

Culture of Kindness

By Jonathan Isaac Sasmor

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*To the Hudson River—
“Let’s go!”*

I. Revolution

Japhy leaping up: "I've been reading Whitman, know what he says, Cheer up slaves, and horrify foreign despots, he means that's the attitude for the Bard, the Zen Lunacy bard of old desert paths, see the whole thing is a world full of rucksack wanderers, Dharma Burns refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars, certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you always find a week later in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume, I see a vision of a great rucksack revolution thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to mountains to pray, making children laugh and old men glad, making young girls happy and old girls happier, all of 'em Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason and also by being kind and also by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures."

—Jack Kerouac, 1958.¹

The mantle of leadership has been placed upon our shoulders not by a nation nor by our own government of citizens but by destiny and circumstance, by the sheer fact of our physical and economic strength...and by what Washington termed 'the sacred fire of liberty.'

—John F. Kennedy, 1954.²

What we need is a transformed life-style which will be as different from our present wasteful, short-sighted, reckless use of the earth's treasures as the present twentieth-century world is from the agrarian world of the past. This new life-style can flow from the efforts of science and the capabilities of technology, but its acceptance depends on an overriding citizen commitment to a higher quality of life for the world's children and future generations on our planet.

—Margaret Mead, 1973.³

For the second time in our history, we must declare and win our independence—this time, not from foreign rule, but from foreign oil, and indeed, all fossil fuels.

—John Kerry, 2007.⁴

No single enterprise, event, or idea will renew the earth. Instead, I believe it will take a movement composed of dedicated citizens who can see the world in a new way and who will work together to bring about revolutionary changes in the way we conduct our lives.

—Newt Gingrich, 2007.⁵

The Friendly Villain

Meet Joe Smith. Joe lives with his wife and three kids in a suburban American home. He and his wife both work hard at their jobs. They share responsibility for the chores. Joe coaches two soccer teams and likes to take fishing trips a few times a year. The Smiths attend Church regularly. They own two cars, one of which is a hybrid. They pay taxes and bills on time. They get along well with each other, most of the time. Joe is a stereotypical American, and a prime example of the Friendly Villain.

It is easy to declare war on the British, the slaveholders, the racists, or even the terrorists, but far more difficult to face ourselves, the Friendly Villains. That is what we must do, for we are the greatest moral enemy of the moment.

It was never our intention that our lifestyles would kill creatures and other human beings, but that is the reality of today. We hope to serve our families, friends, fellow human beings, and our environment. But recent science and economics shows that we are failing at our intention. In fact, our pollution, our economic policies, and our unsustainable practices are killing people and species. We are taxing other living beings without their representation and enslaving future generations. Crimes against humanity and against the natural world are being committed not by bad people but by good people—by Friendly Villains like you and me.

A New Game

As some friends and I take a break from walking in a sandy wash on a hot desert day, my friend says: "Let's play the stone game." "OK!" we all reply.

"What's the stone game?" "We stand here and throw pebbles at that metal post. The first to hit wins." So we toss pebbles at the short rusty post. I throw twenty or thirty rocks. All of them miss.

I become frustrated by the game. While the others focus on the post, I scurry off and hide, lying in the sand behind a bush, in peaceful solitude.

When the game ends, I emerge from the bush, laughing. "I don't like this game!"

* * * *

OK, earth. Game over. Let's play a different one.

Even today's most visionary thinkers and leaders call for change within the same political and economic system that we know—in which the common good competes with inertia and money. But that's not how major change will happen. That game must end.

In the new game, we will decide to do what is right, and then figure out how.

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Action!

The moment is ripe for brave political action. We need courageous leaders who will stand up for what is right above all else, and who will present a bold and colorful vision of a better world. History will herald the heroes who declare complete eternal freedom from fossil fuels, who end extreme poverty around the world, and who enact sustainable practices into law.

Change is the mood of 2008. But what does change look like now? Change itself has changed. We are ready to change not only the rules, but the games we play. We are ready to reinvent our systems and the ways we live our lives. We are ready to pursue kindness with the wholehearted might of today's human power.

We may be on the brink of a great technological and cultural revolution, one in which we come to treat all people, all species, and all future generations in the same way we treat each other. Unlike past technological and cultural revolutions, this one will occur consciously, voluntarily, because we choose to do what is right. We already know many of the technologies that will allow us to live in coexistence with all people, all species, the earth, and future generations. We will soon invent many more. In the next decade, we have the ability for the first time in history to provide every human being with adequate food, water, shelter, and transport, and every species with the ability to continue to exist.

Our descendants may remember the great moment in history, coming soon, when we all stood up for the values that we share as human beings—the moment when we followed through on our intention to care for all people and all living creatures, even in the face of new and daunting knowledge that required our societies to change faster than they have changed ever before.

Let us wait no longer!

**Let us launch a technological and cultural
revolution on behalf of the values we
share!**

**Let us test the limits of human potential
for kindness to all living beings!**

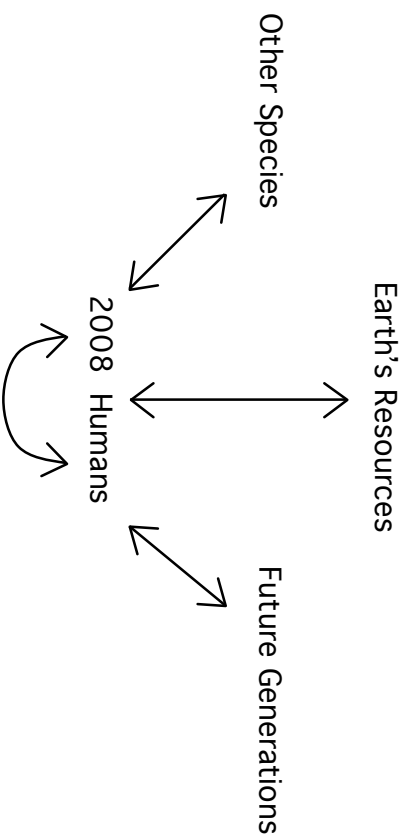
II. Kindness

The human economy and human spirit depend on the wealth of the earth.
The future of the earth depends on the stewardship of humanity.

Ecological issues and humanitarian issues have become indistinguishable.
They now converge towards their crux: our ability to care for all life.

We now exercise power over all people, all species, and all future generations.

A New Map of Human Power



Human power has expanded to new dimensions.

The expansion of human power has been:

Unintentional—we did not intend to control the fates of future generations, the earth, and people in other parts of the world

Indirect—our power derives from consequences of our actions beyond their intended results

Discovered—we did not know the degree to which our power was expanding until it had already expanded a great deal

Kindness means using human power to give and not to take.