

## Rough Roads Lead to Beautiful Places *Finding meaning and purpose in difficult times*

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One truth in life is that rough roads frequently lead to beautiful places. The current economic crisis and numerous other problems have presented a rough road for a lot of people. It seems that there is no shortage of opinions regarding the causes of these events or predictions' regarding what lies ahead. Considering the seriousness of the events that have occurred over the past few months and the seemingly innumerable number of commentaries offered by journalists, politicians, economists, and religious leaders finding meaning and clarity appears to be a murky proposition. Personal and collective fear and anxiety are at high levels of intensity. It may well be that far greater tests and difficulties lie directly ahead. Where many people have, in the past, been able to avoid or ignore unfortunate world events, it appears that events unfolding throughout the US and in countries far from US shores, have effects that are now unavoidable no matter what the person's job, position, or status may be. In terms of the immediacy of events and occurrences a small world, has become little more than a common neighborhood.

The daily news is filled with stories of job losses and gloomy economic predictions. But many people only have to look at a family member or friend to witness the suffering that is taking place. It is of course impossible to operate normally in a climate of such economic chaos with immunity from the serious problems that have affected our local, national and global economies.

Many complex and difficult challenges have been increasingly unfolding over the last century and a half, but they have been increasing in magnitude, intensity, and frequency for the last few decades. These challenges include damage to the environment and climate change, failures in health care and education, extremes of wealth and poverty, moral laxity and corruption, starvation, disease, war, regional conflict, and terrorism, political polarization and governmental paralysis. These difficult problems and issues might be considered a "perfect storm". If we are facing a perfect storm of events is there a purpose, and if so could that purpose be intended to transform the consciousness of humankind and to weld humanity into one human family? While facing the many complex challenges of today, and those yet to come, will be a daunting endeavor for everyone, perhaps knowing the purpose of what is unfolding worldwide will provide some degree of solace?

Throughout the world, there is a growing awareness among people of the need for unity and peace. Difficulty by difficulty, challenge by challenge and conflict by conflict, humanity is slowly and painfully learning the lessons of peace along the hard road of suffering and tragedy. This difficult and dangerous course could be eased and the load lightened if individuals understood the reason and purpose of their existence and the contribution they can make to this evolutionary advancement towards peace.

Of course none of what is happening should be a surprise because it is not as if humanity and governments have not had ample warning. The problem has been that leaders and governments blindly entrenched in old beliefs and old dated concepts have refused to change and have firmly resisted the remedy to their collective problems even to the brink of destruction of their way of life.

How many times has it been stated that humanity is inherently violent and warlike and could never change to embrace peace or unity? Is it possible that faced with multiple destructive forces beyond the ability of a person, ethnic group, or nation to remedy humankind would unite for their common survival and to work towards one common purpose in order to solve critical problems?

If progress from world turmoil and conflict towards building peace is to continue human beings and social institutions will have to undergo radical transformation. Beliefs and perceptions based on ethnic, racial, nationalistic, religious, or any form of prejudice, will have to be changed into attitudes of love and cooperation. Many people worldwide are now vitally interested in how such a transformation can be brought about. To the astute mind it is evident that there is a revolutionary/evolutionary force at work in the world which is reshaping the affairs of humanity.

For many people today the most pressing and the single issue that they are focused upon is the economy, but the economy is only one of many critical issues facing humanity. It might be a lethal mistake to ignore the numerous other complex issues that threaten the world's peace and security.

For many people in the US the current imperative is their job, their pension, their home, and their bank account. For others in the world it is war, starvation, poverty, disease, and/or environmental disaster. Many people are talking about economic recovery, and others are talking about a "reset" of the economy, "“This economic crisis doesn't represent a cycle. It represents a reset,” Jeff Immelt, the CEO of General Electric, said today. “It's an emotional, social, economic reset.” Mr. Immelt is close to being correct and if you step further back from the trees you can see the forest and that that forest represents the process of spiritual transformation that is sweeping across the world. Many fail to understand that the economic crisis is a healing crisis that is attempting to remedy the sickness of crass materialism in the US and worldwide, to address the injustice of the extremes of wealth and poverty, and to correct the social wrongs that promote starvation, deprivation and dire need. Whether by commission or omission we are all responsible for the circumstances that foster these social injustices.

Consider this perception - the social, economic and world change that you are witnessing is a twofold process. One part of this ongoing process of change involves the construction of new ways and methods of thinking and doing that contribute to and promote justice, peace and unity. The other process is disintegrating and breaking down corrupted and failed institutions. “A twofold process, however, can be distinguished, each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive. The former, as it steadily evolves, unfolds a system which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing; while the latter, as its disintegrating influence deepens, tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity's progress towards its destined goal.”

It is the disintegrative process that results in the collapse of antiquated social and governmental institutions that provokes significant fear and suffering. It is likely that no one will be untouched by this part of the necessary and ongoing process of change leading to peace and unity. Is the establishment of

this peace and unity a distant future event? Witness the rapidity of the events now occurring and consider that its initial dawning is not as far off as one might think. If a global financial meltdown can lead to an immediate worldwide response resulting in unforeseen changes in government and business interactions, consider the effects of a major environmental catastrophe, war with weapons of mass destruction, or a global pandemic.

What all of this may mean is that we all face very challenging and difficult times ahead. Because of the nature of this twofold process individuals may find themselves on one side or the other of this change, either as a worker within the integrating process of growth, or as an impediment to that integrative process by attempting to support the old systems and methods of our civilization and by efforts to halt the collapse of antiquated institutions.

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.’”

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