

at the door of 2012

A friend sent me the heartwarming story of the rescue team that helped a whale who had got entangled in a tightening web of crab traps on long lines. The team worked in and probably under the water cutting and unwinding the lines that had almost immobilized the whale, threatening to drown her. When she was finally freed she went around to each person, obviously thanking each and every one of them. I had read that moving story before, but it made me know again how wonderful we human beings can be. Selfless caring for animals in dire trouble.

Then, this morning when checking only a fraction of “news” I felt nauseous. Endless, endless reports of the horrors we humans are doing to the planet, to each other and so to ourselves of course. Killing, torture, injustice, persecution of religious and ethnic groups. Everywhere, even in this country. A whole segment of humans is acting so beyond normal that I think it must be a sickness; a contagious disease. The sick pay others to do their bidding and when jobs are hard to find some of us are forced to work for the crazies.

The split between the two kinds of behavior, maybe two kinds of human, has become extreme. Perhaps it is that split that is behind our worldwide anxiety. I sense it all around in most people I talk with. We all cannot help but feel a great danger threatening us in a near tomorrow.

What is it that threatens us? Undeclared wars, wars we are not told about; governments making war on their own people. Our expectations changed suddenly with the meltdown of economies all over the world. Money buying not just arms but political power. A rapidly growing inequality of wealth. A greater inequality of health and wellness. Perversion of the Old Testament “an eye for an eye” into *a million eyes for one eye*. Even the weather has become extreme. More droughts, more floods, more super storms, glaciers and polar ice melting faster than they predicted just a year ago. The world ocean without fish, getting more acid. Famous, reputable, scientists who changed a virus known to have killed 50% of people who got it, but which was not easily spread from person to person. The scientists were able to make it *more* contagious.

Why would anyone even have the thought to make a virus more deadly? Why would any scientist invent a more lethal weapon? Why did a group of Nobel Prize winning scientists create nuclear weapons? Why would psychologists study and “improve” torture? Those should be unthinkable thoughts. Misuse of what we are told are our superior brains.

All that has been on my mind for many years. We humans demonstrated that we were smart adapters to new environments when we spread around the planet —as I read in one book *no more than 20,000 generations ago*. We were able to adjust to different diets, different climates, altitudes. But for the last few thousand years of our $\pm 150,000$ year on this planet we have used our brains indiscriminately for ever more lethal and destructive machines and so created an unsustainable world. I read the word *unsustainable* is a scary word for some Americans; I am told not to use it. What else can I use for a way of life that is enormously wasteful and unable to be maintained much longer?

We may be the 99% of this country but we are among the 10% of all seven billion. It is we who are responsible for more than half of the pollution of the air, water and soil that is making the globe warmer. The bottom one billion of

us live in unimaginable poverty, hunger, thirst, and danger.

I cannot know what those utterly poor humans think. Could they be thinking of us; why we are not helping them? But I know how most of the rest of us think. We cannot face a future that seems dark and dangerous, so we put it out of our minds. I know the urge to skip the “news.” But I need to know what to expect so that I won’t be too surprised when it happens. There are many futures that need no thinking at all, they are too gruesome to imagine. But danger I can manage; I’ve done it all my life.

In a few words, one future that is quite alive for me is this. There will be a breakdown of systems, a meltdown, a worldwide catastrophe. I waste no time thinking what might start it. But that catastrophe will wake many of us up to the real world that we have hidden behind our technology, our industries, our corporations. We hide behind our gadgets, our artificial world.

The real world is Life, trees and plants and wild animals — and a few tame ones — animals and plants not for us to eat but for themselves. Reality is the weather, sunshine, rain, thunder and lightning. volcanoes. waves. Some of us, maybe many of us, will rediscover that reality and what I like to think is *remembering* how to live in that wild world. And from that beginning a new humankind will be born. I see a world with small communities of neighbors, people who know each other, have to deal with each other and rediscover how to. I don’t see governments, or nations, or armies, or politics, or even science if science is inventing weapons of mass destruction. I see a world with humans who share and care. As we were ten thousand years ago. I don’t see what we call “modern agriculture,” much too destructive of the environment, too chemical. I see small plots behind simple dwellings. Probably a commons. Villages where animals are part of the scene. Romantic, you may think; to me it’s down to earth — and sustainable..

But we’re not there yet. In fact we drift farther and farther away from such a world. It seems we have to go through the purging.

In school I learned that animals and people have two basic modes of responding to danger: fight or flight. Too simple of course. There are other ways animals and humans deal with perceived danger. Hiding, for instance. Being invisible is very effective. Many animals are colored or striped to be invisible in their particular environment. A camouflaged animal becomes invisible if not a muscle twitches, its eyes almost shut. Tigers are very good at disappearing from sight in the blink of an eye. I was taught to be as invisible as possible when I lived in occupied Netherlands. How to not draw attention, look as if I were background. It is something one can learn.

We, modern humans, have what is called a big footprint. Wherever we are it is very evident that there are humans. We leave very visible tracks. We make roads, we change the landscape. The aborigines I knew changed almost nothing. The huts they made looked old and abandoned when they were new. In the jungle they have the skill to merge into the background. Nothing shows there is a human there, no bright artificial colors, no sound of voice or machine. They had a very small footprint. That’s how they survived well into the 20th century in the jungles of a modern country. Of course that jungle is now gone.

The kind of hiding many people do today is denying there is danger. They hide behind ignorance, they don’t want to know; or deny that anything is different from what it was yesterday. That kind of hiding is not effective,

probably the opposite. It is not a smart response to real danger. Denial, pretending that the danger does not exist, or that the danger is minimal, never works. Today's danger is very real. It is about survival of our kind.

In my life I learned that the best way to deal with fear, the threat of danger, is to accept that the danger exists and then face the danger straight on. I need to know what the danger is, what it is capable of doing to me and my kind. I learned that in the five years I lived under German Occupation in WWII. The threat to me and to all of us was very real; the various armies of the Occupation were ruthless. Knowing what the real danger was helped me survive several times.

Later I found a mantra in a book that says it concisely. *The Litany of Fear*, Bene Geserit rite, in *DUNE*, by Frank Herbert, © 1965:

I must not fear.
Fear is the mind-killer.
Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration.
I will face my fear.
I will permit it to pass over me and through me.
And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path.
Where the fear has gone there will be nothing.
Only I will remain.

For me that worked; it works again now. There is very real danger today, the planet is changing and the powers that be have determined that they are going to grab what they can as long as they can. The threats to your life, as well as our survival as a species are real. Threats make us fear. Fear disables. I cannot afford to be disabled. So I must learn not to fear, and that can be done by knowing the danger and what it can do.

Without fear, when I am attacked, or find myself in danger, I won't be surprised into doing something stupid. During the Occupation I was in mortal danger many times. I survived by immediately knowing what the only escape might be and following that intuition. It worked.

One example. We had a curfew almost the entire five years of the Occupation. We were not allowed outside, on the streets, between sunset and sunrise. Very early the German High Command had been able to convince many Jewish people to register as Jews, "for their own protection." When they had names and addresses they began to pick these registered Jewish people up very early in the morning. I learned that around four or five in the morning, in the dark, long lines of Jewish people who had been gathered literally from their beds would be walking to the gathering place, the headquarters of the Gestapo in Amsterdam (Gestapo, "secret police," the most feared of the three or four branches of the militarized Occupation). I would go out very early morning, walked beside these lines of people, some in pajamas, barefoot, a raincoat. I had a note pad and took messages. "Call my cousin at this number, tell her there is money under the flowerpot in the living room." "My daughter lives at this address, tell them to leave immediately." One day, when my little notebook was almost full, a car with German officers drove up behind me, picked me up, and dropped me at the back door of the Gestapo Headquarters. The building had been a school, in the middle of an open space where five streets came together. The school was almost round, two thirds building, the rest a play

ground with a high wall curving around. The door I was shoved through opened on the play ground where I found myself in a crowd of Jewish people. Eerily silent. Their fear was palpable, a physical reality. I knew immediately that I could not stay because once the Gestapo would begin to ship the people to a camp they would not ask questions. I could not climb the brick wall, more than 10 ft high. The only way out was through the building. I worked my way to the only door I saw, walked inside. Curved halls, no people. Tried to orient myself to where another exit might be. Three men in uniform found me. Barked at me, *Who are you, what are you doing here?* I said—in my best German—*I'm looking for Lieutenant Hansen; at the front they told me he was in the back.* I have no idea where that name came from. More barking, they pulled me by my arm to the front entrance. The main door to the building was open, on the left another uniformed man just sitting down behind a desk. A few other uniforms stood around. They all seemed in a jolly mood. When the three men holding me entered, one of them said, *"This man says he is looking for Lieutenant Hansen."* One of the men standing around burst out laughing, *"Hansen just left, going home!"* Everybody chiming in, *Lucky devil. We are stuck here in this rat hole, and he goes home to his wife. Wish I had my wife here.* The three men who had held me let go, joined the fun and I walked out the front door.

I could not help any of the people so obviously terrified of what would happen to them. I made it one of my priorities to help others.

I must have a guardian angel. I escaped three or four other times from other, very different, dangers. But I also know that I never panicked or froze. Danger made me hyper aware. I think because I had faced fear before and dealt with it.

And I trusted my intuition. I call it intuition or 'knowing'. Like when the phone rings and you know who is calling. Or you have hunches. I've always accepted them gratefully. They saved my life more than once. Modern people don't allow intuition. Too bad, it is often useful. One of the many talents we have thrown away when we made so-called civilization; when we were tamed.

Another of those talents we had when we were wild humans was adapting to all kinds of previously unknown environments. I think of that kind of adapting as a martial art: using the energy of the opponent by not resisting but going with the thrust. Humans learned to live in snow and ice by making use of the frozen snow to make a cozy shelter. We learned to live on small islands where nothing much grows except coconut palms and sweet potatoes by getting our protein from the lagoon, adjusting our diet to what we found. We were able to do that in deserts and jungles, at high altitude, in cold climates and hot.

Until, 10,000 years ago, some man had the arrogant idea to conquer his environment I am certain he was a man, no woman could have imagined that. This man thought he need not look for food where it grows, but he would plant it where it was convenient for him. He marked off a plot of land and learned to make wheat or barley grow more grain per plant. Instead of building the kind of shelter his kind had made he decided he must have a more permanent place to live. He thought of complicated ways to make a house. All inventions after that have that complexity. We have almost totally forgotten how to find food and shelter where it is.

Somehow this first man, and then his friends, began to think that manmade things were better than things what had always been free. One thing led to another and ten thousand years later, here we are. Living so enormously beyond our means that we are endangering not only all other life, the planet,

and our own survival. Clever we may be, but smart we're not; not any more at least. We have lost the ability to consider consequences, we're addicted to our own imaginations. We chose to abandon being wild humans living in and as apart of nature. We tamed ourselves. What we, modern humans, consider reality is no longer connected to the planet. We think of the planet as a thing, something we own and can do with what we want.

Now the planet is talking back and we are like the proverbial frog in a pan of water being heated. As the water heats the frog feels nice and warm unsuspecting that he cannot survive boiling water.

From this world of extreme asymmetries we are about to enter 2012. The sophisticated Mayan calendar is ending at the december solstice of 2012. The end of an epoch. From what I hear and read about what is happening all over the planet it seems fitting. All the grand ideas we had about everything are getting so grand that they no longer fit the narrow reality of now. Our obsessions and addictions are strangling our souls. Our expectations have gone off the rails we so carefully laid out. Our violence has broken all bounds. We are so confused by misinformation and outright deceit that we have lost our footing. We need to rethink our thinking.

A short interruption. The military just announced they are getting off oil in Afghanistan; they can no longer afford it. They are going for portable solar panels. Adding in a gruff voice that "of course that does not make us environmentalists. Just a practical thing to do." Maybe not changing their thinking about larger concerns, just more affordable. Hmm.

No, we don't own this planet. We cannot think only of ourselves, we are not apart from all other life. We can survive only if we never again act without considering all consequences of our actions. The reality of this planet cannot tolerate extreme inequalities. We must, we will, relearn humility. Caring and sharing as we did for thousands of years.

The pot is hot, the frog unconscious.

Don't ask me what to do. The only thing I know is that we are at a dead end. We have been fooled into thinking answers must come from experts, scientists, politicians. Our priority is to survive; scientists dig deeper in details, experts are expert at more everything. We must adapt to less, less of everything. Yes, food on the table, but not a seven course meal when our neighbors starve.

Wish we could skip 2012. A whole year of electioneering, a whole year of screaming falsehoods and innuendoes, the Media raking in the dough.

Maybe we can start picking ourselves up *now*, thinking new thoughts. A new epoch always grows from the ground up. Our future must begin with consideration of the Earth and how we relate to her. Save the planet and we save ourselves.