

Making Changes

Written by Kate Burlett - Last Updated Monday, 15 November 2010 09:53

“It is a time when there is much in the window,

but nothing in the room.”

-Dalai Lama

Boy, it's getting tough out there. Everyday we hear about another bank, another company going under. We see the unemployment numbers rising, homeowners in crisis, and feel the pain of it all when we try to buy our groceries.

Peak oil, economic crises, global warming, even seed shortages ...yep we've got it all. Perverse consumption, consumerism and a culture that feeds on instant gratification are all symptoms of what I believe has caused the situation we now find ourselves in. And until we realize why we got into this mess in the first place, I don't think we can effectively change our way of doing things.

We have forgotten that we are stewards of this planet and everything on it, including our fellow humans; and so we are depleting our resources, fouling the environment and have disavowed the responsibility we have to that which sustains us. We seem to believe that we can take what we want and need not give anything back. Living a life that doesn't require you to prepare your own food much less grow it, where its acceptable to drive rather than walk 2 blocks to get a carton of milk, where people don't care who their neighbors are ...much less have a relationship with them. All this keeps us from recognizing that we are irrevocably connected to the ebb and flow of life on this planet and our responsibility to sustaining and protecting it.

Making that transition from consumer lifestyle to ecologically and spiritually sustainable

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lifeways isn't easy. I made a conscious choice to leave New Jersey and a consumer driven lifestyle, move to Maryland and then ultimately to Four Quarters. My reasons weren't that I am terrified that the world will run out of fossil fuels. They weren't because I think the world as I know it is coming to an end, or that the economic crisis is so bad that I will have to scrape food off the street to survive. While I acknowledge these issues, I believe that the lifestyle philosophy that created them needs to change and that the practices at Four Quarters are a big step in that right direction.

Creating sustainable living practices is one aspect of the changes that need to be made. We need to focus on reducing our carbon footprint, learning to live with less and how to rely less on the corporate world to feed us and keep us warm. Here at Four Quarters we not only heat with wood stoves, grow and can our own food, and share our common resources such as automobiles; but we also understand that we really do have a connection to the web of life. We are as concerned with sustaining the Spiritual as well as the physical, knowing that as we care for the Earth, she will care for us.

While not all of us can make such drastic moves, we can begin to alter our mindset and practices by making one crucial change right now, and we can start by asking "How do we identify ourselves? We are both unique as individuals but also a part of the natural environment. We should realize that defining ourselves by external criteria- such as our jobs, where we live and what we own; is not only superficial, but keeps us from understanding our real connection to the living world, and our responsibility to it.

Wall Street and Madison Avenue are really good at keeping us tied to the corporate, consumer lifestyle that more is better, that having the newest tech gadget or bigger TV is what will make us happy. We need to break away from the idea that we are defined by what we have, and not who we are, and to take responsibility for how we affect the world around us. It is not an easy transition to make, but I have come to learn how liberating it is not to be controlled by a culture that cares only for personal satisfaction and significance.

This consumer lifestyle that we have been conditioned to is going to change, and change drastically. I believe Four Quarters has a unique responsibility to be a leader in this time of great global change, and we as a community have an exceptional opportunity to facilitate this role. Which is why I am very excited about our new non profit, The Four Quarters Center for Earth Living. This new venture of "Earth Living in Earth Spirit" will provide us the opportunity to really make the connection between the practical and the spiritual, draw on our own traditions and experiences, explore new information and techniques, and be able to share this information with people everywhere.

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We here at Four Quarters do not have all the answers to all the questions. Heck, we don't know what all the questions are yet; they will change as the months and years progress and we face new challenges. But I believe this: if we can understand and accept what our responsibilities to this Earth and each other are, we can change our perception of what living a whole and successful life means. Its what we need to teach our children.

And that can make all the difference.