Choosing a New Lifeway:
Voluntary Simplicity

(From the book *Promise Ahead*)

The price of anything is
the amount of life that you have to pay for it.
--Henry Thoreau

Too many people spend money they haven't earned,
to buy things they don't want,
to impress people they don't like.
--Will Rogers

A Quiet Revolution

The second opportunity trend that can make an enormous contribution to an evolutionary bounce is a voluntary shift toward more sustainable and satisfying ways of living. This is a promising development for, in order to meet the coming evolutionary challenges successfully, I believe that we will need to make major changes in every aspect of our lives—including the transportation we use, the food that we eat, the homes and communities we live in, the work that we do, and the education that we provide. Although it is appealing to think that marginal measures such as intensified recycling and more fuel efficient cars will take care of things, they will not. We need to make sweeping changes—both externally and

within ourselves. A sustainable future will demand far more than a surface change to a different *style* of life—it requires a deep change to a new *way* of life.

Is it realistic to think that a new way of life could emerge? The American Dream is founded on the premise that the more you consume, the happier and more satisfied you will be. But decades of social science research reveal that, except for the very poor, our level of income has no significant effect on our level of satisfaction with life. As soon as we reach a comfortable level of income, the correlation between income and happiness diminishes dramatically.[1] Studies of entire nations reveal a similar pattern. For example, in the United States, while per-capita disposable income (adjusted for inflation) doubled between 1960 and 1990, the percentage of Americans reporting they were "very happy" remained essentially the same (35 percent in 1957 and 32 percent in 1993).[2]

In an article in the *New York Times* on the high price of the pursuit of affluence, Alfie Kohn says that researchers have amassed significant evidence that "satisfaction simply is not for sale."[3] In fact, Kohn says that "people for whom affluence is a priority in life tend to experience an unusual degree of anxiety and depression as well as a lower overall level of well-being." The single-minded pursuit of affluence actually reduces people's sense of well-being and satisfaction. This is the dark side of the dream of getting rich, and it seems to hold true regardless of age, level of income, or culture. Researchers have also found that "pursuing goals that reflect genuine human needs, like wanting to feel connected to others, turns out to be more psychologically beneficial than spending one's life trying to impress others." Lily Tomlin seems to be right when she says, "the trouble with being in the rat race is that even if you win, you're still a rat."

Are people waking up to another way of life, focused not on the pursuit of affluence, but on close and caring relationships, a rich inner life, and creative contributions to the world? Is there a new way of life emerging that pulls back

from materialism not out of sacrifice but in an attempt to find authentic and lasting sources of satisfaction and meaning?

Amid a frenzy of conspicuous consumption, an inconspicuous revolution has been stirring. A growing number of people are seeking a way of life that is more satisfying and sustainable. This quiet revolution is being called by many names; including voluntary simplicity, soulful simplicity, and compassionate living. But whatever its name, its hallmark is a new common sense—namely, that life is too deep and consumerism is too shallow to provide soulful satisfaction. As a result, more and more people, particularly in the U.S. and Europe, have been exploring life beyond advertising's lure. These people have experienced the good life that consumerism has to offer and found it flat and unsatisfying compared to the rewards of the simple life. Their choice of a lifeway of conscious simplicity is driven not by sacrifice but by a growing understanding of the real sources of satisfaction and meaning—gratifying friendships, a fulfilling family life, spiritual growth, and opportunities for creative learning and expression.

This is a leaderless revolution—a self-organizing movement where people are consciously taking charge of their lives. It is a clear and promising example of people growing up and taking responsibility for how their lives connect with the Earth and the future. Many of these lifeway pioneers have been working at the grass-roots level for several decades, often feeling alone, not realizing that scattered through society are others like themselves numbering in the millions.

What is Voluntary Simplicity?

There has been a tendency in the mainstream media to equate a simple way

of life with a lifestyle of material frugality and then to focus on the material changes people are making, such as recycling, buying used clothing, and planting gardens. While these are a few of the visible expressions of the simple life, this portrayal misses much of the juice, joy, and purpose of simple living. The overwhelming majority of those choosing a life of simplicity are not seeking to fulfill some romantic notion of returning to nature. Instead, they are seeking greater sanity and soulfulness in a society in which separation from nature is rampant. For the most part, these lifeway pioneers are not moving back to the land; they are making the most of wherever they are by crafting a way of life that is more satisfying and sustainable.

Richard Gregg, my mentor on the subject of simplicity, wrote in 1936 that the purpose of life was, fundamentally, to create a life of purpose. He saw simplicity, when it is voluntarily chosen, as a vital ally in achieving our purpose because it enables us to cut through the complexity and busyness of the world. Gregg asked us to consider: What is the unique and true gift that only you can bring to the world? Realizing your life-purpose—or using your true gift—will determine how you structure your life. For example, if your true gift is to adopt and raise a bunch of kids, then you may need to own a large house and car. If your true gift is creating art, then you may choose to forego the house and car and instead travel the world and develop your art. Simplicity is the razor's edge that cuts through the trivial and finds the essential. Simplicity is not about a life of poverty, but about a life of purpose. Here is a key passage from Gregg's writing that describes the essence of voluntary simplicity:

> Voluntary simplicity involves both inner and outer condition. It means singleness of purpose, sincerity and honesty within, as well as avoidance of

> exterior clutter, of many possessions irrelevant to the chief purpose of life. It means an ordering and guiding of our energy and our desires, a partial restraint in some directions in order to secure greater abundance of life in other directions. It involves a deliberate organization of life for a purpose. Of course, as different people have different purposes in life, what is relevant to the purpose of one person might not be relevant to the purpose of another. . . The degree of simplification is a matter for each individual to settle for himself.[4]

The more I thought about the phrase "voluntary simplicity," the more I appreciated its power. To live more *voluntarily* is to live more consciously, deliberately, and purposefully. We cannot be deliberate when we are distracted and unaware. We cannot be intentional when we are not paying attention. We cannot be purposeful when we are not being present. Therefore, to act in a voluntary manner is not only to pay attention to the actions we take in the outer world, but also to pay attention to the one who is acting—to our inner world.

To live more *simply* is to live more lightly, cleanly, aerodynamically—in the things that we consume, in the work we do, in our relationships with others, and in our connections with nature. We each know the unique distractions, clutter, and pretense that weigh upon our lives and make our passage through life needlessly difficult. In living more simply, we make our journey more easeful and rewarding.

Voluntary simplicity means living in such a way that we consciously bring our most authentic and alive self into direct connection with life. This is not a static condition, but an ever changing balance. Simplicity in this sense is not simple. To live out of our deepest sense of purpose—integrating and balancing the inner and outer aspects of our lives—is an enormously challenging and continuously evolving process. The objective of the simple life is not to live

dogmatically with less, but rather to live with balance so as to have a life of greater fulfillment and satisfaction.

There is no instruction manual or set of criteria that defines a life of conscious simplicity. Gregg was insistent that "simplicity is a relative matter depending on climate, customs, culture, and the character of the individual."[5] Henry Thoreau was equally clear that there is no easy formula defining the worldly expression of a simpler life. "I would not have anyone adopt my mode of living on my account. . . . I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way."[6] Because simplicity has as much to do with our purpose in living as it does with our standard of living and because we each have a unique purpose in living, it follows that there is no single right and true way to live more ecologically and compassionately.

Drawing from my book *Voluntary Simplicity*, here are a few first-hand descriptions of this way of life, offered by people who are pioneers of living simply by choice:

> "Voluntary simplicity has more to do with the state of mind than a person's physical surroundings and possessions."

> "As my spiritual growth expanded and developed, voluntary simplicity was a natural outgrowth. I came to realize the cost of material accumulation was too high and offered fewer and fewer real rewards, psychological and spiritual."

> "It seems to me that inner growth is the whole moving force behind voluntary simplicity."

"We are intensely family oriented—we measure happiness by the degree of growth, not by the amount of dollars earned."

"I feel this way of life has made my marriage stronger, as it puts more accent on personal relationships and inner growth."

"I consciously started to live simply when I started to become conscious."

"The main motivation for me is inner spiritual growth and to give my children an idea of the truly valuable and higher things in this world."

"To me, voluntary simplicity means integration and awareness in my life."

"I feel more voluntary about my pleasures and pains than the average American who has his needs dictated by Madison Avenue (my projection of course). I feel sustained, excited, and constantly growing in my spiritual and intellectual pursuits."

What emerges from these descriptions is the sense that something intangible is essential to these people's lives. Perhaps it is living with a feeling of reverence for the Earth and all life, or cultivating a sense of gratitude rather than greed, or focusing on the quality and integrity of relationships of all kinds. At the heart of a life of conscious simplicity is some form of experiential spirituality. In contrast to the larger society where cynicism is rampant, this is a community of people who are tapping into, valuing, and trusting their felt experience of the sacred, although they describe that experience in many different ways.

Voluntary Simplicity and Soulful Living

Writing in 1845, Henry Thoreau set the soulful tone for the simple life in *Walden*, in which he wrote these famous lines:

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to confront all of the essential facts of life, and see if I could learn what it had to teach , and not, when I came to die, to discover that I had not lived. . . . I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life. . .[7]

The Hindu poet Tagore wrote, " I have spent my days stringing and unstringing my instrument while the song I came to sing remains unsung." Those choosing a life of simplicity are not leaving the song of their soul unsung. Instead, they are living "deep," diving into life with engagement and enthusiasm. And, in living that way, they are no doubt experiencing what Thoreau discovered—that "it is life near the bone where it is sweetest." To live simply is to approach life and each moment as inherently worthy of our attention and respect, consciously attending to the small details of life. In attending to these details, we nurture the soul. Thomas Moore explains in *Care of the Soul*:

> Care of the soul requires craft, skill, attention, and art. To live with a high degree of artfulness means to attend to the small things that keep the soul engaged. . . to the soul, the most minute details and the most ordinary activities, carried out with mindfulness and art, have an effect far beyond their apparent insignificance.[8]

For many, the American dream has become the soul's nightmare. Often, the price of affluence is inner alienation and emptiness. Not surprisingly, polls show that a growing number of Americans are seeking lives of greater simplicity as a way to rediscover the life of the soul.

Although the mass media may focus on the external trappings of a simple life, if we look below the surface, we find a powerful new form of personal spirituality motivating the vast majority of these lifeway innovators. For many, their spirituality is an individualized form of faith that minimizes rules and absolutes, and bears little resemblance to the pure form of any of the world's religions.[9] Their experience with the soulful dimensions of life and relationships is so rich and meaningful that a consumerist lifestyle appears pale by comparison.

I have had a quarter-century of experience writing about, speaking about, and living a life of voluntary simplicity. Based on that, here are other priorities (beyond material frugality) that I have found that characterize this way of living:

• **Relationships**—Those choosing the simple life tend to place a high priority on the quality and integrity of their relationships with every aspect of life—with themselves, other people, other creatures, the Earth, and the universe.

• **True gifts**—This way of living supports discovering and expressing the true gifts that are unique to each of us, as opposed to waiting until we die to discover that have not authentically lived out our true potentials.

• **Balance**—The simple life is not narrowly focused on living with less; instead, it is a continuously changing process of consciously balancing the inner and outer aspects of our lives.

• **Meditation**—Living simply enables us to approach life as a meditation. By consciously organizing our lives to minimize distractions and needless busyness, we can pay attention to life's small details and deepen our soulful relationship with life.

All of the world's spiritual traditions have advocated an inner-directed way of life that does not place undue emphasis on material things. The Bible speaks frequently about the need to find a balance between the material and the spiritual sides of life, such as in this passage: "Give me neither poverty nor wealth." (Proverbs 30 : 8) From China and the Taoist tradition, Lao-tzu said that: "he who knows he has enough is rich." In Buddhism, there is a conscious emphasis on discovering a middle way through life that seeks balance and material sufficiency.

The soulful value of the simple life has been recognized for thousands of years. What is new is that world circumstances are changing in such a way that this way of life now has unprecedented relevance for our times.

The Springtime of Simplicity

In the 1960s, voluntary simplicity was a lifeway adopted by a handful of social mavericks; today, a little more more than 30 years later, it is a mainstream wave of cultural invention involving millions of people. Gerald Celente, president of the Trends Research Institute, reported in 1997 on how the voluntary simplicity trend is growing throughout the industrialized world: " Never before in the Institute's 17 years of tracking has a societal trend grown so quickly, spread so broadly and been embraced so eagerly."[10] In the U.S., a conservative estimate is that, in the late 1990s, 10 percent of the adult population—or more than 20 million

people—are opting out of the rat race of consumerism and into soulful simplicity.[11]

The following surveys provide further evidence that a life way of soulful simplicity, with its new pattern of values, is emerging as a significant trend in the world.

Yearning for Balance—A 1995 survey of Americans' commissioned by the Merck Family Fund found that respondents' deepest aspirations are non-material.[12] For example, when asked what would make them much more satisfied with their lives, 66 percent said "if I were able to spend more time with my family and friends," and only 19 percent said "if I had a bigger house or apartment." Twenty-eight percent of the survey respondents said that, in the last five years, they had voluntarily made changes in their lives that resulted in making less money, such as reducing work hours, changing to a lower-paying job, or even quitting work. The most frequent reasons given for voluntarily downshifting were:

-- Wanting a more balanced life (68 percent)
-- Wanting more time (66 percent)
-- Wanting a less stressful life (63 percent).

Had it been worth it? Eighty-seven percent of the downshifters described themselves as happy with the change. In summing up the survey's findings, the report states, "People express a strong desire for a greater sense of balance in their lives—not to repudiate material gain, but to bring it more into proportion with the non-material rewards of life."

The Rise of Integral Culture—A random national survey conducted by Paul

Ray in 1995 found that about 10 percent of the U.S. population (roughly 20 million adults) are choosing to live in a way that integrates a strong interest in their inner or spiritual life with an equally strong concern for living more in harmony with nature.[13] Ray calls these people "cultural creatives." As a group, they live more simply, work for ecological sustainability, honor nature as sacred, affirm the need to rebuild communities, and are willing to pay the costs for cleaning up the environment. As individuals, they are largely unaware of one another and feel relatively isolated.

World Values Survey—This massive survey was conducted in 1990-1991 in 43 nations representing nearly 70 percent of the world's population and covering the full range of economic and political variation.[14] Ronald Inglehart, global coordinator of the survey, concluded that, over the last 25 years, a major shift in values has been occurring in a cluster of a dozen or so nations, primarily in the United States, Canada, and Northern Europe. He calls this change the "postmodern shift."[15] In these societies, emphasis is shifting from economic achievement to postmaterialist values that emphasize individual self-expression, subjective well-being, and quality of life. At the same time, people in these nations are placing less emphasis on organized religion, and more on discovering their inner sense of meaning and purpose in life.[16]

Health of the Planet Survey—In 1993, the Gallup organization conducted in 24 nations this a landmark global survey of attitudes toward the environment.[17] In writing about the survey, its director Dr. Riley E. Dunlap concluded that there is "virtually world-wide citizen awareness that our planet is indeed in poor health, and great concern for its future well-being." The survey found that residents of poorer and wealthier nations express nearly equal concern about the health of the

planet. Majorities in most of the nations surveyed gave environmental protection a higher priority than economic growth, and said that they were willing to pay higher prices for that protection. There was little evidence of the poor blaming the rich for environmental problems, or vice versa. Instead, there seems to be a mature and widespread acceptance of mutual responsibility. When asked who is "more responsible for today's environmental problems in the world," the most frequent response was that industrialized and developing countries are "both equally responsible."

World Environmental Law Survey—The largest environmental survey ever conducted was done in the spring of 1998 for the International Environmental Monitor. Involving more than 35,000 respondents in 30 countries, the survey found that "majorities of people in the world's most populous countries want sharper teeth put into laws to protect the environment."[18] Majorities in 28 of the 30 countries surveyed (ranging from 91 percent in Greece to 54 percent in India) said that environmental laws as currently applied in their country "don't go far enough." The survey report concludes, "Overall, these findings will serve as a wake-up call to national governments and private corporations to get moving on environmental issues or get bitten by their citizens and consumers who will not stand for inaction on what they see as key survival issues."

Could a shift to postmaterialist values occur rapidly if this reservoir of sympathy and support were encouraged? Could these social entrepreneurs be planting seeds of innovation for an evolutionary bounce several decades hence?

Although these global surveys show promising evidence of a shift from consumerism toward sustainability, it is not clear whether this shift will influence the newly modernizing economies of Africa and Asia. For example, in a Gallup

survey conducted in China in October 1994, people were asked which attitudes towards life came closest to describing their own. Sixty-eight percent said that to "work hard and get rich" came closest to describing their approach to life, while only 10 percent selected "don't think about money or fame, just live a life that suits your own taste."[31] Clearly, consumerist attitudes are flourishing in Asia and are likely to come into conflict with the need to develop more ecological ways of living. Indeed, the trends toward sustainability in a number of postmodern nations could be overwhelmed by the impact of rapid industrialization in just two nations, China and India, with their combined population of roughly two billion people.

Implications for the Future

If a new way of life does emerge that values simplicity and satisfaction over consumerism, the implications will be enormous. I believe they will include sustainable economic development, greater economic justice, new forms of community, greater participation in the political system, the development of human potentials, and the advancement of our civilizational purpose.

Sustainable Economic Development. Consumer purchases account for nearly two-thirds of the economic activity in the United States. If a significant percent of Americans were to change their consumption levels and patterns, the effects would be dramatic. Over the years, I have noticed that people choosing a simple life tend to make these kinds of changes in their consumption:

- They tend to buy products that are durable, easy to repair, non-polluting in their manufacture and use, energy-efficient, not tested on animals, functional, and aesthetic. In addition, they are more inclined to make their

own furniture, clothing, and other products as a form of self-expression.

• Regarding transportation, people choosing a life of simplicity tend to use public transit, car-pooling, bicycles, and smaller and more fuel-efficient cars; they may walk rather than ride; they often live closer to work; and they tend to make more extensive use of electronic communication and telecommuting as a substitute for physical travel.

• They often pursue livelihoods that contribute to others and enable them to use their creative capacities in ways that are fulfilling.

• They tend to shift their diets from highly processed food, meat, and sugar toward foods that are more natural, healthful, simple, locally grown, and appropriate for sustaining the inhabitants of a small planet.

• They recycle metal, glass, plastic, and paper and cut back on their use of things that waste non-renewable resources.

• They reduce undue clutter and complexity in their lives by giving away or selling things that they seldom use, such as clothing, books, furniture, and tools.

• They tend to buy less clothing, jewelry, and cosmetics; they tend to focus on what is functional, durable, and aesthetic rather than on passing fads, fashions, and seasonal styles.

• They usually observe holidays in a less commercialized manner.

Bit by bit, these and other small changes by individuals and families could coalesce into a tremendous wave of economic change in support of a sustainable future. Professor Stuart Hart, writing in the *Harvard Business Review* about strategies for a sustainable world, says that "over the next decade or so, sustainable development will constitute one of the biggest opportunities in the history of commerce."[19]

How would a sustainable economy differ from a consumer economy? For one thing, it would be much more differentiated: some sectors would contract (especially those that waste energy and are oriented toward conspicuous consumption), while other sectors would expand (such as information processing, interactive communications, intensive agriculture, retrofitting homes for energy efficiency, and education for life-long learning). To minimize the costs of transportation and distribution, markets would be more decentralized than they are today. People would buy more goods and services from local producers; in turn, there would be a rebirth of entrepreneurial activity at the local level. Small businesses that are well adapted to local conditions and needs would flourish. New types of markets and marketplaces would proliferate, such as flea markets, community markets, and extensive bartering networks (whose efficiency will be greatly enhanced by new generations of computers that match goods and services with potential consumers or traders). The economy would also be more democratized as workers take a larger role in decision-making. All types of products—such as cars, refrigerators, and carpeting—would be designed to be easily disassembled and then recycled into new products, minimizing waste. Less money would be spent on material goods and more on entertainment, education, and communication.

One criticism of the simple life is that it would undermine economic growth

and produce high unemployment. This criticism is based on the erroneous assumption that high-consumption lifestyles are necessary to maintain a vigorous economy and full employment. However, in modern consumer societies such as the United States, there are an enormous number of unmet needs. For example, restoring the natural environment, retrofitting our homes for sustainable living, rebuilding our decaying cities, caring for the elderly, and educating the young. For the foreseeable future, there will be no shortage of real work and meaningful employment if we are committed to meeting the real needs of people.

Likewise, in developing nations, there is enormous economic opportunity if approached from the mindset of sustainability. Sixty percent of the world's population lives on the equivalent of $3 or less a day, mostly in the developing world, in urban shantytowns without adequate shelter, clean water, sanitation, schools, health care, fire and police protection, access to communications technology, dependable energy, paved roads, public transportation, or space to grow food. These enormous needs represent equally great economic opportunities for meaningful work.

Economic justice. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed by the United Nations in 1948 states, in part, that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services." A significant part of humanity has no way to exercise that right, and I see little possibility of that changing under the trickle-down economic system we have today.

Given the new perceptual paradigm that is emerging—whose core expression is a shift in experience from existential separation in a dead universe to empathic connection in a living universe—it is not surprising that those who

choose a simpler life tend to feel connected with and a compassionate concern for the world's poor. This sense of kinship with people around the world fosters a concern for social justice and greater fairness in the use of the world's resources. Because economic inequality is increasing rapidly in the world, a conscious cultural shift toward more sustainable levels and patterns of consumption seems essential if there is to be greater equity in how people live. Indeed, I see a lifeway of choiceful simplicity and graceful moderation as the only realistic foundation for achieving a meaningful degree of economic fairness and thereby building a foundation for pulling together as a human family.

We need to learn to use resources more fairly if we are to live peacefully. Armies and military weapons are enormously expensive and represent a huge drain on resources that could otherwise be used for sustainable development. If we are able to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor of the world, the prospect of conflict over scarce resources will diminish. This, in turn, could free up people and resources for building a future that benefits us all.

New forms of community. Community provides the foundation for a civilization of simplicity. To encourage self-reliance at the most local scale feasible, community design would likely involve a nested set of living arrangements. For example, a family would live in an "eco-home" (designed for considerations such as energy efficiency, telecommuting, and gardening), nested within an "eco-neighborhood," within an "eco-village," within an "eco-city," within an "eco-region," and so on. Each eco-village could contain a telecommuting center, child-care home, community garden, and recycling area. Urban land that was formerly used for lawns and flower gardens could be used for supplemental food sources such as vegetable gardens, and fruit and nut trees. These micro-communities or neighborhood-sized villages could have the flavor

and cohesiveness of a small town combined with the urban flavor of a larger city. Each eco-village might specialize in a particular kind of work—such as crafts, health care, child care, gardening, or education—providing fulfilling work for many of its inhabitants. People could earn time-share hours that could be bartered for the products or services of neighbors—such as gardening, food, music lessons, carpentry, or plumbing. People could balance their work between serving their local community and serving the world.

Because the populations of ecovillages (500 or so people), would approximate the scale of a tribe, many people could feel quite comfortable in this design for living. With an architecture sensitive to the psychology of these modern tribes, a new sense of community could begin to replace the alienation of today's massive cities. To support these innovations in housing and community, there could be accompanying changes in zoning laws, building codes, financing methods, and ownership arrangements. Overall, these smaller-scale, human-sized living and working environments could foster a rebirth of community; we could again have face-to-face contact in the process of daily living in local neighborhoods with concerns such as family, play, and mutually helpful living.

Greater participation in politics. Many of those choosing a simpler way of life have pulled back from traditional politics, unable to identify with either conservatives (who tend to trust in the workings of business and the marketplace) or liberals (who tend to trust in the workings of government and bureaucracy). They are turning instead to their own resources as well as to their friends and local community. The politics of simplicity are neither left nor right, but represent a new combination of self-reliance, community spirit, and cooperation.

We can use the analogy of humanity's adolescence to get a better sense of how politics may change in the future as we mature into our young adulthood. It

seems to me that humans have been acting like political adolescents; on the whole, we have been waiting for "mom and dad" (our big institutions of business and government) to take care of things for us and blame them when they don't. As we move into our early adulthood, however, we are beginning to face our challenges head on, recognizing that we are in charge, and that no one is going to save us. To create a sustainable future for ourselves on this planet, particularly given the speed, cooperation, and creativity that our situation demands—will require the voluntary actions of millions, even billions, of free individuals acting responsibly and in concert with one another. Never before in human history have so many people been called upon to make such sweeping changes voluntarily and in so little time. The new politics are grounded in the unflinching recognition that we are being challenged to grow up and take charge of our lives, both locally and globally.

Our indispensable ally in this process is the communications revolution. When the politics of sustainability are combined with the power of television and the internet, the combination could be transformative. As we shall explore in the next chapter, the communications revolution will support a dramatic increase in public efforts to hold corporations and governments accountable for their actions. Internet campaigns will flourish that blow the whistle on government and corporate abuses and encourage people to boycott the products of firms and nations whose policies are unethical environmentally, economically, or socially.

Finally, a new era of volunteerism could blossom. For instance, young people could be encouraged to contribute a year or more of local or national service, perhaps restoring the environment, working with youth, or building community centers.

The development of human potentials. A life that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich naturally celebrates the development of our many potentials. As the

simple life makes time available, areas for learning and growth blossom. These include the physical (such as running, biking, yoga, and the "inner game" of tennis); the emotional (such as learning the skills of emotional intelligence and interpersonal intimacy); the intellectual (such as developing skills in the arts and crafts as well as basic skills such as carpentry, plumbing, appliance repair, and gardening); and the spiritual (such as various forms of meditation and relaxation, and exploring the mind-body connection with biofeedback).

The advancement of our civilizational purpose. Choosing to live more simply does not mean turning away from progress; quite the opposite. Voluntary simplicity is a direct expression of our growth as a maturing civilization. After a lifetime of studying the rise and fall of more than 20 of the world's civilizations, the highly esteemed historian, Arnold Toynbee, concluded that the conquest of land or people was not the true measure of a civilization's growth. The true measure of growth, he said, was expressed in a civilization's ability to transfer an increasing proportion of energy and attention from the material to the non-material side of life in order to develop its culture (meaning music, art, drama, and literature), sense of community, and strength of democracy. Toynbee called this the "Law of Progressive Simplification."[20] He said that authentic growth consists of a "progressive and cumulative increase both in outward mastery of the environment and in inward self-determination or self-articulation on the part of the individual or society."[21] I believe that Toynbee is correct, and that our outward mastery will be evident by living ever more lightly upon the Earth, and our inward mastery will be evident by living ever more lightly with gratitude and joy in our hearts.

Choosing a way of life that is simpler, more satisfying, and more sustainable

could help us transform an evolutionary crash into a bounce. Obviously, the simple life offers no magical solutions. It will take millions and even billions of people tending to the small details of their lives to craft a more soulful and satisfying existence for themselves and for us all. It is, nonetheless, empowering to know that each of us can make a meaningful difference by taking responsibility for changes in our own lives. Most of us have seen the limits of bureaucracy and understand that, if creative action is required, it will likely come through the conscious actions of countless individuals working in cooperation with one another. A lifeway of conscious simplicity is made-to-order for self-organizing action at the local scale. Small changes that seem insignificant in isolation can have an enormous impact when undertaken together by millions. Seeds growing in the garden of simplicity for the past generation are now blossoming into the springtime of their planetary relevance and could provide a crucial ingredient in an evolutionary bounce.

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[7] Thoreau, *Walden* p. 168.

[8] Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul* p. 285

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[13] Ray, op. cit.

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[17] Riley E. Dunlap, "International Attitudes Towards Environment and Development," in Green Globe Yearbook 1994, an independent publication from the Fritjof Nansen Institute, Norway, (Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 125.

[18] Environics International, news release, June 5, 1998, "Citizens Worldwide Want Teeth Added to Environmental Laws," Washington, D.C.

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[20] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, (Abridgement of Vol's I-VI, by D.C. Somerville), New York: Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 198.

[21] Ibid, p. 208.