

What Really Matters?

A Youth's Quest for Keys to Effecting Global Change

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We must be the change we wish to see in the world.

– Mohandas Gandhi



Who am I? How shall I serve?
Since I was 20 years old I've been trying to answer these questions. As part of this quest, I've struggled to understand our biggest global problems and sought ways that anyone can contribute to their resolution. This is the story of that search.

A scan of our global reality shows that we are clearly in massive trouble. From worldwide fiscal frailty to a robust arms trade; from vanishing species to devastated ecological resources; from decimated social and cultural support systems to uncharted territory in genetics, nano-technology and weapons design...we've got huge momentum moving in scary directions.

Six External Leverage Points for Global Change

What can any one person do which will make the largest beneficial difference on the planet? Where are the leverage points that, when pressed, will result in major positive changes? I've spent the last year informally researching answers to these questions. I interviewed some of the best minds I could find, including: Ken Wilber (*Theory of Everything*); Howard Bloom (*The Global Brain*); and Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and Hunter Lovins (*Natural Capitalism*). My initial results are below, but as I first listed them, I sensed something critical was missing...

- **Pay for the education and health care of a young woman in a developing country.** Population growth – and the educational level and health of our populations – is one of the largest factors in the well being of societies and the environment. Studies show that educated women have fewer, healthier and better educated children. \$10 a week, invested through one of several NGOs, empowers anyone to initiate a virtuous spiral of positive change in a child's life and future. Consider: www.childreach.org
- **Purchase electricity from renewable energy sources.** Nuclear and coal-based pollution is killing the environment and damaging public health. Any North American and most Europeans can pay a little extra for

electricity and guarantee that it comes from a renewable energy source. Consider: www.renewablechoice.com

- **Drive and fly less.** On average, every kilometer we drive puts approximately 0.25 kilograms of CO₂ into the atmosphere that will likely stay there for decades. (1 mile driven = 1 pound of CO₂ into the atmosphere). Flying is even more fuel intensive. Our carbon footprint will shrink rapidly if we consciously commute. Measure your carbon footprint: www.redefiningprogress.org
- **Become a social entrepreneur.** Capitalism – despite its widespread abuse and pathological expressions – is arguably the most powerful tool we have to achieving sustainability. Socially responsible entrepreneurship conscientiously leverages the mechanisms of healthy capitalism to address social needs while still making a profit. Check out: www.ashoka.org
- **Develop positive new memes.** Memes (units of cultural information) can flash through a population, catalyzing shifts in perspectives and actions. Corporate marketers and politicians spend millions developing them to propagate messages. Like capitalism, the science of memetics is often used for ignoble gains; but it's also a potent tool for beneficial change and we need to increasingly use it as such. Using inexpensive multi-media technology, a captivating and perspective-challenging audio-video presentation that is forwarded via e-mail can reach millions of people. For an example: www.miniature-earth.com
- **Nurture children.** Children today are savvier and more ecologically conscious than ever. The more we nurture their development, the faster they'll mature into integral consciousness. In order to confront the increasingly difficult challenges we face, our children will need to develop ways of thinking and responding that are more complex than ours. It's our responsibility to educate children's whole being and then allow them stand on our shoulders to go far beyond our own reach. Need ideas how? www.ecoliteracy.org

My Internal Struggle and Resolution

These were the top things I initially found that nearly anyone could do to positively influence our global community and the environment. But there was still something missing; I felt there had to be a deeper leverage point that would address the core causes of our misery and crises. I sought answers, read, questioned, listened and at times collapsed in frustration, sadness and exasperation. I was driven by a responsibility to leverage my skills to do something about the environmental and human horror occurring worldwide. At the same time, I questioned this whole process. I wondered: "Was I merely sold on 'saving the planet' as some convoluted way to build my self-esteem? Was I looking for respect or unconsciously playing for moral one-upmanship? Was this another dream that I naively thought would make me happy upon attainment?" I

decided that while I am naïve in some ways, my true motives are sourced from a deeper convergence of desire, opportunity and obligation to consciously respond to the challenges we face.

Over the years I had researched careers that I thought would make the biggest difference: from renewable energy engineering to transpersonal counseling psychology to becoming a diplomat or international development worker. I studied global social and environmental problems and recently traveled to the UN Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The more I looked at our scores of socio-economic, environmental and cultural crises - and their inextricable complexities - the more depressed and impotent I felt. I mused: "What's the use? There's no way out of this mess. If the UN with its billions of dollars can't figure this out, we're doomed. I might as well live out my life having a good time." But I couldn't choose that path; I couldn't forget all that I had seen, learned and felt...that wasn't an option anymore. I needed to understand where and how I fit into conscious solutions, not unconscious problems.

The Internal Leverage Point for Global Change

The most frustrating part of this process was realizing that we already have all of the resources we need to create a healthy world. Collectively, we have all the technology, money and brainpower necessary to address every global problem; we just don't consistently choose to use these forces for the greater good of the whole. We invest exponentially more energy in exploring what we *can* do with our money, brains and technology than what we *should* do. Why is this?

Ken Wilber (www.integralinstitute.org) pointed out that on a global scale, our exterior development (brain, organism, social systems and environment) is leagues ahead of our interior development (morals, consciousness, culture and worldview). Egocentric and ethnocentric forces dominate our high-tech, high-finance, super-intellectualized world. People anchored in these worldviews literally don't see the importance of taking care of humanity and the commons. Thus, the calamities we face aren't surprising. Even the UN seems overwhelmed by the confluence of increasingly complex global crises and some member states' lack of internal commitment/leadership to act in the interest of everyone. To successfully address global problems we therefore need leaders and citizens at the very highest levels of interior development; this will enable us to act from an integral perspective and not be overwhelmed by egocentric and ethnocentric motives.

In light of the internal limitations we face, I continued to wonder, how can any one person make a difference? I ultimately realized that the crucial, most influential path to positive world change isn't a career in international development, diplomacy or social entrepreneurship. *The crucial path is from the head to the heart.* I ardently feel that

the most valuable thing we can do to benefit the world is to develop ourselves internally. We need to do everything we can to move beyond egocentrism and ethnocentrism and into integral consciousness, where we hold worldcentric, even theocentric worldviews. Why? As we mature internally, we deepen the honor, respect and love we have for the people with whom we interact. We come to care for and want justice for *all* life; and we *act* accordingly. We also come to see the highest intrinsic value of *all* worldviews, accepting as valid those worldviews different than ours (instead of pitting ours against theirs) while simultaneously seeing a different relative value in each. Our honoring and fundamental validation of another's worldview also allows that person to more fully express and be who they authentically are. This in turn nurtures their own internal development. Finally...there is the power of our presence.

The Power of Presence

To inspire a shift in a person's worldview toward integral consciousness requires more than a fancy multi-media presentation, workshop, or logical explanation. The most catalytic factor is our *presence*, our unique physio-psychospiritual "way of being" in the world. As we are present with people, we learn from each other intellectually, emotionally and bodily. If there is a resonance between two people - in the form of respect, trust or love - one person's way of being can serve as a template for another, as in a mentor/student relationship. Our worldview is reflected in our presence and our internal development is profoundly influenced by the worldview and presence of the people with whom we interact. How many times have we taken to heart the words of someone we respect, and then made those words our own? How many times do we act and remember the person who first inspired us to see the world that way? Depending upon our level of internal development, our presence can be a catalytic influence or a destructive force. If others witness us acting egocentrically, we only serve to reinforce that worldview in them. If we demonstrate egocentric or ethnocentric values, our very presence propagates the very same forces which are creating many of our global and local problems. If instead we are anchored in a worldcentric or theocentric worldview and *then* we communicate with people in a way that respects and reflects their deepest values, *that's* when we have the greatest potential to genuinely impact them and catalyze transformation.

What have I really learned in this quest? While there are powerful external ways anyone can make a difference in the world, we need to *also* invest attention and energy in our own internal development. When we take the reins of our internal development, we begin to trigger the fundamental changes necessary to handle our personal and global crises. Gandhi had it right. To truly transform the divisions and politics which run riot and fragment our world, we must first *be* that very change we desire.