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THE GREAT TURNING

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BALLE BEAT

David Korten

THE HUMAN SPECIES is entering a period of dramatic and potentially devastating change as the result of forces of our own creation that are now largely beyond our control. It is within our means, however, to shape a positive outcome if we choose to embrace the resulting crisis as an opportunity to lift ourselves to a new level of species maturity and potential. The outcome will depend in a large measure on the prevailing stories that shape our understanding of the traumatic time at hand - its cause and its possibilities. Perhaps the most difficult and yet essential aspect of this work is to change our stories.

If we succeed, future generations may look back on this as a time of profound transition and speak of it as the time of the Great Turning. If we fail, our time may instead be known simply as the tragic time of the Great Unraveling.

Histories written by the victors of Empire's endless wars, intrigues, and deceits have greatly exaggerated Empire's accomplishments while neglecting the costs and lost opportunities. Current attempts by the world's imperial elites to salvage the power and privilege of Empire are accelerating the collapse of critical social and environmental systems and threatening the survival of human civilization, if not the human species.

We now have the means to end the five-thousand-year era of Empire that has reproduced hierarchies of domination at all levels of human organization. A global cultural and spiritual awakening is building momentum toward the birthing of a new era of Earth Community based on a radically democratic partnership model of organizing human relationships. This awakening gives us cause for hope.

There are those who say that the violence and greed of Empire are defining characteristics of our human nature, that ruthless competition for power and material goods is inescapable.

They say our impulses must be disciplined either by central authority or by market

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competition, both of which create hierarchies of power that consign the majority of humans to lives of desperation and suppress the creative potential of the species.

The truth is at once more complex and more hopeful. Our human nature actually embodies many possibilities, ranging from violence and greed to love and service. Contemporary human societies fail to manifest the higher-order potentials of love and service, not because of an inherent flaw in our human nature, but because the dominator relations of Empire actively suppress the development and expression of this potential. As a species, we now face both the imperative and the opportunity to say no to Empire, grow up, and accept the responsibilities of mature adulthood.

Our failing environmental and social systems create the imperative. The global revolution in transportation and communications is creating the opportunity. Leadership in actualizing the possibilities is coming from people everywhere who are making the choice to walk away from Empire's false promises and engage the work of turning our cultures, economies, and politics from dominator to partnership relations.

THE CULTURAL TURNING

The Great Turning begins with a cultural and spiritual awakening. Economic and political turning can only follow a turning in cultural values from money and material excess to life and spiritual fulfillment, from relationships of domination to relationships of partnership, from a belief in our limitations to a belief in our possibilities, and from fearing our difference to rejoicing in our diversity.

THE ECONOMIC TURNING

The values shift of the cultural turning calls us to turn from measuring well being by the size of our yachts and bank accounts to measuring well being by the health of our families, communities, and natural environment. It leads us from economic policies that raise those at the top to policies that raise those at the bottom, from economic plutocracy to economic democracy, from hoarding to sharing, and from the rights of ownership to the responsibilities of stewardship.

THE POLITICAL TURNING

The economic turning creates the necessary conditions for a turn from a democracy of money to a democracy of people, from passive to active citizenship, from competition for individual advantage to cooperation for mutual advantage, from retributive justice to restorative justice, and from social order by coercion to social order by mutual responsibility and accountability.

Some critics will surely complain that "Korten wants to change everything." They miss the point. Everything is going to change. The question is whether we let the changes play out in increasingly destructive ways or embrace the deepening crisis as our time of opportunity. Now as never before we must unleash the creative potential of the species and direct it to democratizing our cultures and institutions and bringing ourselves into balance with one another and Earth. It is the greatest creative challenge the species has ever faced. Success would seem a futile dream, except that all around the planet momentum is already building.

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member of the Club of Rome. He serves on the board of BALLE, the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, and of the Bainbridge Graduate Institute. Excerpted with permission of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. from *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, by David C. Korten, 2006.

LIVING ECONOMIES

THE LOCAL LIVING economies we must create are on every dimension virtual opposites of the suicidal global imperial economy we have. The following explanation summarizes the critical features that distinguish the two.

GLOBAL IMPERIAL ECONOMY

The defining purpose is to make money for owners to increase their power and their claims to the resources of the many.

The guiding mantra is create global monopolies to eliminate local choice, take all you can get and pass costs to others.

The rules favor absentee owners, monopoly-scale enterprises, financial speculators, rights of property, and central planning by global corporations.

Denying any responsibility for public interests, proponents seek to secure impermeable boundaries around the exclusive private interest of corporations and their wealthiest owners, while demanding that communities eliminate any borders protective of public interests.

LOCAL LIVING ECONOMIES

The defining purpose is to secure fulfilling livelihoods for all and increase the generative power of the whole.

The guiding mantra is create beneficial local options, take only what you need, and accept responsibility for the whole.

The rules favor participating owners, human-scale enterprises, wealth creators, rights of people, and self-organization by people and communities.

Recognizing the need of all living entities to protect and balance individual and community interests, proponents support both firms and communities in establishing managed protective borders that support fair, balanced, and mutually beneficial exchange.

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