

EPILOGUE

The Great Dream

Author's Thoughts Since the Last Edition Was Published

Here it is, five years after the first edition of this book was published, and I'm working on a new book, further describing this "better future" and why I think it is more possible now than any time in human history. It will probably be a year or two before this new book is published so I'd like to share a few things with readers of this new edition in the meantime.

The better future I write about in the preceding pages will be a challenge somewhat similar to the task the founders of the United States of America undertook almost three centuries ago. Let us now dream "the Great Dream" that extends the original American Dream to the entire world. As Thomas Paine, possibly the closest to being the "father" of modern democracy, told us in the mid-1770s: "we have the power to start the world over again." Indigenous shamans teach: "the world is as you dream it."

While I am a fourth generation American and have lived all my life in the United States, the Great Dream I write about here is about our entire world, the place we all share as "home" – that speck of white and blue that space explorers see from the windows of their spacecrafts, floating in the black nothingness of all and everything.

The "American experiment" can serve the world because it is a microcosm of Earth. The U.S. has the most diverse population, in some cases hosting ethnic communities almost as large as those in their homelands. All religions, races, national origins and ethnicities make America their home. The U.S. is also the first nation to be founded on the principle that people deserve to be free to find their own happiness, in whatever form that takes.

Americans have wrestled with the challenges of implementing the founders' vision – the original American Dream. We have strayed from its original intent and spirit, violated the principles under which we were founded, and squabbled over our differences. We've fought each other in a civil war, shouted across the aisle at each other in Congress, killed one another over silly differences and have become the world's most arrogant, obscene and conspicuous consumers in the world. But, despite all these faults, we remain one nation, for the most part completely transparent.

The Great Dream can be an extension of the original American Dream if the world can embrace it as humanity's dream. Is this a challenge? You bet! We in the United States are still learning and growing, finding our way along this difficult path to our original vision. We keep getting lost, then finding our way back and then wandering off that path again. But we love challenges! We've proven that over our relatively short history. Life without challenges can be pretty boring so let's expand the vision and embrace the challenges even if this means we have to change our ways.

Daring to Dream, Rejecting Cynicism

As the old saying goes, “scratch a cynic and you’ll find a disillusioned idealist.” Former idealists who get disappointed or burned previously in their lives often resort to donning the mantle of cynicism as a way of protecting themselves from any further pain. Let us reject any temptations to resort to cynicism that might invalidate our knowing that the world could really work for everyone.

Let us expand the 1776 vision for the American colonies to include all peoples everywhere. Let us embrace our awakenings to full liberation and maturity as human beings. Let us end our perverse nationalisms and develop a “global patriotism” that allows all of us to maintain our national pride, those time-honored cultures and unique identities.

Like Albert Einstein wrote, "Nationalism is an infantile sickness. It is the measles of the human race." This perverse nationalism we see from time to time, particularly from these United States, is an indicator of our own adolescence. The times call for us to grow up and step into this new dream, this new possibility for the entire world. Paine writes, "My country is the world. My countrymen are mankind." That is an adult perspective, one that will allow us to evolve into a better world.

Many centuries ago, Socrates stated something quite close to Paine’s perspective: “I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world.” Are we ready to be global citizens?

In the past, if you were a citizen of a country whose culture and/or politics were not to your liking, and you’d exhausted all attempts to change them, you could consider moving to another country. It is a bit harder to leave Spaceship Earth for another spacecraft.

There’s a place for nationalism, taking pride in one’s country and its own uniqueness in the world. But nationalism gets perverse when that uniqueness turns into “special-ness” or superiority over others and a distorted sense of entitlement. Each of us is unique, as people and as cultures. But thinking of ourselves as special separates us at a time when we need to honor our common connection as crew members on Spaceship Earth.

The Great Dream benefits *everyone*, not just a nation or a class of people. It is a new chapter in our evolution as human beings, not merely as Americans, or Germans, or Africans, or Asians. Perhaps it is to be part of, as futurist Walter Truett Anderson writes, the “next enlightenment” for the world.

Let us declare our freedom to fully engage our destiny and to become all we can be – not only as Americans but as human beings living in this diverse galactic neighborhood called Earth. Let us co-author our own version of a new “emancipation proclamation” and set ourselves free to become the magnificence that we have stored up in ourselves – that beauty, strength, vision and creativity that bursts forth from us occasionally but spends most of its time buried underneath our fears and denials, our prejudices and insecurities – in self-imposed jail cells of our psyches.

Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (U.N.) Richard Holbrooke used a phrase I like when it comes to changing our thinking about how things have to be. In a 2004 interview in *Leaders* magazine the experienced diplomat was asked who in the world he most admired. He promptly replied, "The greatest person I ever met, bar none, is Nelson

Mandela, and I have gotten to know him very well. No man is perfect, not even Mandela, but he took history by the throat, seized it, and changed its course through a combination of moral authority, vision, strategic sense, practical genius, and a remarkable capacity for forgiveness toward the thugs who ran South Africa under Apartheid."

It is time for us all to "take history by the throat" and change from a mindset that tells us the best predictor of the future is the past. This attitude dooms us to being slaves of our history. Let us adopt a new mindset that creates a future based upon what we envision for ourselves, our families, our communities and our world .

Former Czech Republic President Vaclav Havel writes, "Planetary democracy does not yet exist but our global civilization is already preparing a place for it. It is the very Earth we inhabit linked with Heaven above us. Only in this setting can the mutuality and the commonality of the human race be newly created with reverence and gratitude for that which transcends each of us and all of us together." Our "mutuality and commonality" can transcend our petty prejudices, greed and selfishness.

The Power of the Dream

Dreaming is a highly-valued source of wisdom in many ancient cultures. Those indigenous tribes around the world who we used to think were so primitive are proving to be far wiser than we had thought in our scientific egotism. The power of dreams has been archived for centuries in ancient traditions. One ancient culture with which I recently became familiar is the Achuar tribe in the Ecuadorian rainforest. One of their tribal elders received a warning in a dream, a warning of a threat being posed by the "Dream of the North." The dream came to pass as the Achuar's land became threatened by oil, mining and timber companies, controlled by the North, which are determined to exploit the Achuar's land for its natural resources.

The 10th Century Toltec people from Central Mexico appreciated the power of dreams. They believed that their lives were the manifestation of their dreams, whether good or bad, whether conditioned by "domestication" or envisioned from within. To change your life, they taught themselves, just change your dream. So dreams have been viewed as powerful and prophetic parts of many cultures.

In a campfire song almost every kid in the English-speaking West knows, "Row, row, row your boat" the cap line is "Life is but a dream." Many of us interpreted the line as life isn't very real but, as many ancient traditions tell us, life is what we dream it to be!

John Perkins is a businessman who sold his company and reconnected with his youthful Peace Corp passions. He returned to South America to work with the Shuar tribe in Ecuador. He subsequently started the Dream Change program, dedicated to "promoting sustainable lifestyles for the individual and global community" in the West, particularly in the U.S. Dream Change now offers workshops and other programs teaching people how they can change the dream they carry with them, forwarding the ancient wisdom he discovered in the Amazon. As Perkins writes in an article in *Dream Change Magazine*, he and his colleagues have been called to rise "to new levels of consciousness" and help "set the world straight" in this time of global transformation.

I am amazed at the wisdom the ancient cultures possess, an appreciation that has grown as I have matured. This is especially poignant given that my childhood was filled with movie and newsreel images of native “savages” who were portrayed so pejoratively because they didn’t idolize consumptive materialism and western medicine as we did.

We in the West generally look at dreaming as a waste of time. We prefer to put more validity in the conditions which we endure, taking band-aid consolations to make the conditions more tolerable. We think of dreams as escapes from the real world (as in “daydreaming”). When we think of our personal dreams, like “my dream,” it usually means that there is selfish motive built into the dream, like my dream is to be a movie star or a sports superstar or the president of my country.

The Great Dream as I’m using the term goes beyond one person’s vision, which is what makes it “great.” It has the “good of the whole” at heart, bettering everyone, without any individual or group’s personal agendas. Many previous “great dreams” have preceded this one. We know that people can bring about seemingly impossible realities when they have the vision and resolve to act in voluntary unison, not by edict or command. It happens when an idea is so powerful that people take it as their own to champion. So each person becomes a leader for the new idea and not merely a follower of someone else or a “believer” who is being loyal to a cause. A few examples of other great dreams that have been led by communities (not just one designated “leader” or a select few) include the European Renaissance, the rapid rise of modern democracy and the end of the era of “Divine right of kings,” and the establishing of the United States. In music, rock ‘n roll and jazz were born by shared dreams of many musicians seeking a new form of artistic expression. Groups of people shared the visions and collaborated in manifesting these great dreams.

History tells us that great dreams have *many* leaders who contribute to their shared idea in unpredictable ways – sometimes a messy process - as unique as their personalities and as diverse as their experiences. If the dream is big enough, these leaders don’t concern themselves too much with how they will achieve it. The power of the idea is sufficient so that those who’ve embraced it know that the means to achieve the great dream will be invented in the process. The idea wants to be realized; it has its own creative force which is shared by these visionaries. It’s time has come. It wants to happen!

The Great Dream is “great” because it represents a brand new consciousness that serves us in evolving intentionally, to consciously step into greater maturity *together*. This is new territory for us humans, territory that might seem like fantasy or impossibility to the old mindset but territory that our hearts have been yearning for as long as we can remember. The Great Dream is defined by possibility. Union and connectivity replace separation. The Great Dream fits the criteria for being a dream worthy of our dreaming it.

Taking Back Our Responsibility

The New Yorker financial columnist James Surowiecki shows us how wiser decisions are more frequently made by groups from diverse backgrounds than with groups of experts in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds*. Like body-builders who often get “muscle-bound” and are almost useless in doing any activity beyond the exercises they practice, experts can get “idea-bound” and lose perspective. Someone with totally different experience,

without the encumbrances of what they know, can often ask something that leads to a wiser choice, something that might be considered “a stupid question” by the experts.

One thing we are learning about collective wisdom is that hierarchy or rank destroys wisdom. Dialogue and rank-free inquiry yields much better results for groups, work teams and communities. True democracies seem to eventually fair better, correcting their mistakes and, long-term, making wiser decisions than countries run by a handful of governors. One of the dangers of the experts running the show is “groupthink” a term coined by psychologist Irving Janis to describe how homogeneous groups become more dependent on each other than diverse groups. They become insulated from outside opinions, begin to believe they are infallible, rationalize or discount any and all counterarguments and are convinced dissent is not useful. I’m sure we can all think of situations that can be described this way. As Surowiecki writes, “Deliberation in a groupthink setting has the disturbing effect not of opening people’s minds but of closing them. In that sense, Janis’ work suggests that the odds of a homogeneous group of people reaching a good decision are slim at best.”

A former U.N. weapons inspector testified at a U.S. Senate committee hearing in the Summer of 2004. He explained that the belief that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) was so strong and so widespread amongst America’s “experts” and the British allies that any evidence that there were none would have had to been “overwhelming” prior to the invasion in 2003. In contrast, he said, the slightest hint of there being WMDs added to the already entrenched belief that Iraq had them. This is a more recent example of groupthink among experts that had tragic consequences.

Other examples of groupthink include the demise of huge corporations such as Enron and WorldCom, where a few executives drove their companies into oblivion in the absence of feedback. The Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1962 is another example, despite the fact that JFK took the heat since he was the one to ultimately make the decision. Nonetheless, groupthink was the input President Kennedy received from his military and political “experts” upon whom he was relying. Groupthink can not only lead to closing minds instead of opening them, it can lead to anti-social or selfish ends that could be very harmful to society. In contrast, Surowiecki cites four characteristics of collective wisdom:

- diversity of opinion
- independence
- decentralization
- aggregation

In Surowiecki’s words, *diversity of opinion* calls for “each person [to] have some private information, even if it’s just an eccentric interpretation of the known facts.”

Independence means “people’s opinions are not determined by the opinions of those around them.” *Decentralization* means that “people are able to specialize and draw on local knowledge.” *Aggregation* means “some mechanism exists for turning private judgments into a collective decision.”

Why do we defer to experts so frequently and routinely when it comes to our future and the kind of world we want? It is understandable if we are getting our car repaired or having heart surgery. But our future, our destiny as people, is up to all of us. There are limits to what we can count on from experts, a limit to what we can delegate wisely. Now

we know that *together* we are at least as smart as the experts in determining our future. All it takes is being responsible for being part of that wisdom, part of that “wise crowd.”

New Frontier of Human Consciousness

For dreams to become realities, we need more than just the dreamers. Ideas like this often serve as triggers for mass cynicism. Comments like “It’s always been this way and it will never change” are common among the cynics. I’m reminded of what visionaries have learned through the ages, that it is easier to get people enrolled in “dystopias” - a doomsday forecast or thoughts of some coming disaster - than a utopian vision of a positive vision for the future. The Y2K doomsday predictors before the millennium come to mind as one example.

People who succeed at inculcating new ideas into a culture will be essential to bringing the Great Dream into the minds of millions so it can be implemented. This means we’ll need a new breed of visionary, not only the person who dreams the big dreams but the person who can advocate, educate, and inspire others so more and more people get behind this new idea. These are the inculcators, the heroes for our future.

Inculcators embrace the vision and own it as their own. They can talk about it as if they dreamed it up, even if they didn’t. They emulate a confidence and certainty that penetrates the skepticism they encounter, overwhelms the cynicism that comes their way and wakes up the dreamer and idealist in everyone.

The entire world needn’t believe in the Great Dream or even think it is achievable in order to achieve it. In fact, global changes never start with popular movements. Copernicus was very lonely when he first proposed the Sun did not revolve around the Earth. Grand visions and discoveries almost always start with one person or a small group. As anthropologist Margaret Mead was fond of saying, “Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” But it will take dreamers, visionaries and inculcators.

I’m reminded of an old saying that goes something like this: At first a new idea is scoffed at and ridiculed as crazy or utopian, certainly impossible. As it is discussed more it is judged to be perhaps possible but most certainly improbable. Finally, as the idea is becoming more widely adapted, these same people start honestly believing they always knew it could happen, as if it has been their idea in the first place. This is the nutty nature of human beings!

One difference between the inculcators of the Great Dream and inculcators of other great ideas in history is that this generation is steeped in a new level of consciousness, a consciousness that is grounded in the spiritual domain, not the material or mental.

The Role of Business in Manifesting the Great Dream

In his 1993 book of the same name, management elder Peter Drucker describes the “post-capitalist society” by opening with this statement: “Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. We cross...a ‘divide.’ Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself – its basic values; its social and political structure; its

arts; its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world. And the people born then cannot imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born. We are currently living through just such a transformation.”

The most dominant institution we have created for ourselves is business. Corporations are having more influence on society in the West than any other of our basic institutions, including religions and nation states! Someone once said that if you want to know which aspect of a society has the most power in a society look to which one has the tallest structures. There was a time when churches were the tallest, with cathedrals and church spires rising toward the heavens, even in small cities. Universities built towers as a symbol of their influence during times in our evolution and there has also been a time when the government edifices were the biggest. Nowadays, there’s no doubt which structures overshadow all others. Corporate skyscrapers around the world dominate the horizons of our cities around the world. Even our sporting arenas and stadiums boast corporate logos.

The power of the nation-state has become an illusion, albeit one that many people still hold onto. Business and its economic engines run the show! And whatever ideology is inbred in business is the dominant gospel that ultimately becomes the reality we perceive.

Economics is the most dominant system on the Earth, so powerful that all other choices and policies bow to its influence. Business is all about economics nowadays, having morphed from enterprises of service. As the Industrial Age started rolling, the focus shifted from service to society to a focus on the owners. Business is now about money. Big business is about big money. In this era of the multinational dinosaur, which has become the new “nation-state” throughout the world, a few corporate executives can eliminate countries and decimate local economies. They can dictate foreign policy through bribery and graft in the world’s monarchies and by lobbying in democracies. However they go about it, they get their way!

Why do I think this can change? Why do I fail to see the hopelessness and futility in changing things? Because no matter how huge the dinosaurs get, no matter how much they control the economics and how much economics dominates our world’s decision-making, we are still human beings. And we can change. If enough people want change, it will happen. If enough people see that this train is a runaway, and want a better world for their children and their children’s children, they can change it.

Economics, corporations, policies, politics, business...if you take away the people they are simply file cabinets and mortar, paper and computers. Without the people to fuel these systems they dissolve into historical ruins. People built these institutions, they put these systems into place, and they can tear them down, transform them, remove them or de-legitimize the power they have over people.

People who work are in a great position to have a positive effect. For the whole system to change, business must change since it is the most influential. People in business are keys to making big change happen.

“Business people” are not little green alien men and women who are up to no good. They are not modern day evil-doers. Business people are just plain people. I find it amazing that whenever I get into conversations with people and the subject turns to “business people” they are discussed as if they are an alien culture that no one wants to be part of.

Yet, almost everyone works these days and is therefore a part of the business system. We are *all* business people! Why do we insist on talking about business people as if they are *not* us? Could it be that we don't want to accept that we are part of the problem and it is more comfortable to discuss the problem intellectually as if there is some villainous "them" out there to blame for the messes?

We all have an opportunity to tell the truth, to own that we are all part of the problem and begin rectifying what we know needs changing. If we all acknowledge that we are all card-carrying "business people" and accept that we built these structures and policies and values, or allowed them to be built under our noses, then we have the power to modify, demolish or improve upon them. We'll be on our way to having a world we want instead of having a world we complain about.

New Context, New Legitimacy

History is filled with examples of people who rallied others to follow their lead and move the world toward what they thought was the "right" way to be. Besides the conspicuously notorious examples of Hitler, Osama bin Laden and Slobodan Milosevic, whose answers to a perfect world included mass murders, compelling ideas for the "right way" have occurred throughout history. In most all these cases there was disrespect even persecution of one group over another. This is why people are sometimes suspect about noble visions or grand ideas for a better world.

The new legitimacy I'm envisioning is based on ideals that *most* people, all but the most radical, would agree are life-affirming and non-religiously spiritual, allowing for all people to be respected, to be free and to have their basic needs provided. This requires a new context for the way we think of each other in the world, a new worldview.

Would this new legitimacy mean the end of all conflict, starvation, prejudice and crime? I don't think so. The Great Dream is not intended to be a panacea or utopian in nature. It is intended to speak to that part of us all that knows that "better" is possible, perhaps that "much better" is possible, and that we are underperforming as human beings.

Whenever there's discussion about bringing about any radical transformation, it gets tempting to make the old mindset or paradigm wrong while championing the advent of the new paradigm. A couple of years ago I heard about a very elegant way to hold the old and the new concurrently while the transformation is underway. Lynne Twist, former Funding Director for The Hunger Project and Vice Chair for the Institute of Noetic Sciences, suggests that the old mindset be held in compassion as if it is receiving hospice care while the new mindset or the new legitimacy is being birthed, similar to mid-wifery. Neither hospicing nor midwifing relies on force and both are based on compassion.

We can change the context for life on Earth – the background or default worldview. Then reality would be quite different. All that is required is for us to change our minds. It is really that simple! No monies are required. No great studies need be made. No governments need to confer. We simply need to change how we think about each other and our world, our Spaceship Earth.

Rather than enduring lives based on fear and scarcity, with occasional episodes of joy and happiness, we could enjoy lives of peace, love and sufficiency that might be interrupted

occasionally with unpleasant occurrences. But the larger context prevails and there exists greater community, communication, relationship and serenity for all.

I'm reminded of the words of 19th Century American philosopher William James who wrote, "Of all the creatures of earth, only human beings can change their patterns. Man alone is the architect of his destiny...Human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives."