

A Thousand Years' Checkup

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The changing of the millennium is an opportunity for us to pause, breathe deeply and reflect on where we are and where we would like to go from here as we reset our calendars to '000' and begin a new age of civilization.

The first millennium of the current era was a time of humanity's cultural childhood. Our ancestors believed that they were the ultimate reason for creation. They expected to receive rewards and punishments according to the specific expectations of an external, paternal deity. There was little room for choice or tolerance for alternative viewpoints.

The second millennium corresponds to our cultural adolescence. During these thousand years we've learned that the universe is much vaster than ever imagined. We developed impressive power to release and transform the earth's stored energy, and to alter and move things from where Mother Nature placed them to where we desire. We've started learning to choose for ourselves; in fact, the opening up of new choices at all levels is a hallmark of this era.

Like risk taking adolescents, we've often made dangerous choices, testing Mother Nature's limits as if we were invincible. We behave as if we were somehow exempt from natural law, as if we could separate ourselves from its inevitable principles of cause and effect. As we explode across the planet, tinkering with Gaia's life support systems, this illusion of separation has become the great crisis and challenge of our time.

As we enter the third millennium, our age of potential maturity, we are finally starting to realize that our actions do indeed have lasting consequences, though they may be felt distantly and unexpectedly. We're awakening into awareness of how intimately our lives are woven into the planetary web of life.

We're learning that our health depends on the health of our planet's intricate energy flow. We are well when our personal and cultural energies flow harmoniously with Gaia's. We suffer from illness, epidemics and social catastrophes such as war when this balance is disrupted.

Symptoms like these are messages that, if heeded, can guide us to change our harmful behaviors and transform ourselves so we can heal into a renewed equilibrium. When we ignore these healing opportunities, the underlying imbalance continues to undermine the foundations of our health until we suffer lasting consequences. We're beginning to understand that the choices we make now will determine our descendants' prospects for well being, and perhaps even survival.

Let's look at some of the most critical messages Mother Nature is sending us at this turning

point.

We're facing unprecedented epidemics of cancer and previously rare autoimmune diseases. One in eight American women will face breast cancer in her lifetime, while half of us will develop skin cancer. Millions suffer and die from immune disorders such as asthma, diabetes, lupus and multiple sclerosis.

Cancer seems to be an inner manifestation of a tainted external environment. Instead of waging our "war on cancer" and searching for cures that just scratch the surface, we might do better to examine and correct the root causes of these devastating epidemics.

During the industrial revolution of the second millennium we often neglected common sense principles of planetary hygiene. We manufactured and then haphazardly discarded a dangerous brew of noxious chemicals and radioactive waste. Even now, our factories and cities continue to spew record amounts of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere. These poisons blow where the wind blows and fall where the rains fall, collecting in the soil and in the food we eat.

We can no longer safely drink from our rivers and lakes. Even the earth's oceans, once imagined to be limitlessly vast, are increasingly polluted. We're cutting down the planet's ancient forests as if unaware that they produce vital oxygen and harbor the diversity that is essential for stability of the entire ecosystem. Far above us, Mother Earth's protective ozone layer no longer effectively shields us from the ionizing radiation of outer space.

We're made of the earth, and we are what we eat. As the earth accumulates poisons, so do we. So many of Gaia's children are sick because she is sick. We simply cannot stay well while we make the earth ill. Gaia is powerful, but she is fragile. If we continue to destroy her ability to sustain us, we risk being discarded.

As this millennium closes, our population is exploding in a dramatic crescendo. We grew to three billion over millions of years' time. Now we've added another three billion in a single generation!

By consuming available resources, the human population explosion diminishes our descendants' chances to enjoy quality lives. But it's even more disastrous to so many of our plant and animal relations. We've spread across the planet into every imaginable ecological niche, tapping every resource, no matter how remote or delicate. Our destruction of native habitats has accelerated the usual rate of extinction by a thousand fold. Each species lost is an irreplaceable gene pool, a blow that hacks at the foundations of biological diversity that supports us all.

The symptoms of overpopulation include epidemics of famine, genocide and incessant wars. As communities outstrip the land's ability to sustain them, the dispossessed often wind up hopelessly impoverished in violent, sprawling cities.

War is a symptom of stunted cultural development, an external manifestation of alienation, insecurity and fear. While it's been a part of human history throughout the ages, the unimaginably lethal nuclear, chemical and biological weapons we've created clearly demand that we resolve our conflicts peacefully, like mature adults, not violently, like adolescent gangs. As we have abolished slavery, it's now imperative that we succeed in abolishing war.

A thousand years ago we believed that we lived on a flat earth located at the center of creation. We now realize that the earth is a small blue planet spinning on an outer arm of the Milky Way galaxy in a vast and ancient universe.

As our understanding of the universe has expanded, our world has become much smaller. We've witnessed amazing revolutions in communications and mobility. We've gone from handwritten and spoken words to the printing press and radio, from signal fires and village drums to telephones and the Internet. A thousand years ago, the idea of circling the planet was unthinkable. Yet now, we're on the threshold of traveling to the stars.

As the third millennium dawns, many of us enjoy more freedom and choices than ever before. We've made remarkable advances in fertility control, literacy and human rights. It's a time of rich intercultural dialogue, a planetary exchange of ideas that's sparking extraordinary spiritual growth. We've found out who lives on this planet and where it is in the universe. It's starting to reveal to us how it works, and we're beginning to learn what to do with our newly discovered power. Yet with awesome power comes awesome responsibility.

Perhaps the challenges we face during our perilous transition from adolescence to maturity will serve as a cultural rite of passage. If successful, we will evolve into our divine nature, thinking and acting like the divine beings we are.

It's natural to feel uneasy as we enter unfamiliar territory. But now is the time for all of us to reach out and join together in a new planetary consciousness. All of us: our brothers and sisters around the globe and our plant and animal relatives depend upon our wisdom in this moment. In today's hurried world, it may be hard to figure out where to begin. But when we simply stop what we're doing and open our hearts, Mother Nature's healing energy comes rushing in. When we take the first step she will help us the rest of the way, because we are part of her, designed to respond to her.

When we still ourselves, we see that we are part of the whole, fully alive because we are connected. The wind whistling through the trees is our breath too. The falling rain, the cascading streams are our own blood flowing. The living earth that sustains all is our flesh and bones, and the sunshine, the flame of our divine life spark.

While the future is always a mystery, destiny and our free will interact to determine how the mystery unfolds. We can only succeed when we visualize the future of our dreams.

May we manifest in the new millennium a world of peace built upon justice, of prosperity based on sharing. May we transform our fears into curiosity. May we be grateful for the joy of living. May love guide us always. May we learn to act responsibly, taking care of our beautiful world, as our consciousness expands to fill the universe, one people, one web of life, all here together.

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