

Change the world, start with yourself first...part 2

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When we learn to use our special human equipment, our 'consciousness', we can learn to deal with the so-called marathon of changes that was accelerated by COVID-19, and which we will be dealing with for some time to come. Just like in a real marathon, you can train behavioral change, day after day and week after week. By consciously asking the question who you want to be in a world that is changing rapidly, and by asking yourself what is required for that. What is required from you, and what is required from us together? How do we recreate the world together?

Norms, values and an old shared story

On a collective level, the beliefs and values of a group of individuals make up their culture, their shared story. And because nothing and no one can find meaning by themselves, people become insecure and afraid when a clear shared story is missing or falls away. We develop meaning to life together, because we are all only human in relation to one another; we deeply need to tell our stories and test their validity in relation to the world and people around us. This allows us to shape and internalize our stories. By now, it has become clear to many of us that the collective narrative of infinite growth is a questionable tale. The outbreak of the corona virus and the measures worldwide have exposed the unsustainability of capitalism and other flaws in our man-made systems, perhaps more fully and painfully than ever before. After all, this crisis touched each and every one of us. Many of us could testify to how the sky seemed more blue than ever, and how we increasingly experienced the peace and quiet of nature on our daily walks. With this growing collective awareness of the unsustainability of the neoliberal capitalist narrative, a broader dialogue in society has been triggered. This dialogue centers around what behavior, both individual and collective, has caused the great imbalances in our global societies that are ever more visible today. This in turn has created space for a dialogue on the deeper values that underlie the neoliberal capitalist story promulgated by western societies. Values such as competition, control and individualism that have led to gigantic imbalances. The balance between man and nature has been lost. The same applies for the balance between people and the balance within each of us. The neoliberal story has shown cracks for quite a long time and now appeared quite useless in 'controlling' the outbreak of the corona virus. The values underlying this story need to be seriously questioned, as they are showing to be wholly inadequate in dealing with the virus in a satisfactory manner. As it turns out, the same values and the relentless focus on growth and control make us equally powerless in the face of the consequences of the global climate crisis.

Universal values

Because the virus is still around and there is no prospect of a return to our old world, returning to our old realities is impossible. At the same time there is still little clarity about the new reality. Being in this liminal space, this space in between the old and the new

world, is incredibly difficult. Because, although the cracks in the old story are clearly visible and it is slowly starting to dawn on us that we cannot continue as we always have, writing a new story is hard. This is even more so when the ingredients of this new story still seem far away, abstract, unclear or even disputed. Furthermore, within the chaos there seem to be little or no visible signs of a 'happy' ending.

After some breathing space and therefore relaxation in which we almost imagined to be back in 'the old days', the summer is now almost over. 'Normal' life is picking up again and we still have no control over everything that happens around us. Where the period up to the summer holidays felt like an eternity, the uncertainty persists after this summer period. Moreover, unambiguous stories about corona infections are missing, new measures are being devised, announced and then withdrawn again. And increasingly, our society is polarizing around the corona crisis and the measures related to it on a whole range of other themes such as our healthcare system, the damage to our climate and the many people who feel misled and treated unjustly by our public institutions, on a variety of topics. How inclusive and just are our systems really? How sustainable do our companies operate? And if not, are they paying the price for their failure to act responsibly?

For many of us, the desire to write a new story is growing. A story that can guide us. A story in which other, more sustainable, principles and values can have their place. A story that we 'know' deep down is true: simply because it is a story that is based on deeply universal values such as love, justice and inclusivity. People worldwide have experienced these universal principles during the lockdowns. We need a new story. A story based on these values that can offer hopeful perspectives of our future. A story that contributes to restoring our balance with nature, and with ourselves and each other. After all, from the Netherlands to Bolivia, human beings are intensely happy when a child is born, mourn the loss of beloved friends in similar ways and are massively shocked by horrific human suffering, such as deep poverty and natural disasters creating havoc. For these new stories, more knowledge or evidence is not necessarily needed: individual building blocks and 'blueprints' from think tanks and experts, that include wisdom from indigenous cultures, experience within local communities and green technologies for shaping a society based on justice, love and inclusivity are widely available today. Fortunately. However, what is still largely missing and seems essential is connection with others, trust in ourselves and each other, and the courage to start creating that better world together. After all, each of us can only human be in relation to another person (Ubuntu). Instead of stories that are far away, abstract and general, we need concrete stories that touch our hearts and souls. Stories that touch our hearts because of their beauty and evil, around us and within each of us. We need to be touched by both love and fear. May our hearts and souls be stirred so that we develop the courage to write a new, hopeful story in dialogue and connection with each other.

On the threshold of a new era

As said before, the writing of this new story is not easy. First of all, it is hard because we lost firm ground under our feet and many of us experience the world around us as one big chaos today. On top of that, it is not easy to write a new story together since it requires a different mind-set. It requires a mind-set that allows us to have honest conversations and to listen to each other deeply. And, in a society where the law of the strongest often applies

and group-think is common place, truly listening to everyone's individual sound (often very different perspectives than your own) is the exception rather than the rule. Today's focus on online 'conversations' also makes many conversations less nuanced, and not knowing the person on the other side of the screen makes it even less personal. Regardless of all that, the power of true authentic encounters, physical and virtual, can be so enormous. Wanting to know and respect the other person, and his/her perspective, play a crucial role in searching and finding common ground and developing solutions. However, when adding the feelings of anxiety that are so characteristic to the collective trauma caused by the corona virus outbreak to the aforementioned complicating factors, we quickly realize that untangling facts from emotions and attribute meaning to someone's words is not at all easy. The lack of clarity in the information and stories about the corona virus and Covid-19, and about other 'hot' topics, further complicate the emergence of a new story. And yet, instead of fighting each other in the (online) media and beyond, we can ask ourselves what role we can each play in having conversations about the, oftentimes missing, facts and our divergent interpretations. Conversations where we can focus on questions such as: What facts are available? How are these facts substantiated? Which things are still uncertain, and what information is missing? What different interpretations and opinions do we as citizens, politicians and experts give to those known and missing facts/information? And how do we bring all these different facts and perspectives together in a new story that does add up? Or perhaps multiple new stories.

If we really want to, we can have conversations about the facts and the questions that remain as well as about our different interpretations. And we can even do this without feeling the need to dismiss the other person as an idiot or conspiracy theorist. No matter how threatening a different view of the world may seem or feel, instead of automatically acting on our emotions, we can use them as a warning signal and choose to reflect for a moment. And, after recognizing our own emotion we can let it go and instead have real conversations with each other. And through those conversations, we will likely realize that many of us have questions. And that a lot of things are still uncertain and that there are many perspectives that each offer additional views on the facts and circumstances. Do we dare to have these authentic conversations, and build true connection? Do we dare to listen to each other's stories and open ourselves up to different perspectives? After all, we all love and protect that which we know, and vice versa.

A new shared story

In order to have honest open conversations whereby we postpone our judgment and conclusions, perhaps we need to dare to doubt. Furthermore, it takes courage to openly share your doubts about your opinion, beliefs or feelings, and even more courage and willingness to adjust any of these. In a world where manipulability and control are ingrained in the system, and making mistakes seems to have become virtually unforgivable, this individual willingness, the courage to dare to be vulnerable and to listen to each other, is far from self-evident. Nevertheless, our human history has proven time and time again that it is well possible: the civil rights movement in America provides an example, as does the abolition of the Apartheid in South Africa. Our individual capacity for change allows us to face the fact that the collective story that we are a part of is coming to an end. Now that the systemic malfunctioning has been painfully exposed and people around the world are calling for change and greater balance, we can start our collective search and write a new

collective story. Together. Perhaps the time has come to do just that? After all, we have collectively had a brief insight into how things can be done differently: a world in which we experience more peace, balance and attention in our daily activities. A world in which we can use technology for the benefit of people, and in which attention and compassion for yourself and others is the rule instead of the exception. Once we realize that it is up to us to make this choice, day after day and week after week, then we can, by trial and error, courageously examine our own behavior. We can recognize outdated ways of being and acting, learn to forgive ourselves and each other for previous choices that have proven untenable with the passage of time. And together we can stumble forward in a new direction that gives greater hope. After all, why would you fly on autopilot when you can fly yourself?