

Maintaining Hope in Treacherous Times



*Alice Holstein, Ed.D. wrote this for the Unitarian newsletter in 2005.
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“(There is) a paralyzing cynicism that is the ‘common sense’ of our age.”

— Rabbi Michael Lerner, Editor of Tikkun Magazine

I like to be informed about the world, but I know that mainstream media’s preoccupation with trivia, war, and sensationalism affects me negatively. I am also fairly confident that we are not getting comprehensive, unbiased news coverage. How, then, to avoid falling into “ain’t it awful” conversations with others? Indeed, how do avoid depression from so much bad news about our times?

Recently I had dinner with a friend active in social justice and environmental issues. She affirmed something I had forgotten for a while — that there is a lot of hopeful activity beneath the surface. I say forgotten because I realized this was true when I researched the internet in 1997 and found hundreds of organizations dealing with transformation, which means substantive change. My friend pointed out that there were some recent worldwide demonstrations against U.S. military policy and a growing movement of small organizations joining in networks to increase their effectiveness. The [United for Peace and Justice](#) organization, for example, represents 1,300 smaller peace groups.

The introduction of a recent 25 year re-release of [E. F. Schum-](#)

[acher’s](#) classic, *Small Is Beautiful*, pointed out that today there are 30,000 non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) in the U.S. and perhaps another 70,000 worldwide actively working towards a more sustainable world. “Although uncoordinated and mostly disconnected, the mandates, directives, principles, declarations and other statements of purpose drafted by these groups are extraordinarily consonant.”

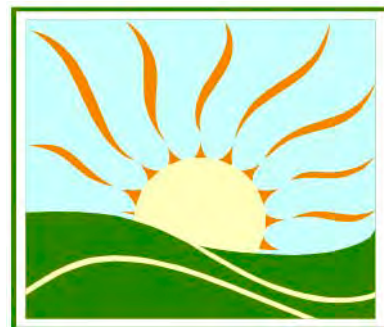
(And here is the good news!) “Never before in history have independent groups from around the world derived frameworks of knowledge that are utterly consonant and in agreement. It is not that they are the same; it is that they do not conflict. This hasn’t happened in politics, not in religion, not in psychology, and not in economics. As worldwide conditions continue to change and worsen, organizations working towards sustainability increase, deepen and multiply. Someday these dots are going to be connected.”

Some other hopeful news:

1. Reverend [John Pawlikowski](#), OSM, Professor of Social Ethics and Director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies program at [CTU](#) (*Catholic Theological Union*) in Chicago, reported that the ten

religious leaders included in the World Economic Forum meetings in 2005 in Davos, Switzerland, became influential in those proceedings. He also said, “many of the major political leaders gave strong addresses on the need to confront poverty, AIDS, and ecological destruction.”

2. Tikkun Magazine, a Jewish critique of culture and society, announced a summer 2005 “Spiritual Activism Conference” to re-invigorate an International Progressive Interfaith Spiritual Movement. Regardless of their success, this is more evidence of the networking, uniting effects being attempted. I’ve been waiting for a “people’s revolution” that would unite these disparate groups and causes for years. For a long time, however, I saw only fragmentation and relative ineffectiveness from these groups, but now I see the networks gathering force. The internet is a great empowering tool.



3. At a seminar on “[Ecological Economics](#)” in England in 1994, I listened to scientist and futurist [Willis Harman](#) discuss how fundamental change in society could occur. Willis reminded us that Communism fell swiftly. Willis already saw signs of this change in the culture 11 years ago, and I see many more today. Indeed, as my friend suggested, the present war consciousness and preoccupation with the negative is likely pushing the people’s revolution to better organization and effectiveness. Amidst such conflict and seeming lack of leadership, Harman also proposed that “keeping the fear levels down would be the major challenge as the shift occurred.” My way of saying something similar is that maintaining hope in these treacherous times is one of the



most important things we can do to make a difference.

From [Marc Ian Barasch](#)’s new book, *The Compassionate Life*: “We live in a world poised on the brink of self-discovery, knowing the only god we can now afford is a god of love, and if we are to go anywhere, we must all go there together.”

A small sampling of positive news sources:

- [Global Village News](#): part of [Positive News](#) international network. Monthly, e-mail free subscription.
- [hillconnections.org/Contemplation and Social Justice](#) site coordinated by two [Servants of Mary of Ladysmith, Wisconsin](#). For a terrific listing of Social Justice organizations, find that entry on the home page, then “[Links to Social Justice Sites](#),” then either “[Primary Issue Area\(s\)](#)” or “[Alphabetical Listings](#).” Years of research!
- *Yes, A Journal of Positive Futures*; 284 Madrona Way NE, Suite 116; Bainbridge Island, WA 98110; or subscribe online. (*This hard copy quarterly is a steal at \$15/year.*)