

Chapter 11

A Common Theory of Change for White People

Privileged wealthy whites have more than \$1 million in assets, making us the top 10% wealthiest in the U.S., the heart of the global corporate empire, and the top 1% globally. Our privileges reward us for our whiteness. Along with our wealthy counterparts in the rest of the world, privileged white people have the largest responsibility for and entanglement with global corporate colonialism, which causes exploitation of other people, loss of biodiversity, collapse of planetary systems, and global warming, a responsibility which we ignore. By definition, we are the oppressors.

Change

Conventional social change efforts place blame on external threats and then mobilize people to pressure the government to force the blamed to do better. This strategy has not worked to change the omniscidal trajectory of global corporate colonialism at any scale, from local planetary. To understand why, we first must understand the rules of change. We have to know what we can and cannot change.

First truism: we cannot change other people. Many social change efforts confuse forcing one's will upon others with real change. Imposing one's will upon others does not change the other but encourages the politically powerful to resist, find loopholes, or change the rules. Force does not change hearts and minds. As soon as a force stops, what was repressed springs back.

Second, we can only change ourselves. This change rule gets downplayed by the white social change community, which focuses on external threats. White people do not want social change organizations to tell us to stop behaving like oppressors.

Just as I cannot change the beliefs and attitudes of another, nobody can change my beliefs unless I am willing to change them myself. Coercion, either by brute force or legislation, can change my behavior but not my beliefs and attitudes. Remove the penalties for misbehaving, and I will return to misbehaving.

If we fit the profile of a Western oppressor (whiteness, wealth, rank, education, privileges), then by definition, we share the beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that go along with having more than enough wealth, such as complicity in strengthening the omniscidal trajectory through our consumerism, and playing our privilege cards when needed. We tend to value people's interests over other life forms and willingly harm others to get what we want. Despite being the cause of the planet in peril, we still believe we have better answers than others. When we consume, we disconnect from the harms embodied in what we consume and waste. We blame others for the dangers we cause and deny the wholeness of Earth Interbeing.

So, changing our beliefs, feelings, and behaviors sounds like a reasonable first step toward overcoming global corporate colonialism. I can change myself. I can reduce my harmful behaviors, overcome my oppressor beliefs, and move toward caring for the Earth Interbeing. I can unbecome an oppressor. But

habits of the mind and heart do not change easily, even when we know they generate great harm. However, the anti-racist efforts of Black People have led many whites to plumb the inner depths of our racist colonialist beliefs and behaviors, proving the possibilities of actual social change. New behavior takes time and persistence, and they seldom feel comfortable or natural at first. We often have to behave our way into new habits of mind.

Giving up is not an option. To believe that we cannot stop corporate colonialism denies the uncertainty of change. Giving up assumes that we have no power other than to surrender to the oppressor's ways, even when we know how it will end. When we say we don't want to do this inner work, it means that we have something more important to do. Really?

How we relate to change makes all the difference in how we respond to a perilous world. If we waste time blaming others and devising technological fixes to the dangers we cause, we will only hasten our ultimate destruction. Or we can change how we respond by relating to others in ways that will bring us together, by bringing into our lives the ways of wholeness with the Earth Interbeing.

For this to happen, we must apply the rules of change: only oppressors can change ourselves, and nobody else can do it for us. Why should we believe other people should change if we do not want to change ourselves? Large transformations arise from the smallest changes. The universe moves from within.

Changing Ourselves

In this time of Western culture's collapse, a strategy based on the power of the individual embraces both complexity and uncertainty. Small efforts to change will resonate and transform our interbeing relationships. We become leverage points of change. Our ability to change ourselves in a new direction is our tiny lever of freedom and power.

Western culture focuses on responding to crises with technology. Instead, we can focus on changing our identity from oppressor to interbeing. We change our focus from the Big Picture to the details of our lives and realign our relationships of care with each other, all life, and the Earth. Rather than trying to change the world, we overcome what stops us from caring for others.

To change and strengthen our resolve to live the ways of wholeness requires us to transform the deeply conditioned beliefs and values to which white privileged people tenaciously adhere.

- The privilege of harming others for self-benefit becomes a willingness to enjoy the benefits of caring for all.
- The privileged belief that people have greater value than other beings and that white people have greater value than other people becomes knowing that all life has the equal right to live, to have a place to live, and to share what life and the Earth provides commonly.
- The privileged presumption that creation exists for self-centered benefit and pleasure and that we have the right to impose our will upon others transforms into recognizing our interdependence, mutual neediness, and the circular dance of mutual aid.
- The privileged belief that we have no accountability for what we have stolen and continue to steal from others becomes the recovery and renewal of reciprocity and caring for the sacred Earth Interbeing.

The process of inner work consists of four cyclical movements: reduce harm, move toward wholeness, resist, and solidarity. We reduce the omnicultural harms of our actions. We strengthen our alignment with ways of caring for the Earth and all life. We firmly resist our resistance to change or yielding to temptations to act contrary to the values of wholeness. We stand in solidarity with the oppressed and their liberation struggles.

To succeed in changing ourselves, we go beyond the expected, a small step that does not greatly exceed the cultural norm. We gradually reduce our habitual harms rather than boldly put an end to them at once. When we have mastered the first step, we can take another small step to reduce the harm further. In this way, we reset the norm and hit the transformational mark for ourselves. If we try to change a harmful behavior in one step rashly, we will fail because we mobilize our resistance to change. Further, others will see our failure as a reason not to try reducing their harm.

Once we have mastered one harm, we repeat the cycle in another way, and we harm others and continue until we have nothing more to reduce, nothing more to increase. The practice draws us from our self-centeredness and holds us in active relations with others, life, and the Earth. We directly experience our interbeing interdependencies and care. These experienced relationships ground us in the ongoing Earth Interbeing commons and inspire us ever to deepen our commitment to care for it.

We do not just want to define the ideal human nature but also to help our planet and life recover from all the harms we have inflicted upon it by changing the ways we interact. This practice occurs in our daily lives by persistently making the decision to do the harder but right thing to do. We become what we do. Success in freeing ourselves from Western culture comes gradually, but it brings increasing clarity in

Ways of Wholeness with Earth Interbeing: Provisional*

We know the sacred wholeness of Creation, the Earth Interbeing.

We live within Earth limits and moral bounds to sustain the sacred balance and harmony of the Earth Interbeing.

We know and care for our place as the ground upon which we enact our care for the Earth Interbeing.

We interbe with all our sacred Earth Interbeing relations with love, equality, respect, and care.

We know the sacred within all our interactions and open to the ways of wholeness to move through problems and dangers.

We know and respond to the mutual neediness of all life.

We gift forward for what we have taken to preserve the harmony and balance of the Earth Interbeing and share the blessings we have received.

We live as unique whole beings with the Earth Interbeing and overcome within ourselves what disrupts our balance and harmony with the Earth Interbeing.

We know and resist what harms the Earth Interbeing through the ways of wholeness and stand in solidarity with the hungry, dispossessed, and exploited.

We act in the ways of wholeness of Earth Interbeing and accept responsibility for the consequences of our actions.

We have the deep, enduring joy that comes from living in the ways of wholeness with the Earth Interbeing. We enjoy being, interbeing, and Creation.

* Ancient wisdom and the ways of living practiced by Indigenous People have informed the ways of wholeness with Earth Interbeing identified here.

Further, these Ways of Wholeness with the Earth Interbeing require emerging commoners to have many conversations about them. Please consider the above as a proposal rather than a prescription.

purpose and the way forward together.

The Sacred

We cannot know or even imagine the Creator. We cannot define the Creator, but the Creator defines us. We have no language to speak of the Creator, yet the Creator guides us to live in the sacred ways of Creation. Wherever we look, we see the Creator shining through Creation and, thus, through us. Beings worship the Creator by their devotion to caring for their place within Creation, our Earth Interbeing. We have no way to apprehend the Creator except through Creation and no other purpose but to follow its ways.

Over eons, life has learned how to live with others in ways that benefit all. Every form of life has unique gifts that we share through intricate webs of mutual neediness and mutual care. By living the ways of the sacred, we become whole.

Wholeness

We yearn for belonging to a union, but separation often seems the easier choice. The sacred voice within us speaks about living with others in ways that benefit all, but we do not act upon it. We withhold a gift that might serve a good end or commit to a project we do not believe in. Or persist in a habit we know harms us or a belief we should break faith. We deny our inner darkness, giving it more power over us, or project it onto others, creating “enemies” where none exist.

We want wholeness, the interbeingness of Creation, from which reciprocity and caring for all to live and thrive emerge. Even though beings are diverse and do not all want the same things, we have much in common. Our compassion and affection for others grow as we understand our connections with all. We reduce our separation from the whole so that we may become the ground for bringing together dispersed elements into a greater whole. By understanding the needs and values of others, we come to see life as a dynamic, interconnected whole. We address the roots of what divides us by fathoming our reluctance to interbe.

We cannot allow divisiveness and separation to cause the disintegration of life and Earth. We must acknowledge and celebrate differences but constantly hold them within an ever larger, interconnected whole. Within our time, we must restore reciprocity and caring for others. Viewing relationships through the lens of interbeing has been the way for hundreds of thousands of years, always evolving and changing. The time has come again for us to resume cooperating with life and the Earth.

We have the task of liberating ourselves from the Western world view. We do not seek transformation but prepare for it. The privileged are less than we think we are but more than we believe.

Discerning the Common Path

Something is deeply flawed with the Western worldview and ways of living. Our social and ecological crises emerge from viewing ourselves as observers, separated from and, above all, even the sacred. Western global corporate colonialism tears apart the web of life and Earth systems. We have a planet on life support but an economy that demands more consumption.

White, wealthy, privileged people have the power, the wealth, the technology, and access to state violence to keep everyone moving down the road to mutual destruction. The unwillingness of Western

culture to care for our common home and relations calls upon those motivated to change our worldview and ways of living, beginning with ourselves.

While previous chapters have called upon privileged white people to move away from global corporate colonialism and toward an Earth Interbeing food commons, we cannot begin to suggest how to do that beyond changing ourselves and living our lives in the ways of wholeness. Changing our worldview changes how we experience the world. Opportunities will unfold that we cannot imagine now.

The transformation will occur through gratitude and respect for Earth Interbeing and cooperating as much as possible with the forces of life in concert with like-minded, unprivileged people around us. When people have a common understanding of the inner and path to wholeness with Earth Interbeing, they have a strong connecting bond. They enrich each other by sharing their resources, talents, and blessings. Their mutual support overcomes the dangers of separation.

In an address to the UN General Assembly in 1997, Joji Carino, representing the tribal people of tropical forests, said,

Often the campaigns of Indigenous communities are misjudged as the ignorance of primitives unschooled in modern economic realities. But make no mistake. We are not people of the past – we are your contemporaries and in some ways may be your guide toward more sustainable futures in the twenty-first century

The wisdom that Indigenous People have generously shared with white colonizers has informed and shaped this book. Native People call upon colonizers to struggle with them to protect the Earth and all life. This wisdom holds the Earth Interbeing as a commons. The ways of wholeness do not reflect the swan song of a fast disappearing way of life nor an attempt to turn back the clock to an earlier time but provide our only proven path to survival as a species, as interbeings, as Earthlings.