



a journal of positive futures

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YES! #38, Summer 2006 **5,000 Years of Empire—Ready for a Change?**

YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.

You can find the articles mentioned below on our website at www.yesmagazine.org. You are welcome to download and photocopy them free of charge. If you'd like to purchase multiple copies of YES! or subscriptions for your class or group, please phone 800/937-4451 and ask for the Discussion Group Discount.

These are momentous times. Perhaps many eras feel momentous, but we now face perils that threaten the very survival of the human race or at least life as we know it—global warming, the imminent peaking of world oil production, burgeoning human population, collapsing ecosystems.

Yet this dangerous moment also represents a tremendous opportunity. As old patterns reach crises of unsustainability, the search for alternatives gains urgency. Will we embrace successful alternatives fast enough to mark this era as a time of a Great Turning toward Earth Community? The articles in this issue explore aspects of this challenge, from shifting beyond petroleum to learning to live harmoniously together. This discussion guide will focus on the following articles.

- David Korten, “The Great Turning”
- Various, “On the Path to Earth Community ...”
- Carol Estes, “Can Soap Operas Save the World?”
- Joanna Macy, “The Great Turning as Compass and Lens”

The Great Turning

We face a choice between empire and Earth Community, domination or partnership, says David Korten. Empire has prevailed for 5,000 years, but there are signs of a global awakening to the possibilities of partnership. The signs include the civil rights, environmental, women's, and peace movements; the creation of the United Nations; and growing leadership of indigenous people. To promote this shift, we must create stories that find meaning in partnership, to



replace old stories that find meaning and order only in domination.

- What makes you anxious about the future? What is different now from your expectations growing up?
- Korten describes three stories empire tells. Are these stories you have lived with? How do they seem true or untrue to you? What experiences have you had that suggested other stories?
- Korten mentions shifts from dominator to partnership modes in each of the three main spheres of human activity—culture, economy, and politics. What signs do you see of any of these shifts in your experience?

On the path to Earth Community ...

In Cleveland, the collapse of the industrial economy has provided an opportunity that is being seized by activists. The city where the river once caught fire is on the way to becoming an ecocity. Meanwhile, in New York City, neighbors are banding together for help in case of disaster. In Prescott, Arizona, a modest neighborhood is pioneering ecological living. And Cuba has developed a remarkable method for keeping its citizens safe from hurricanes (it has also created a system of agriculture that does not depend on oil—see Dale Wen’s article contrasting North Korea’s and Cuba’s agriculture systems).

- What aspect of your daily life (food, shelter, transportation, personal safety, communication, etc.) are you most worried about in case of a disaster or economic or environmental decline? Which of these stories suggests some way of dealing with it?
- In her article on Prescott, Susan DeFreitas describes Prescott’s environmental assets, such as a high water table and good soil. What natural assets does your neighborhood have that you and your community could tap into? What aspects of the Prescott ecohood could you imagine developing in your neighborhood? Is food grown in or near your neighborhood?
- What preparations for disaster has your neighborhood or region made? Who would you turn to for help in an emergency?

Can soap operas save the world?

South Africa was widely expected to descend into a bloodbath as the apartheid regime collapsed. The true reasons it did not have less to do with the widely reported actions of its leaders than with the grassroots peace committees that did the daily work of keeping the peace. That work had a lot to do with storytelling, which destroyed dehumanizing stereotypes that kept conflict going. The Search for Common Ground took the lessons learned in South Africa about storytelling to Macedonia and Burundi, using radio and television dramas to defuse conflict and rehumanize opponents.

- What conflicts have you been involved in that stories—about victims and villains, who started it and who didn’t—exacerbated? How might different stories have helped heal these conflicts?
- Have you ever experienced a time when a new story helped defuse a conflict? What was it about the story that reduced conflict?

The Great Turning as compass and lens

We are now in the midst of the third great revolution in human history, according to Joanna Macy. The late Neolithic era saw the agricultural revolution, the last two centuries saw the industrial revolution, and now we are experiencing a shift from an industrial-growth society to a life-sustaining society, what Macy calls the Great Turning. The term, she says, helps us lift our eyes from the many short-term problems we face and see the larger historical context. In this context we can recognize it as “the essential adventure of our time.”

- What signs of such a shift do you see in your own community?
- Macy says the Great Turning has three dimensions—efforts to slow down destruction caused by indus-



trial-growth, the emergence of alternatives, and a shift in consciousness. What experiences have you had that you believe are examples of shifts in these dimensions?

What are you doing?

Are you using this discussion guide as part of a discussion group? In a classroom? Please let us know how you use it and how we can improve it by e-mailing us at DiscussionGuides@yesmagazine.org. We're also looking for stories of what you're doing to change the world for the better. E-mail stories of up to 500 words to: Editors@yesmagazine.org. You can download additional copies of this guide at www.yesmagazine.org.

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