

The Friendly Word

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The Friendly Word

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Five things the ordinary person can do to help the environment

Féidhlim Harty, Limerick Meeting

Summary of a talk given in Limerick Meeting House, September 2018.

For the recent Western Regional Monthly Meeting in Limerick I was asked to give a talk on “five things the ordinary person can do to help the environment”. It would have been nice to have been able to just say things like; drive less, fly less, walk and cycle more, buy organic and get an ethical pension fund. However given the scale and breadth of the challenges we are facing, the solutions need to be similarly broad and thorough. I believe that if we adopt the five things that follow in our daily lives we could do a 180° turn and begin the process of reversing from our current trajectory of environmental and social collapse.

1 – Make Careful Choices. There is a story in the North American tradition of two wolves. One is mean and aggressive; greedy and fearful. The other is gentle and nurturing; generous and protective. They battle forever within us for supremacy over our hearts and minds. Which one wins? The one you feed. So too in the world about us, we often feed the companies and institutions that sow the seeds of violence and war; distrust and fear; climate change and biodiversity loss.

Our choices are like votes for how we want the world to be. Whenever we buy chemically grown (standard) fruit, veg or meat we essentially vote for agrochemical industries that put neonicotinoids, Roundup and artificial fertilisers on our food. Bee deaths, cancer, soil erosion and climate change are the result. By choosing with care the products and services we use, we can instead support and nurture farmers’ markets, organic production methods that can support wildlife, and build carbon in our soils as rich compost. In other areas of our lives we can choose ethical pensions to keep our money out of fossil fuels and war, natural clothing instead of generating micro-plastics in the sea from nylon clothes, zero waste shops and repair cafes to reduce resource use and also reduce waste.

The havoc being wreaked upon the world is increasingly being carried out by an ever smaller number of principle antagonists. Whether it is food production, household cleaners, alcohol, car manufacture or oil and gas, the top handful of companies control the market and how it operates. When profit is pursued in the absence of ethical checks and balances, trouble inevitably occurs. Large and all as these companies may be, we can simply starve them of the funds they need to do the damage they do. At the same time, we can choose instead the methods of production, agriculture and manufacture that will build a safer, saner future.

2 – Practice Voluntary Simplicity. Changing our purchasing from bad to good is an excellent and important step to meet our day to day needs – but at present we also use too much stuff in general. Yes, the compostable coffee cups are better than plastic cups made of gas fracked in some unfortunate community; but disposable cups of any sort are simply unsustainable on the scale we are using them and using everything else. We literally cannot sustain such a wasteful use of energy and resources on an ongoing basis. Our climate, wildlife, oceans, health and wellbeing are all at breaking point under the strain.

If we simply move over from oil and gas for making plastics to plant based bioplastics, without wholesale reductions of use, we'll still impoverish vast swathes of the Earth and its people to grow the feedstock for essentially useless stuff. We must relearn the local art of reuse. Whether that's our wicker vegetable basket at the market, refilling our milk bottles from a local farmer or reusing a plastic box when buying meat or fish.

We must remember Gandhi's call to live simply, that others may simply live. Do less and buy less – and the flip-side: work less and earn less, providing more time for family, friends, contemplation and creating a fulfilling life.

3 – Speak Truth to Power. Friends have a long tradition of facing those in power with the consequences of their actions. From the early work to abolish slavery, to Quaker presence at the arms trade show in Paris, we have quietly and firmly spoken our truth. Advocacy for positive change can also come in the form of letters to governments and companies; taking to the streets when called to do so; or adding our name to online petitions from groups like Avaaz.com and Uplift.ie.

Advocacy works. It has changed many things for many people - particularly minorities or marginalised groups - over the past 100 years and more. It can work now. But is it necessary? Can't we just take care of our own lives and our own choices and leave it at that? Well, yes we can do that – but while government policy adds VAT to train fares and offers VAT-free status to flights, our efforts to reduce fossil fuel use in transport will always be stymied by tax-payer funded

incentives to do the wrong thing. By drawing the connection that these types of policies directly support the oil wars in the Middle East, we apply pressure on politicians to do the right thing instead of the usual thing.

By advocating for Cap Global Carbon, Cap and Share, The Financial Transaction (Robin Hood) Tax, Universal Basic Income and other structural changes, we could greatly speed up the positive changes that are being made and make it through the narrow gap into a brighter future.

4 – Hold Hands and Connect with Other People. We are social animals. We often achieve most when we work together. The current global market and the myriad of structures that keep it rolling along are a phenomenal testament to the cooperation of the human spirit. Unfortunately it is currently steering us in the direction of collective disaster. But we can rewire our connections for a better future.

We can surround ourselves with people, conversations and stories of constructive change; of possibility; of solutions. We can steep our minds in independent news sources such as the newsletters of groups like the Irish Environmental Network, Friends' interest groups, Positive News and the like. Some newspapers such as the Guardian have removed internet paywalls and are seeking ways to generate revenue from sources other than advertising in order to keep their content and reporting more independent of corporate interests.

We can hold hands with suppliers who sell recycled office products, organic produce, second hand furniture, bicycles, books, cars etc. We can build social events around experiences rather than stuff; being rather than buying.

Peer pressure is used in advertising to sell too much of what we don't need. Let's steep ourselves in kinder, more constructive company and conversations instead. When we inform ourselves and others and talk about the consequences of our actions we can support the choices we make in our lives and gently help others to do the same. Really, if given an informed choice between disposal plastic anything and a planet that is safe, biodiverse and peaceful, most people will do without the plastic.

5 – Hold the Vision. Research is clear that if prayer was patentable, it would have been bottled and sold long ago. Creative visualisation is a powerful force. This is so effective that young cancer patients can get video games in which they zap the cancer cells and thus heighten their capacity to visualise a clear, healthy body. By holding a good clear vision of our desired outcome, success is much more likely. Any top athlete will concur. Training the mind is a crucial part of the work needed.

Holding a positive vision feels good, and is vastly different from denial, by the way. Sometimes it feels as if we will need a miracle to carry us through the challenges ahead. The fear can be debilitating, but miracles happen all the time. In conventional medicine they're called spontaneous remissions. We need one of those for the planet and for our whole society. Miracles are not necessarily random events either. They can be encouraged and cultivated – we can cultivate the fertile soils of our imaginations and together we can dream a new world into being.

So, with these five things and some knowledge about how to put them into action, together we *can* make the changes we need. We *can* create a beautiful, bountiful, equitable and peaceful world. Friends, let's make it so.

Death:

HALLIDAY, A. Leo (born in Dublin to Stanley McC. and E. Kathleen Halliday (née Douglas) - October 15, 2018. Greatly missed and lovingly remembered by his darling wife Eileen (née Monks) and dear children Paul and Orla, his brother Denis, grandchildren Aiden, Jasmine and Niamh, children-in-law Nichole and Vincent, brother-in-law Cathal O' Neill, sisters-in-law Ann Moore and Lena Hartono, and his extended family and friends worldwide. Leo will repose in the Chapel of Rest, Ballyconneely, Connemara, today (Friday) from 1pm until 2pm followed by burial in Ballyconneely Cemetery. Family flowers only please. Donations in lieu to Galway Hospice or the Irish Cancer Society. "Until we all meet again"

Yearly Meeting 2019

Will be held in the
High School
Rathgar
Dublin 6
From
25th. - 28th. April