

ONE WORLD  
By Michael A. Schuler  
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GLEANINGS FROM CONTEMPORARY WISDOM

From David Korten's *The Great Turning*

Earth community...features a drive for what Riane Eisler calls "partnership power," the power to create, share and nurture. It organizes through consensual decision making, mutual accountability and individual responsibility. Its focus is on cultivating mutual trust, caring, competence and an equitable distribution of power and resources. This is more fulfilling, more efficient and ultimately more human. In addition, it allows for a massive re-allocation of the available human surplus away from maintaining hierarchies of domination to the work of improving the lives of all.

The Golden Rule of Earth Community is "Do unto your neighbor as you would have your neighbor do unto you as you work together to create a better life for all." Service, compassion and cooperation are valued as essential social goods and considered a measure of healthy maturity. If each individual has the opportunity to experience the intrinsic rewards that come from responsible service and share in the benefits of the growing generative power of the whole, then trust, compassion and cooperation become self-reinforcing...

In Earth Community, violence and competition for dominator power are considered irrational, because they destroy the cooperative nurturing relationships essential to the welfare of the individual and society. It becomes self-evident that such behaviors are morally wrong because they are destructive of life. Through their daily experience people learn that meaning and purpose are found in equitably sharing power and resources to explore life's creative possibilities in ways that secure the well-being of all.

The cultural principles of Earth Community affirm the spiritual unity and interconnectedness of Creation. They favor respect for all beings, nonviolence, service to community and the stewardship of common resources for the benefit of generations to come.

The economic principles of Earth Community affirm the basic right of every person to a means of livelihood and the responsibility of each person to live in a balanced

relationship with their place on Earth without expropriating the resources of others. They favor local control, self-reliance and mutually beneficial trade and sharing.

The political principles of Earth Community affirm the inherent worth and potential of all individuals and their right to a voice in the decisions that shape their lives, thereby favoring inclusive citizen engagement, cooperative problem solving and restorative justice.

\*\* REFLECTIONS \*\*

From a purely physical standpoint, the planet we inhabit is round or spheroid. But according to **Thomas Friedman**, from another perspective it is becoming increasingly flat. This flattening is the result, **Friedman** argues, of a surge in technological innovation that has produced features we are all familiar with: the Internet, the World-Wide Web, commercial practices that include outsourcing, supply-chaining, the electronic transfer of capital, to name just a few.

These developments have, in turn, produced a shift in people's outlook and their expectations. Parochialism and provincialism are rapidly giving way as people begin to develop a more global perspective. Local customs, religion and nationalistic sentiments are no longer the most relevant forces affecting how people think and what they value. Instead, we are becoming more and more the products of powerful, pervasive technologies. The global trends **Friedman** identifies are leading humankind into a highly integrated, interconnected brave new world.

**Friedman** is, on the whole, enthusiastic about this trend and generally optimistic as he looks toward the future. "In a flat world," he writes, "you can innovate without having to emigrate..."

It's a "plug-and-play world...and the scale of the global community that is soon going to be able to participate in all sorts of discovery and innovation is something the world has simply never seen before.

If we accept this assessment, it appears that the Sixth Principle of Unitarian Universalism - "the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all" - is on the horizon. **Rajesh**, an young man from Bangalore, India who develops computer games for the international market describes his own experience of this new reality:

It's not about ruling anybody... It's about how you can create a great opportunity for yourself...so that you can thrive.

The only problem with this scenario is that, so far at least, it has improved the lives of relatively few people. Indeed, it could be argued that the process of "flattening" has created as much, if not more pain than gain. A great deal has been written about the rapid growth of high-tech services and industries in India, yet as **Friedman** himself admits, only one Indian in 500 works in that field. A meager 2% of India's population is employed in any form of manufacturing for export. The 700 million who have been left behind, **Friedman** writes, "see only gloom and darkness and despair."

Sobering comments such as this are rare in **Thomas Friedman's** writing and he devotes most of his book *The World Is Flat* to describing the new generation of well-educated tech-savvy go-getters known as "Zippies" -- ambitious, aspiring young adults with "zip" in their stride. These are the fortunate folk living in places like Bangalore, Shanghai and Bangkok who have successfully made the transition to a flat world. For the vast majority, however, the world is still very much round, and to appreciate their situation more fully we must turn elsewhere.

According to **Mike Davis**, an alarming number of our fellow humans inhabit "a planet of slums." According to the United Nations, each and every week more than 1.3 million people abandon their traditional lives in the countryside and move to an urban area -- typically to a slum. For instance, in the oil-rich nation of Nigeria, 70 million people now dwell in a contiguous collection of shantytowns - the largest footprint of urban poverty in the entire world. They enjoy few amenities and have virtually no future prospects. In Africa as a whole, the U.N. says, 40% of slum dwellers live in conditions that are literally life-threatening.

**Matthew Power** has visited the "garbage slums" outside of Manila in the Philippines where tens of thousands of migrants from the countryside eke out a living scavenging the vast mountains of refuse trucked in from the center-cities. This is by no means a solely Filipino phenomenon. More than a billion people worldwide have been reduced to scavenging. "Household and industrial trash," **Power** writes,

Has become for the world's poor a more viable source of sustenance than the agriculture and husbandry that had supported civilization since the first cities sprang up in the Fertile Crescent.

Incidentally, for the first time in history more human beings now live in urban areas than in the countryside. By contrast, just two hundred years ago 3% of the world's population was city-dwellers.

**Matthew Power** has also spent time in India, among those who "have fallen beneath the wheels of economic progress." Here the absence of a social safety net is so total that millions of the chronically ill and physically handicapped have been reduced to begging for their survival.

Back out in the Indian countryside, those who find employment on the large farms that grow cashews, tea and other export crops suffer from exposure to toxic pesticides and herbicides - substances subject to rigorous controls in our own country. The World Health Organization estimates that 3 million third-world agricultural workers suffer from the effects of pesticide poisoning each year.

The "flattening" of our world has also had an untoward effect on countries not typically associated with economic hardship. In Turkey, **Christopher de Bellaigue** reports, small farmers have gone under and thousands of small shops have closed as new supermarkets and U.S.-style malls have opened. Throughout the country, rural communities and cultures are disintegrating.

Overall, then, we appear to be no closer to a world community of peace, liberty and justice than we were before **Thomas Friedman's** great "flattening" process began. While it is true that globalization has bolstered general economic indicators in many countries - wages up a few pennies and absolute poverty down a notch - these advances have largely been offset by rising food and energy prices, the drowning of local industry and agriculture by cheap imports, social welfare cutbacks, environmental degradation and resource depletion.

Regardless of what broad statistical measures like GDP have to say, the fruits of development have been allocated very unevenly. Productivity and trade grew at a record setting pace throughout the 1990's, creating the opportunity for widespread prosperity and social improvement. But huge numbers of people received little if any benefit. Why? Nobel prize-winning economist **Joseph Stiglitz** argues that globalism in its current form tilts

the rules against poor nations and the underprivileged while favoring multinational corporations, powerful investors and banks.

**Robert Solow**, another Nobel laureate, offers a similar insight. The primary problem with the current form of market-driven globalism is that it focuses on "gains in efficiency to the neglect of equity and distributional consequences." Financier **George Soros** agrees when he writes that:

Unobstructed markets are very efficient in allocating resources among competing private needs...but there are collective needs, such as maintaining peace and order, protecting the environment, and preserving the market mechanism itself, that are not taken care of by market forces.

These observations help to explain why the economic gap between the fortunate few and the rest of the world has widened significantly during a period of unprecedented economic expansion. Today 300,000 top Americans collectively have almost as much income as the bottom 150 million. Beyond our borders, the gap between rich and poor countries has also increased. Former Secretary of Labor **Robert Reich** offers this interesting comparison:

In the year 1800 Western Europe, North America and Oceania...had 12% of the world's population and an estimated 27% of the world's income. In the year 2000 they still had 12% of the population...but 45% of the income. During that same period, Africa went from 7% of the population and 9% of the income to 13% of the population and 4% of the income.

In other words, the way the world currently works makes the values we profess as Unitarian Universalists difficult to achieve. The free market is committed neither to democracy nor to equity. Gains in "efficiency" do not necessarily produce justice, ensuring that workers will enjoy the fruits of their labor or be granted political rights and civil liberties.

In fact, some features of a "flat world" - outsourcing and supply-chaining, for instance, may be antithetical to democracy and liberty. A democratic upheaval in China, **John Gray** notes, would jeopardize our own economic supply lines. The United States might then "find itself cooperating with Beijing hardliners to suppress the will of the Chinese people."

There are, of course, numerous worthy individuals and organizations committed to compensating for the biases built into the global economic system. George Soros is spending a fortune to promote open, democratic societies. The Gates Foundation has piloted sustainable development projects in Africa.

Among the organizations most effective at cushioning the impact of economic globalization are faith communities. It is they who provide the bulk of resources and relief in the world's burgeoning slums. Whether Christian or Muslim, religious organizations are often the only entities that reliably provide schooling, legal aid, medical care and other services for the urban poor. Why are organizations such as **Hamas** and **Hezbollah** supported by the Palestinians? Not so much for their militancy as for the necessary resources they provide in the absence of state or international support.

First Unitarian Society is also a faith community, so what can we, blessed to live in such privileged circumstances, do to advance our Sixth Principle?

First of all, we can educate ourselves about the issues, develop a clearer understanding of the political policies that have helped create such glaring inequality and cast our ballots accordingly. The wider we allow the gap between rich and poor to grow the less secure our world will become.

Just one example of how a single U.S. policy has contributed significantly to the problems I've described. According to **The New York Times**, ending government subsidies to producers of cotton, rice, corn, sugar and other commodities could conceivably lift 150 million people out of poverty. Why? Because American agribusiness has been dumping these products into Third World markets at bargain-basement prices, thus driving millions of small third-world farmers out of business and off their land. Our own tax dollars pay for these subsidies and thus contribute directly to destruction of indigenous farm economies.

Related to this issue is a second point: we can put our consumer dollars where they will make the most difference - in fair-trade commodities like coffee, chocolate, sugar, clothing and tea. And in particular, we can support businesses like Equal Exchange that help their agricultural partners develop a sustainable livelihood.

Third, we can reduce our own consumption footprint and urge others to do likewise. America, as **Jared Diamond** has pointed out, is an incredibly wasteful society and much of

what we consume contributes very little to our quality of life. By reducing our "wants" and eliminating waste, we can afford to make choices that are wiser for the world at large.

Fourth, we can "invest" in the world's future by supporting micro-finance ventures, subsidizing the education and health of a Third-world child, aligning ourselves with organizations like Wisconsin's own **Sand County Foundation** that teach farmers and ranchers abroad how to be both economically successful and environmentally sensitive.

Finally, we can further the mission of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, which sponsors grass-roots programs in countries like Kenya, Burkina Faso, India, Guatemala as well as the United States. Worker justice, a living wage, fair trade, water rights, and the protection of civil liberties are areas that UUSC currently emphasizes.

It's easy to get preoccupied with the problems we face right here in Madison. In a time of increasing economic insecurity it's tempting to stick to our own knitting and let the rest of the world take care of itself.

But thanks to technology, we now do belong to a vast, interconnected network. Slender threads connect us to the destinies of factory workers in China, cacao producers in Ivory Coast, oil workers in Nigeria. What we spend, how we vote, who we include in our circle of caring all matter and they matter a great deal. "We must take the whole world to be our ethical unit," **Peter Singer** urges, because in ethical terms "there is only one atmosphere, one economy, one law and one community."