in these organizations are quietly but profoundly engaged in the world, challenging accepted beliefs and pursuing new avenues of personal and social commitment. They are united by the aspiration to live a more simple, healthy, whole and ethical life.

The Institute of Noetic Sciences, founded in California by Apollo astronaut Edgar Mitchell to explore the potential for expanding human consciousness, has documented the following shifts in values and behavior among some of these "subcultures" now emerging in the United States.

There is a shift from competition to partnership, greed to caring, feelings of scarcity to feelings of sufficiency, reliance on outer sources of "authority" to inner sources of "knowing," viewing the world as a mechanistic system to viewing it as a living system, separation to wholeness. There is a fresh recognition of the interconnectedness of all aspects of life and reality.

Unfortunately, many people dismiss these developments as "New Age" and the people involved in the groups as "flakes" or "cult members." To think this way is to throw out the baby with the bath-water. Every new chapter in human civilization brings forth people who are selfish, naive and "hucksters," but we must focus on the majority who are sincere, positive and trying to help Earth survive. We need to stop feeling that there is nothing we can do and foster a new way of thinking. We must think globally, act morally - and let go of old beliefs that no longer make sense, such as the belief that nature is inexhaustible and the more you earn and consume, the more successful and happy you are. As Gandhi said: "Live more simply so others can simply live."

What can you do to help? Among other things, you can dream and take your dreams seriously. To imagine what you want for the world is neither foolish nor a waste of time. Today, dreams are more important than ever before. You can expand your sense of consciousness and believe, as anthropologist Margaret Mead said, that we must "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Meditation, prayer, yoga, tai chi, qi gong and simple breathing techniques or deep relaxation, even a daily walk, can help you experience a profound oneness with the natural world and other people. These techniques will help you realize that the fate of nature and people is not separate from your own fate.

You can work to replace your negative feelings, such as anger, hate, fear, anxiety, suspicion, jealousy, contempt and indifference, with the emotions of love, trust, respect, appreciation and self-assurance. If you need help changing your emotions, seek out therapy, join a support group or talk to friends. Open yourself to experiences of nature such as seeing the beauty of a sunset, or make time to be with friends and family.

Have you ever seen a beautiful sunset and just stopped what you were doing to look at its magnificence and to honor the universe? Try it. Stop running and sit down on the grass, or get a chair, or simply stand there and watch the sun go down and appreciate our universe.

Better yet, make it a family event and teach your children to protect our world.

We must re-examine our thinking and evolve our consciousness to move toward a more holistic, peaceful and sustainable civilization. We can change the world and leave our children with a better place to live if we care enough to make the effort. What ideas do you have to help the Earth? Share them with friends, family, your children. Influence others, and one by one we create the world of our dreams.