

## This I Believe

### 32.1 A Final Word

*For 5,000 years, humans lived in the past tense: "Yesterday was the same as tomorrow." For the next 500 years people lived in the present tense: "Today can be whatever we want it to be." But now, for the next 50 years we must start living in the future tense: "Tomorrow's social, economic and political constraints must become today's reality."*

*"In the beginning, only Animals, the Four-Legged, Birds, the Wing-Flappers and Fish People inhabited the surface of the Earth. When Creator made Humans He first placed them under the surface of Earth.*

*Earth Mother called a big meeting of the Four-Legged and Wing-Flappers and told them of Creator's intention to release the so-called Humans onto the surface of the planet to mingle with all the other creatures that already lived there.*

*"What do we need them for? We're doing just fine on our own. What are these Humans anyway?"*

*Earth Mother scolded, "Creator tells me He has made these Humans in his own image, and they are to be respected by all you other creatures. The Humans have been given the ability to acquire more knowledge than*

*anything He has made before. It will be interesting to see if they use it wisely."*

*Earth Mother brought... the Human People up to the surface of the planet."*

John James Stewart

Dream Catchers: A Journey into Native American Spirituality.

Thus, according to a Native American Legend, began the great human experiment on earth. I prefer this version of the beginning, in part because it is no less reasonable than the Western biblical version, but mostly because it is clearly allegorical. The meaning of life is ultimately the capacity of human intelligence to reconcile the human footprint on the planet through the acceptance of the Earth as the Mother of all life.

Indeed, it has been an interesting experiment.

### The Medicine Wheel

The Native American oneness with nature is captured by the Medicine Wheel – a symbol of creation – in the shape of a circle with the Creator as the center and with four quadrants. The quadrants represent the four directions, the four seasons, the four elements, the four races, the four stages of life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age), and the four aspects of our nature (physical, mental, emotional and spiritual). All of us travel the wheel at our own speed to manifest our needs, and to remember who we are, what is to come, and why we are here.

### The Flat World

The Native American spiritual view, in which the human purpose is to live in harmony with nature, reflects one ideal of the perfection and purpose of the great human experiment. But, as

we are well aware, this is not where the human experiment has, in fact, taken us. Mankind has plundered and stripped the planet at an ever-increasing rate, through a dramatic increase in numbers, and through a greater impact per person, as the trademark of the Modern Era. The accelerated pace of economic growth as the engine for the present and for continued human progress has been graphically described as “flattening the world.” The flat world is in contrast to a circular sphere where mankind does not flatten nature, nor nature mankind. In a flat world we believe that the gift of human intelligence is able to dominate nature. In his account of how to survive in the new technology dominated flat world, Thomas Friedman has written:

“...(there is) no reason to believe (wages will settle at a newer, lower equilibrium)...as long as the global pie keeps growing (p. 227)...the pie keeps growing because things that look like wants today are needs tomorrow (p. 232)...if you believe human wants and needs are infinite...then there are infinite industries to be created...and the only limiting factor is human imagination (p. 231).”

### **The Sustainable World**

In contrast, Jared Diamond makes the counter argument that growth without limits is the path to collapse. It is the argument that if humankind pushes nature too far, that nature, in the end, will trump humankind. If we, as humans, expand the over-consumption of sustainable resources beyond the tipping point, the great human experiment will come to a crashing end – this time not for an ancient isolated society buffered from others by continents and time, but in the new flat world for the planet itself. In the stark barren Mad Max remains of collapse, the current version of the great human experiment will end. The Creator will have his answer, and in a World Without Us the planet will heal itself, and the cycle of the Medicine Wheel will begin again.

“A quote”  
Author and source

### **The End of “Faith”**

For centuries, much of the fate of the human condition needed to be taken as a matter of faith. This is no longer so. It is embarrassing to know that we in the US are presently building museums of creation through faith in the concepts of intelligent design and divine conception, when we have used our intelligence to gain sufficient understanding of the universe and the physical laws of nature to make scientific, knowledge-based decisions about the consequences of these two alternate paths to the future. Very little has to be left to faith.

We have the capacity through the gift of intelligence, and through the accumulated knowledge as the gift of the Modern Era, to choose whether we go into the 21<sup>st</sup> century following the path of economic growth (which was the engine of the Modern Era) as the way into the future, or whether we will choose sustainability as the new conceptual foundation and engine for the Post-Modern Era.

The great human experiment has reached, perhaps, its first ultimate choice point. The simple Native American spiritual metaphor is the only faith we need to have. It is a variation of the belief in the power of balance -- the necessity for humankind and nature to balance and sustain each other -- rather than one or the other winning the balance power.

The choice point before us, for determining the outcome of the great human experiment, does not deny that there will be other similar choice points in the future; we should expect there will be. This is simply the first one where the choice is ours to live or die with. We are the change we have all been waiting for.

What an exciting time to be alive. It is the Age of the Millennials.

### **The Millennial Person**

Faith used to provide people with their sense of certainty. It gave purpose, meaning and direction to life. The time for that kind of sense of certainty is now over. All that is certain is that change will be constant. No world-view will last a lifetime. The Modern Era, through the biological, physical and behavioral sciences had given us the tools for intelligent life on this planet in the Post-Modern Era. This is a time for personal reckoning: to abandon blind religious faith – whether radical Islam or Christian – and become both the experimenter and the subject in the great human experiment.

The most essential choice we have, today, is to establish and enhance knowledge as public domain, not to become the new commodity for financial gain. If the creation of the accumulation of knowledge is allowed to become the new form of “capital” for the continued creation of growing and greater disparities of wealth and power, this century will not be an inflection point, but the continuation of an older world-view whose time has surely come.

The Millennial person, who may be the first through the door of a new era, may also be the last out, if the creation and accumulation of knowledge -- the gift of intelligence -- becomes a commodity for the greater accumulation wealth.

### **Epilogue**

*“If, in the end, Mother Earth swallows the last remaining Humans, and the Four-Legged and Wing Flappers again reign supreme, then the great human experiment of the Creator will come to an ignoble end.”*