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The Next American Revolution

*Sustainable Activism
for the Twenty-First Century*

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CHAPTER ONE

These Are the Times to Grow Our Souls

On June 27, 2010, I celebrated my ninety-fifth birthday. Over the past few years I have become much less mobile. I no longer bound from my chair to fetch a book or article to show a visitor. I have two hearing aids, three pairs of glasses, and very few teeth. But I still have most of my marbles, mainly because I am good at learning, arguably the most important qualification for a movement activist. In fact, the past decade-plus since the 1998 publication of my autobiography, *Living for Change*, has been one of the busiest and most invigorating periods of my life.

I have a lot to learn from. I was born during World War I, above my father's Chinese American restaurant in downtown Providence, Rhode Island. This means that through no fault of my own, I have lived through most of the catastrophic events of the twentieth century—the Great Depression, fascism and Nazism, the Holocaust, World War II, the A-bomb and the H-bomb, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the cold war, the Korean War, McCarthyism, the Vietnam War, 9/11, and the “taking the

law into our own hands” response of the Bush administration. Perhaps eighty million people have been killed in wars during my lifetime.

But it has also been my good fortune to have lived long enough to witness the death blow dealt to the illusion that unceasing technological innovations and economic growth can guarantee happiness and security to the citizens of our planet's only superpower.

Since I left the university in 1940, I have been privileged to participate in most of the great humanizing movements of the past seventy years—the labor, civil rights, Black Power, women's, Asian American, environmental justice, and antiwar movements. Each of these has been a tremendously transformative experience for me, expanding my understanding of what it means to be both an American and a human being, while challenging me to keep deepening my thinking about how to bring about radical social change.

However, I cannot recall any previous period when the issues were so basic, so interconnected, and so demanding of everyone living in this country, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, or national origin. At this point in the continuing evolution of our country and of the human race, we urgently need to stop thinking of ourselves as victims and to recognize that we must each become a part of the solution because we are each a part of the problem.

What is our response to the economic crisis and financial meltdown? Will we just keep scrambling to react to each new domino that falls (e.g., Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, Fannie/Freddie, AIG, Citigroup)? Or are we prepared to develop a whole new form of solidarity economics emphasizing sustainability, mutuality, and local self-reliance?

How are we going to make our living in an age when Hi-Tech (high technology) and the export of jobs overseas have brought us to the point where the number of workers needed to produce goods and services is constantly diminishing? Where will we get the imagination, the courage, and the determination to reconceptualize the meaning and purpose of Work in a society that is becoming increasingly jobless?

What is going to happen to cities like Detroit, which was once the "arsenal of democracy," and others whose apex was tied to manufacturing? Now that they've been abandoned by industry, are we just going to throw them away? Or can we rebuild, redefine, and respirit them as models of twenty-first-century self-reliant and sustainable multicultural communities? Who is going to begin this new story?

How are we going to redefine Education so that half of all inner-city children do not drop out of school, thus ensuring that large numbers will end up in prison? Is it enough to call for "Education, not Incarceration"? Or does our top-down educational system, created a hundred years ago to prepare an immigrant population for factory work, bear a large part of the responsibility for the atrocity that, even though the United States is home to less than 5 percent of the world's total population, we are responsible for nearly 25 percent of the world's incarcerated population?

How are we going to build a twenty-first-century America in which people of all races and ethnicities live together in harmony, and European Americans in particular embrace their new role as one among many minorities constituting the new multiethnic majority?

What is going to motivate us to start caring for our biosphere instead of using our mastery of technology to increase the

volume and speed at which we are making our planet uninhabitable for other species and eventually for ourselves?

And, especially since 9/11, how are we to achieve reconciliation with the two-thirds of the world that increasingly resents our economic, military, and cultural domination? Can we accept their anger as a challenge rather than a threat? Out of our new vulnerability can we recognize that our safety now depends on our loving and caring for the peoples of the world as we love and care for our own families? Or can we conceive of security only in terms of the Patriot Act and the exercising of our formidable military power?

Where will we get the courage and the imagination to free ourselves from the quagmires of Iraq and Afghanistan, the wars that have killed tens of thousands while squandering hundreds of billions of dollars? What will help us confront our own hubris, our own irresponsibility, and our own unwillingness, as individuals and as a nation, to engage in seeking radical solutions to the growing inequality between the nations of the North and those of the South? Can we create a new paradigm of our selfhood and our nationhood? Or are we so locked into nationalism, racism, and determinism that we will be driven to seek scapegoats for our frustrations and failures as the Germans did after World War I, thus aiding and abetting the onset of Hitler and the Holocaust?¹

We live at a very dangerous time because these questions are no longer abstractions. As we embrace the challenges and opportunities awaiting us in the age of Obama, we must be mindful of the mess we are in and the damage we must undo. Our political system became so undemocratic and dysfunctional that we were saddled with a president unable to distinguish between facts and personal fantasies. Eight years of George W. Bush left us

stuck in two wars. Under the guise of defense against terrorism, our government violated the Geneva Conventions and the U.S. Constitution, torturing detainees, suspending habeas corpus, and instituting warrantless domestic spying. Meanwhile, our media are owned and controlled by huge multinational corporations who treat the American people as consumers and audience rather than as active citizens.

Our heedless pursuit of material and technological growth has created a planetary emergency. With places such as the Maldives—the islands that scientists warn may be engulfed by rising seas—confronting a threat to their existence and the livelihoods of millions more being undermined, “climate justice” promises to be the defining issue of the twenty-first century. The physical threat posed by climate change represents a crisis that is not only material but also profoundly spiritual at its core because it challenges us to think seriously about the future of the human race and what it means to be a human being. Our lives, the lives of our children and of future generations, and even the survival of life on Earth depend on our willingness to transform ourselves into active planetary and global citizens who, as Martin Luther King Jr. put it, “develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies.”²

The time is already very late and we have a long way to go to meet these challenges. In the decades following World War II, the so-called American Century gave rise to an economic expansion that has ultimately driven us further apart rather than closer together. Growing inequality in the United States, which is now the most stratified among industrialized nations, has made a mockery of our founding ideals. CEOs of failed financial institutions have walked away with ill-gotten fortunes. Millions of

children in the Global South die each year of starvation while diabetes as a result of obesity is approaching epidemic levels in the United States.

Yet rather than wrestle with such grim realities, too many Americans have become self-centered and overly materialistic, more concerned with our possessions and individual careers than with the state of our neighborhoods, cities, country, and planet, closing our eyes and hearts to the many forms of violence that have been exploding in our inner cities and in powder kegs all over the rest of the world. Because the problems seem so insurmountable and because just struggling for our own survival consumes so much of our time and energy, we view ourselves as victims rather than embrace the power within us to change our reality.

Over the past seventy years the various identity struggles have to some degree remediated the great wrongs that have been done to workers, people of color, Indigenous Peoples, women, gays and lesbians, and the disabled, while helping to humanize our society overall. But they have also had a shadow side in the sense that they have encouraged us to think of ourselves more as determined than as self-determining, more as victims of “isms” (racism, sexism, capitalism, ableism) than as human beings who have the power of choice. For our own survival we must assume individual and collective responsibility for creating a new nation—one that is loved rather than feared and one that does not have to bribe and bully other nations to win support.

These are the times that try our souls. Each of us needs to undergo a tremendous philosophical and spiritual transformation. Each of us needs to be awakened to a personal and compassionate recognition of the inseparable interconnection between our minds, hearts, and bodies; between our physical and

psychical well-being; and between our selves and all the other selves in our country and in the world. Each of us needs to stop being a passive observer of the suffering that we know is going on in the world and start identifying with the sufferers. Each of us needs to make a leap that is both practical and philosophical, beyond determinism to self-determination. Each of us has to be true to and enhance our own humanity by embracing and practicing the conviction that as human beings we have Free Will.

Despite the powers and principles that are bent on objectifying and commodifying us and all our human relationships, the interlocking crises of our time require that we exercise the power within us to make principled choices in our ongoing daily and political lives—choices that will eventually although not inevitably (since there are no guarantees) make a difference.

AN END TO POLITICS AS USUAL

How are we going to bring about these transformations? Politics as usual—debate and argument, even voting—are no longer sufficient. Our system of representative democracy, created by a great revolution, must now itself become the target of revolutionary change. For too many years counting, vast numbers of people stopped going to the polls, either because they did not care what happened to the country or the world or because they did not believe that voting would make a difference on the profound and interconnected issues that really matter. Now, with a surge of new political interest having give rise to the Obama presidency, we need to inject new meaning into the concept of the “will of the people.”

The will of too many Americans has been to pursue private happiness and take as little responsibility as possible for govern-

ing our country. As a result, we have left the job of governing to our elected representatives, even though we know that they serve corporate interests and therefore make decisions that threaten our biosphere and widen the gulf between the rich and poor both in our country and throughout the world. In other words, even though it is readily apparent that our lifestyle choices and the decisions of our representatives are increasing social injustice and endangering our planet, too many of us have wanted to continue going our merry and not-so-merry ways, periodically voting politicians in and out of office but leaving the responsibility for policy decisions to them. Our will has been to act like consumers, not like responsible citizens.

Historians may one day look back at the 2000 election, marked by the Supreme Court's decision to award the presidency to George W. Bush, as a decisive turning point in the death of representative democracy in the United States. National Public Radio analyst Daniel Schorr called it “a junta.” Jack Lessenberry, columnist for the *MetroTimes* in Detroit, called it “a right-wing judicial coup.” Although more restrained, the language of dissenting justices Breyer, Ginsberg, Souter, and Stevens was equally clear. They said that there was no legal or moral justification for deciding the presidency in this way.³

That's why Al Gore didn't speak for me in his concession speech. You don't just “strongly disagree” with a right-wing coup or a junta. You expose it as illegal, immoral, and illegitimate, and you start building a movement to challenge and change the system that created it. The crisis brought on by the fraud of 2000 and aggravated by the Bush administration's constant and callous disregard for the Constitution exposed so many defects that we now have an unprecedented opportunity not only to improve voting procedures but to turn U.S. democracy into “government

of the people, by the people, and for the people" instead of government of, by, and for corporate power.

We may take some brief solace in the fact that George W. Bush's terms in office, while wreaking national and global havoc, aroused heightened political awareness and opposition. Tens of thousands in Washington, DC, and other cities across the country denounced him through a counterinaugural. Then beginning in 2002, millions more took to the streets at home and abroad to denounce the war in Iraq. Meanwhile, the needless death and suffering that occurred in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina exposed the true depths of corruption, incompetence, and arrogance within the administration.

Still, it becomes clearer every day that organizing or joining massive protests and demanding new policies fail to sufficiently address the crisis we face. They may demonstrate that we are on the right side politically, but they are not transformative enough. They do not change the cultural images or the symbols that play such a pivotal role in molding us into who we are.

GROWING OUR SOULS

Art can help us to envision the new cultural images we need to grow our souls. As the labor movement was developing in the pre-World War II years, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* transformed the way that Americans viewed themselves in relationship to faceless bankers and heartless landowners. In the 1970s and 1980s artist Judy Chicago's exhibits, *The Dinner Party* and *Birth Project*, reimagined the vagina, transforming it from a private space and site of oppression into a public space of beauty and spiritual as well as physical creation and liberation. In this period, we need artists to create new images that will liberate us

from our preoccupation with constantly expanding production and consumption and open up space in our hearts and minds to imagine and create another America that will be viewed by the world as a beacon rather than as a danger.

This need has become more urgent since September 11, 2001. The activist, organizer, and writer Starhawk writes that "9/11 threw us collectively into a deep well of grief." "The movement we need to build now," she argues, "the potential for transformation that might arise out of this tragedy, must speak to the heart of the pain we share across political lines. A great hole has been torn out of the heart of the world." This potential can be realized only when we summon the courage to confront "a fear more profound than even the terror caused by the attack itself. For those towers represented human triumph over nature. Larger than life, built to be unburnable, they were the *Titanic* of our day."

"Faced with the profundity of loss, with the stark reality of death, we find words inadequate," Starhawk further notes. "The language of abstraction doesn't work. Ideology doesn't work. Judgment and hectoring and shaming and blaming cannot truly touch the depth of that loss. Only poetry can address grief. Only words that convey what we can see and smell and taste and touch of life, can move us." "To do that," she concludes, "we need to forge a new language of both the word and the deed."⁴

The America that is best known and most resented around the world pursues unlimited economic growth, technological revolutions, and consumption, with little or no regard for their destructive impact on communities, on the environment, and on the billions of people who live in what used to be called the "Third World."

However, the end of the Bush regime provides an opening to build national and international recognition of the movement

to “grow our souls,” which began emerging organically in the United States in the aftermath of World War II. The dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki demonstrated the enormous power and the enormous limitations of viewing human beings primarily as producers and as rational beings in the scientific sense. At the time, Einstein remarked, “The unleashed power of the atom bomb has changed everything except our modes of thinking, and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophes.” Thus, he recognized the urgent need for us to redefine what it means to be a human being. Warning about the danger of unfettered technological progress, Einstein asserted that the solution of world peace could arise only from inside the hearts of humankind. That is why “imagination is more important than knowledge.”⁵

“A human being,” Einstein concluded, “is a part of the whole, called by us ‘Universe,’ a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”⁶

The nuclear bomb created a Great Divide in theories and strategies for social change. Henceforth, human beings could no longer pretend that everything that happened to us was determined by external or economic circumstances. Freedom now included the responsibility for making choices. Radical social change could no longer be viewed in terms of transferring power from the top to the bottom or of simple binary oppositions—us versus them, victims versus villains, good versus evil. We

could no longer afford a separation between politics and ethics. Within the Marxist-Leninist paradigm, consciousness and self-consciousness and ideas and values were mere “superstructure.” Now they had to become integral, both as end and as means, to social struggle. Radical social change had to be viewed as a two-sided transformational process, of ourselves and of our institutions, a process requiring protracted struggle and not just a D-day replacement of one set of rulers with another.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955–56 was the first struggle by an oppressed people in Western society from this new philosophical/political perspective. Before the eyes of the whole world, a people who had been treated as less than human struggled against their dehumanization not as angry victims, or rebels but as new men and women, representative of a new, more human society. Practicing methods of nonviolence that transformed themselves and increased the good rather than the evil in the world and always bearing in mind that their goal was not only desegregating the buses but creating the beloved community, they inspired the human identity and ecological movements that over the past forty years have been creating a new civil society in the United States.

The sermons of Martin Luther King Jr. and other religious leaders, produced in the heat of struggle, played a critical role in the success of the Montgomery boycott and ensuing civil rights struggles. But as my friend the late Rosemarie Freeney Harding, who worked closely with Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee activists in the 1960s, pointed out, “Another vital source of support was music, particularly the sacred music of the black experience, which has long been an alchemical resource for struggle: a conjured strength.” Harding concluded, “The songs changed the atmosphere, becoming an almost palpable

barrier between demonstrators and police, giving the marchers an internal girding that allowed them to move without fear.”⁷

I recall how activists popularized songs like “Joe Hill” and “Solidarity Forever” in the decades before the civil rights movement, thus demonstrating the link between music and social action. But the songs of the civil rights movement, such as “We Shall Overcome” and “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around,” did more than energize those on the front lines. They helped grow the souls of their supporters all over the world.

The publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 added another dimension to the evolving movement toward inner and outer transformation initiated by the civil rights movement. By helping us to see how the widespread use of chemicals and hazardous technologies in post-World War II America was silencing “robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens and scores of other bird voices,” Carson awakened millions of Americans to the sacredness of Nature and to the need, expressed by Einstein, for “widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”⁸

The next year Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* brought small groups of women together in consciousness-raising groups all over the country. Laughing and crying over stories of growing up female in a patriarchal society, women turned anger into hope and created a social and political movement much more participatory and closer to daily life than just going to the polls and voting. The transformative power of women’s storytelling has been captured by playwright Eve Ensler in *The Vagina Monologues*, a dramatic compilation of women’s soliloquies. Every year, to raise both funds and consciousness, thousands of women’s groups all over the country and the world reproduce—or produce their

own version of—these monologues, turning the monologue art form itself into a movement.

As the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, and the women’s movement were gaining momentum, small groups of individuals, especially on the West Coast, were coming together in workshops to open themselves up to new, more spiritual ways of knowing, consciously decentering the scientific rationalism that had laid the philosophic foundation for the modern age. To become truly human and to really know Truth, people discovered, we need to summon up all our mental and spiritual resources, constantly expanding our imaginations, sensitivities, and capacity for wonder and love, for hope rather than despair, for compassion and cooperation rather than cynicism and competition, for spiritual aspiration and moral effort. Instead of either/or, reductive, dualistic, and divisive, or “blaming the other,” thinking, the movement affirmed the unity of mind and body and of the spiritual with the material. It advocated a consciousness that rejects determinism—the belief that we are limited by the past—and repudiates all absolutes. Instead, the movement promoted a consciousness that finds joy in crossing boundaries, is naturalistic instead of supernatural, and strives for empowerment rather than power and control.

TOWARD THE GREAT TURNING

All over the world, local groups are struggling, as we are in Detroit, to keep our communities, our environment, and our humanity from being destroyed by corporate globalization. In his book *Blessed Unrest*, environmentalist Paul Hawken estimates that there may be more than one million of these self-healing

civic groups across every country around the world. Most of them are small and barely visible, but together they are creating the largest movement the world has ever known. Many of these groups are inspired by a philosophy that replaces the scientific and reductive rationalism of seventeenth-century Western male philosophers (such as Descartes and Bacon) with the ways of knowing of Indigenous Peoples (which include the perceptions of trees and animals) and of women, based on intimate connections with Nature and ideas of healing and caring that were part of European village culture prior to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witch hunts.⁹

This movement has no central leadership and is not bound together by any *ism*. Its very diverse and widely scattered individuals and groups are connected mainly by the Internet and other information technologies. But they are joined at the heart by their commitment to achieving social justice, establishing new forms of more democratic governance, and creating new ways of living at the local level that will reconnect us with the Earth and with one another. Above all, they are linked by their indomitable faith in our ability to create the world anew.

Millions of people in the United States are part of this organically evolving cultural revolution. Because we believe in combining spiritual growth and awakening with practical actions in our daily lives, we are having a profound effect on American culture. For example, most of us reject the getting and spending that not only lay waste to our own powers but also put intolerable pressures on the environment. We try to eat homegrown rather than processed foods and to maintain our physical well-being through healthful habits rather than by dependence on prescription drugs. Overall, we try to make our living in ways that are in harmony with our convictions.

Depending on skills, interests, and where we live, most of us carry on this cultural revolution in our own way. For example, a doctor may decide to practice alternative medicine. A teacher will try to create a more democratic classroom. A businessperson will try to replace competition with cooperation in his firm or may quit the business altogether to act as a consultant to community organizations. Whatever our line of work, we participate in a lot of workshops because we view our selves and the culture as works in progress.

The social activists among us struggle to create actions that go beyond protest and negativity and build community because community is the most important thing that has been destroyed by the dominant culture. For example, at mass demonstrations against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or corporate globalization, Starhawk organizes small affinity groups to promote democratic decision making and to combine community building with protest.

What unites us is not an organization or leaders but the sense that we are in the middle of what Buddhist writer Joanna Macy calls a "Great Turning."¹⁰ We need to recognize that we are coming to the end of ten thousand years of agricultural and industrial society, both of which are patriarchal. Many of my European friends viewed George W. Bush as the last gasp of industrial society because he was so determined to pursue economic growth even at the risk of destroying our biosphere. We must see the need to confront the crises we face today as part of a broader challenge to make the transition to a new postindustrial world based on partnership among ourselves and with our environment rather than patriarchal and bureaucratic domination.

Whether or not the media recognize it, the Great Turning is a reality. Although we cannot know yet if it will take hold in

time for humans and other complex life-forms to survive, we can know that it is under way. And it is gaining momentum, through the actions of countless individuals and groups around the world. To see this as the larger context of our lives clears our vision and summons our courage.

The writings of Karen Armstrong can help us put this notion of a Great Turning into further perspective. I discovered her work after 9/11, when I wanted to know more about Islam. Often called the “runaway nun,” Armstrong left the convent in her early twenties, turning her back on the “narrow gate” of religion. Fifteen years later, while working on a film on Jerusalem, she started investigating the origins of Judaism. This led to her studying and writing readable books on the history of different religions.

In her book *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*, Armstrong explains how the great faiths (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism) emerged during the seven hundred years from 900 to 200 B.C. in countries like China and India. In this period, sometimes called the “Axial Age,” societies on the Eurasian continent were undergoing a great transition: from tribalism, in which individuals were submerged in the community, to urban ways of living that challenged individuals to figure things out for themselves. It was also a period of great violence in which destructive weapons, made possible by new Iron Age technologies, encouraged rulers to expand their turf by warring against one another.¹¹

The result was a profound social crisis in which old gods and old religions no longer provided satisfactory answers to new questions. Looking into their own hearts and minds, people felt the need for a leap in faith in what it means to be human. Prophetic voices began urging people to recognize a divinity and sacredness, both in themselves and in others, and to practice

compassion by surrendering their egos. In each of these faiths the rejection of violence was linked to the practice of compassion.

Thus, all the great religions that emerged during the Axial Age include some form of the Golden Rule. For example, Confucius said that we should not act toward others as we would not want others to act toward us. In China the ideal ruler was no longer a warrior but someone whose deeds brought spiritual benefits to the people.

This new awakening to the divinity or sacredness within every human being is what Armstrong means by spirituality—a leap of faith, a practice of compassion based on a new belief in the sacredness of ourselves and other selves. We need to see the distinction between this concept of spirituality and what many practice as religion. Religion is belief in a body of ideas. Religious people, Armstrong argues, tend to be doctrinaire; they often prefer being right to being compassionate.

Armstrong is convinced that as a result of urbanization, globalization, and rapidly changing technology the whole world is now in the midst of a social crisis as profound as that of the Axial Age. We are therefore called on to make a similar leap in faith, to practice a similar compassion. Native People’s view of the Earth as a sacred entity rather than only as a resource, she believes, provides us with a model.

To me, as a movement activist, this suggests that, to grapple with the interacting and seemingly intractable questions of today’s society, we need to see ourselves not mainly as victims but as new men and women who, recognizing the sacredness in ourselves and in others, can view love and compassion, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr., not as “some sentimental and weak response” but instead as “the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality.”¹²

TRANSFORMATIONAL ORGANIZING

The older I grow, the more I realize how lucky I am to have lived so long and been part of so many historic changes. When I became a radical nearly seventy years ago, we ran the “risk of seeming ridiculous,” as Che Guevara put it, if we thought Love had anything to do with Revolution.¹³

Being revolutionary meant being tough as nails, committed to agitating and mobilizing angry and oppressed masses to overthrow the government and seize state power by any means necessary in order to reconstruct society from the top down.

In the past fifty years this top-down view of revolution has been discredited by the demise of the Soviet Union. At the same time our approach to revolution has been humanized by the modern women’s movement, which informs us that the political is personal; the ecological movement, which emphasizes loving Mother Earth and the places where we live; and Martin Luther King Jr.’s call for a radical revolution in our values and his concept of “beloved community.”

In the past fifteen years tens of thousands of very diverse community groups have sprung up all over the world to resist the commodifying by global corporations of our relationships to one another. On January 1, 1994, the day NAFTA took effect, the Zapatistas dramatized this new movement by first taking over six Mexican cities militarily and then retiring to Chiapas and other indigenous communities to engage the people at the grassroots in nonviolent struggles to create new forms of participatory democracy.

Nearly six years later, in the November 1999 “Battle of Seattle,” fifty thousand members of labor, women, youth, and peace groups closed down the World Trade Organization to

inform the world that the time has come to create alternatives to corporate globalization.

In 2001 a series of “Another World Is Possible” World Social Forums began in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to help movement activists around the world recognize that it is futile to keep calling on elected officials to create a more just, caring, and sustainable world. We ourselves must begin practicing in the social realm the capacity to care for each other, to share the food, skills, time, and ideas that up to now most of us have limited to our most cherished personal relationships.

As part and parcel of this new approach to revolution, the first United States Social Forum was held in Atlanta, Georgia, in 2007. The second inspired over eighteen thousand diverse activists to convene in Detroit in June 2010.

Normally it would take decades for a people to transform themselves from the hyperindividualist, hypermaterialist, damaged human beings that Americans in all walks of life are today to the loving, caring people we need in the deepening crises. But these are not normal times. If we don’t speed up this transformation, the likelihood is that, armed with AK-47s, we will soon be at each other’s throats.

That is why linking Love and Revolution is an idea whose time has come.

We urgently need to bring to our communities the limitless capacity to love, serve, and create for and with each other. We urgently need to bring the neighbor back into our hoods, not only in our inner cities but also in our suburbs, our gated communities, on Main Street and Wall Street, and on Ivy League campuses.

We are in the midst of a process that is nothing short of reinventing revolution. For much of the twentieth century the theory

and practice of revolution have been dominated by overarching ideologies, purist paradigms, and absolutist views of a static Paradise; arguments over which class, race, or gender was the main revolutionary social force; and binary oppositions between Left and Right. Big victories have been prioritized over small collaborative actions that build community and neighborhoods: the end has been valued over the means. We rarely stopped to wonder how much this view of revolution reflected the capitalist culture that was dehumanizing us.

Now, in the light of our historical experiences and thanks especially to the indigenous cultures that the Zapatistas have revealed to us, we are beginning to understand that the world is always being made and never finished; that activism can be the journey rather than the arrival; that struggle doesn't always have to be confrontational but can take the form of reaching out to find common ground with the many "others" in our society who are also seeking ways out from alienation, isolation, privatization, and dehumanization by corporate globalization.

This is the kind of transformational organizing we need in this period. Instead of putting our organizational energies into begging Ford and General Motors to stay in Detroit—or begging the government to keep them afloat—so that they can continue to exploit us, we need to go beyond traditional capitalism. Creating new forms of community-based institutions (e.g., co-ops, small businesses, and community development corporations) will give us ownership and control over the way we make our living, while helping us to ensure that the well-being of the community and the environment is part of the bottom line.

Instead of buying all our food from the store, we need to be planting community and school gardens and creating farmers'

markets that will not only provide us with healthier food but also enable us to raise our children in a nurturing relationship with the Earth.

Instead of trying to bully young people to remain in classrooms isolated from the community and structured to prepare them to become cogs in the existing economic system, we need to recognize that the reason why so many young people drop out from inner-city schools is because they are voting with their feet against an educational system that sorts, tracks, tests, and rejects or certifies them like products of a factory because it was created for the age of industrialization. They are crying out for another kind of education that gives them opportunities to exercise their creative energies because it values them as whole human beings.

This kind of organizing takes a lot of patience because changing people and people changing themselves requires time. Because it usually involves only small groups of people, it lacks the drama and visibility of angry masses making demands on the power structure. So it doesn't seem practical to those who think of change only in terms of quick fixes, huge masses, and charismatic leaders.

But as Margaret Wheatley puts it in *Leadership and the New Science*, we need a paradigm shift in our understanding of how change happens. "From a Newtonian perspective," Wheatley argues, "our efforts often seem too small, and we doubt that our actions will make a difference. Or perhaps we hope that our small efforts will contribute incrementally to large-scale change. Step by step, system by system, we aspire to develop enough mass or force to alter the larger system."

What the most advanced researchers and theoreticians in all of science now comprehend is that the Newtonian concept of a

universe driven by mass force is out of touch with reality, for it fails to account for both observable phenomena and theoretical conundrums that can be explained only by quantum physics:

A quantum view explains the success of small efforts quite differently. Acting locally allows us to be inside the movement and flow of the system, participating in all those complex events occurring simultaneously. We are more likely to be sensitive to the dynamics of this system, and thus more effective. However, changes in small places also affect the global system, not through incrementalism, but because every small system participates in an unbroken wholeness. Activities in one part of the whole create effects that appear in distant places. Because of these unseen connections, there is potential value in working anywhere in the system. We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness.

In what Wheatley calls "this exquisitely connected world," the real engine of change is never "critical mass"; dramatic and systemic change always begins with "critical connections."¹⁴

So by now the crux of our preliminary needs should be apparent. We must open our hearts to new beacons of Hope. We must expand our minds to new modes of thought. We must equip our hands with new methods of organizing. And we must build on all of the humanity-stretching movements of the past half century: the Montgomery Bus Boycott; the civil rights movement; the Free Speech movement; the anti-Vietnam War movement; the Asian American, Native American, and Chicano movements; the women's movement; the gay and lesbian movement; the disability rights/pride movement; and the ecological and environmental justice movements. We must find ourselves amid the fifty million people who as activists or as supporters have engaged in the many-sided struggles to create

the new democratic and life-affirming values that are needed to civilize U.S. society.

The transition to a better world is not guaranteed. We could destroy the planet, as those chanting "Drill, baby, drill!" seem determined to do. We could end up in barbarism unless we engage in and support positive struggles that create *more human* human beings and *more democratic* institutions. Our challenge, as we enter the third millennium, is to deepen the commonalities and the bonds between these tens of millions, while at the same time continuing to address the issues within our local communities by two-sided struggles that not only say "No" to the existing power structure but also empower our constituencies to embrace the power within each of us to create the world anew.

We must have the courage to walk the talk, but we must also engage in the continuing dialogues that enable us to break free of old categories and create the new ideas that are necessary to address our realities, because revolutions are made not to prove the correctness of ideas but to begin anew.

In this scenario everyone has a contribution to make, each according to our abilities, our energies, our experiences, our skills and where we are in our own lives. When I was much younger, I used to recite a poem that goes: "So much to do, so many to woo, and, oh, we are so very few." As I go around the country these days, making new friends and talking to people about the challenges of the new millennium, I still recognize that we have much to do and many to woo, but I no longer feel that we are so very few.