

THE GREAT TURNING: FROM EMPIRE TO EARTH COMMUNITY

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CHAPTER SUMMARIES

PART I: CHOOSING OUR FUTURE

The defining choice before us is between two contrasting models for organizing human affairs referred to in The Great Turning as Empire and Earth Community. Empire organizes by domination at all levels, from relations among nations to relations among family members. For five thousand years, Empire has brought fortune to the few, condemned the majority of humanity to misery and servitude, suppressed the creative potential of the species, and appropriated much of the productive surplus of human societies to maintain the institutions of domination. Earth Community, by contrast, features organization by partnership, unleashes the human potential for creative cooperation, and gives priority in allocating the productive surplus of society to growing the generative potential of the whole. Supporting evidence of these potentials comes from sources as varied as evolutionary theory, developmental psychology, and religious teachings.

CHAPTER 1: THE CHOICE

A convergence of imperative and opportunity unique to the present moment in the human experience sets the stage for an intentional collective choice to put the way of Empire behind us as we live into being a new era of Earth Community. Although our personal circumstances may limit our individual choices, human circumstances are often collective human creations and thereby subject to collective choice.

CHAPTER 2: THE POSSIBILITY

The defenders of Empire teach that we humans are by nature limited to a self-centered and ultimately self-destructive narcissism. In fact, Empire suppresses development of the higher orders of human consciousness thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. The lower orders of Magical and Imperial Consciousness produce a culture of Empire. The higher orders of Cultural and Spiritual Consciousness produce a culture of Earth Community. The Socialized Consciousness from which most people operate is capable of adapting to the values and expectations of either Empire or Earth Community, depending on which culture prevails. Ultimately, we humans are the architects of our own nature, and thereby of our future.

CHAPTER 3: THE IMPERATIVE

Empire has reached the limits of the social and environmental exploitation that people and Earth will sustain. A mounting perfect economic storm born of a convergence of peak oil, climate change, and unsustainable U.S. trade deficits will bring a dramatic restructuring of every aspect of modern life. It is ours to choose, however, whether the consequences play out as a terminal crisis or an epic opportunity.

CHAPTER 4: THE OPPORTUNITY

The capacity to anticipate and choose our future is a defining characteristic of the human species. The recent global spread of communications technologies has combined with a confrontation with

planetary limits to present us with a unique opportunity, and the necessity, to use that capacity with conscious collective intent.

PART 2: SORROWS OF EMPIRE

To liberate ourselves from Empire's self-limiting patterns of domination we must understand their dynamics, acknowledge their destructive consequences, and embrace the truth of the human possibilities that Empire has long denied. By the accounts of Empire's historians, civilization, history and human progress began with the consolidation of dominator power in the first great Empires. Much is made of the glorious accomplishments and heroic battles of the rise and fall of subsequent imperial civilizations. Rather less is said about the brutalization of the slaves who built the great monuments, the racism, the suppression of women, the conversion of free farmers into serfs or landless laborers, the carnage of the battles, and the hopes and lives destroyed by wave after wave of invasion, pillage, and gratuitous devastation of the vanquished. These are among the sorrows of Empire.

CHAPTER 5: WHEN GOD WAS A WOMAN

One of history's best-kept secrets is the evidence that the most significant advances on the path to the actualization of our distinctive humanity came during a period when human relationships with one another and Earth were in relative balance and people worshipped the nurturant power of the Goddess. The era of Empire not only upset the healthy balance of the generative and nurturant power associated with the feminine and the more assertive dominance power associated with the masculine, it actively deprecated and denied the feminine, resulting in a violent human assault against life itself.

CHAPTER 6: ANCIENT EMPIRE

Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Rome were three of history's most celebrated empires. Each had its moments of greatness, but at an enormous cost in lives, natural wealth, and human possibility, as vain and violent rulers played out the drama of Empire's inexorable play-or-die, rule-or-be-ruled, kill-or-be-killed logic. Empire built great civilizations, but then swept them away in successive waves of violence and destruction as jealous winners sought to erase the memory of those they vanquished.

CHAPTER 7: MODERN EMPIRE

The gradual transition to political democracy during the last half of the second millennium stimulated a corresponding transition from imperial rule by the power of the sword to imperial rule by the power of money. The new rulers donned business suits rather than imperial robes and embraced more subtle tactics as they deftly circumvented the democratic challenge to their power and privilege. By controlling the creation and allocation of money, the ruling class maintains near total control over the lives of ordinary people and the resources of the planet.

CHAPTER 8: ATHENIAN EXPERIMENT

Between the time of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian empires and the time of the American Revolution, the era of Empire was punctuated by two celebrated human encounters with egalitarian greatness. The first was Egypt's golden age (1990–1786 BCE). The second, and better known, was centered in ancient Athens, a Greek city-state known for the graceful beauty of its art and architecture, its belief in the nobility of human achievement, and its devotion to human

freedom. Unfortunately, Athenian democracy never matured and ultimately succumbed to imperial ambitions.

PART 3: AMERICA, THE UNFINISHED PROJECT

Of all the nations of the world, few confront a greater challenge in facing up to the imperatives of the Great Turning than the United States of America. Mature democracy, a defining condition of Earth Community, can only be achieved by acknowledging the gap between our idealized self-image and our troubled historical reality. We must take an unflinching look at the realities and implications of our national imperial legacy, the imperfections of our democracy, our reckless relationship with the natural environment, and the real and inspiring struggles for justice of people of color, women, and working people to whom justice has long been denied. Our history exposes the deep cultural and institutional roots of the challenges we citizens of the United States now face in birthing the mature democracy of Earth Community.

CHAPTER 9: INAUSPICIOUS BEGINNING

The American colonies replicated the imperial social structures of plutocracy and theocracy of the European nations that created them. Early settlements were operated as privately owned company estates ruled by their overseers. Parishes were ruled as theocracies by preachers who believed democracy to be contrary to the will of God. Colonial economies depended on slaves and bonded labor, and the family structure placed women in a condition of indentured servitude. The lands the colonies occupied were acquired by genocide, and their social structures embodied deep racial and class divisions. The history of the United States of America underscores the harsh reality that a declaration of liberty and a new constitution promising tranquility, liberty, and prosperity for all do not suddenly wipe away the cultural and institutional legacy of five thousand years of Empire.

CHAPTER 10: PEOPLE POWER REBELLION

Accustomed to being the subjects of arbitrary rule by those in positions of power, many of the colonists had no particular reason to consider the law as anything other than a means by which the few exploit the many. Yet for all their diversity and lack of experience with organized self-rule, the grassroots rebels who initiated and led the revolution in its earliest manifestations demonstrated a remarkable capacity to express the popular will through self-organizing groups and networks—long one of democracy’s most meaningful and effective forms of expression.

CHAPTER 11: EMPIRE’S VICTORY

Once independence was won, the colonial elites turned their attention to securing their hold on the institutions of government. The principle that all men are born equal and enjoy a natural right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness so elegantly articulated in the Declaration of Independence, fell by the wayside. The focus shifted to securing the interests of industrialists, bankers, and slave-owning plantation owners and assuring that the powers of government would remain in the hands of white men of means. Empire morphed once again into a new form but remained true to the essential organizing principle of domination. What the founders brought forth is best described as a constitutional plutocracy (rule by people of wealth) with an agenda of imperial expansion.

CHAPTER 12: STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

All the disparate popular struggles of our history to achieve justice for workers, women, and people of color, as well as the struggles for peace and the environment, are subtexts of a larger meta-struggle against the cultural mindset and institutions of Empire. The owning classes have long recognized that their imperial class privilege is placed at risk by a unification of the oppressed. The claims of identity politics based on race, gender, and occupational specialization are tolerable to Empire because they emphasize and perpetuate division. Discussion of class, however, is forbidden, because it exposes common interests and deeper structural issues with a potential to lead to a unified resistance.

CHAPTER 13: WAKE-UP CALL

The devastating policy failures visited on the United States in the opening years of the twenty-first century speak to more than the sins of a corrupt and incompetent administration intent on rolling back the post–World War II economic and political gains of the U.S. middle class and asserting global imperial rule by military force. They speak to a five-thousand-year imperial legacy, a plutocracy posing as a democracy, and a wounded national psyche in denial of the shadow side of our national story.

CHAPTER 14: PRISONS OF THE MIND

Those who control the stories that define the culture of a society control its politics and its economy. True believers of the New Right gained power not by their numbers, which are relatively small, but by their ability to control the stories that answer three basic questions: How do we prosper? How do we maintain order and keep ourselves secure? How do we find a sense of meaning and purpose in life? The New Right has carefully honed and incessantly retold imperial versions of these stories to legitimate, even celebrate, the ordering of society by hierarchies of domination. Stories are the key. To redirect the course of humanity, change the stories by which we live.

PART 4: THE GREAT TURNING

It is now within our means to make an epic choice to put the sorrows of Empire behind us in favor of the joys of Earth Community. We have the knowledge and the technology. The remaining barriers are primarily self-limiting beliefs that have no reality beyond the human mind. The explosive advance of human knowledge in the past hundred years greatly expands not only our understanding of our nature and possibilities but also the capacity for cooperative self-organization and mutual service inherent in the very nature of life itself. To navigate successfully the turbulent waters of the Great Turning, we must revisit and update the stories by which we communicate our common understanding of our human origin, purpose, and possibility.

CHAPTER 15: BEYOND THE STRICT FATHER VERSUS AGING CLOCK

Religion and science are two contending sources of the creation stories by which we humans define ourselves, our moral codes, and the meaning of our existence. Since the beginning of the scientific revolution, religion and science have been engaged in a competition to be the exclusive purveyors and interpreters of the reigning creation story of modern life. In keeping with the win-lose dynamic of Empire, the struggle for power between the two competing establishments has trumped the search for truth.

CHAPTER 16: CREATION'S EPIC JOURNEY

Although science remains captive to the premise that reality can be explained entirely by a combination of chance and material mechanism, the story of Creation's unfolding to ever higher levels of complexity and consciousness points to the existence of a profound intelligence engaged in an epic journey of self-discovery. By giving matter the capacity to choose, life accelerates the pace of the journey. Engaged in a cooperative struggle to maintain its choice-making potential against the downward pull of entropy, life exists only in living communities of diverse and mutually interdependent species.

CHAPTER 17: JOYS OF EARTH COMMUNITY

Earth Community offers an alternative to the alienation and the sorrows of Empire, a way of living that places life values ahead of financial values and organizes by the principles of partnership rather than the principles of domination. The deeper and more mutually affirming our relationships, the richer and more distinctively human we become. The yawning gap between the integral relationships for which we yearn and the fragmentation and alienation of modern life suggests the epic proportions of the challenge before us.

CHAPTER 18: STORIES FOR A NEW ERA

The Great Turning begins with relearning how to live, which depends in turn on new life-affirming stories that celebrate the possibilities of community. The life-denying stories of Empire cannot compete with the life-affirming stories of Earth Community, which—in combination with practical demonstrations—give voice to the deep human yearning for healthy children, families, communities, and natural environments.

PART 5: BIRTHING EARTH COMMUNITY

The work of the Great Turning is not to fix Empire. It is to birth a new era that makes the choice for life, gives expression to the higher potential of our nature, and restores to people, families, and communities the power that Empire has usurped. Leadership for birthing this new era will not come from those who feel comfortable with the status quo or who are intent on preserving their special privilege. It will come from the people who are feeling out of step with the beliefs and values of the imperial cultures and the institutions of contemporary life. They will live the new into being by giving practical expression to the change they seek.

CHAPTER 19: LEADING FROM BELOW

Leadership for Earth Community emerges through processes of mutual empowerment that encourage every person to recognize and express their capacities for leadership on behalf of the whole. Almost inevitably, this leadership comes from outside the institutions of Empire—from the growing millions of people with the mature consciousness that enables them to envision the possibilities of this human moment and to accept responsibility for bringing those possibilities into being.

CHAPTER 20: BUILDING A POLITICAL MAJORITY

Few contemporary nations seem more divided politically than the United States. The institutions of government and corporate power have been at odds for so long with the core values and interests of the nation that most people have given up hope of any change. Beyond the partisan rancor, however, polling data point to a broad consensus on core values and suggest that the struggle for

the health and well-being of our children is potentially the unifying political issue of our time and an obvious rallying point for building an Earth Community political majority.

CHAPTER 21: LIBERATING CREATIVE POTENTIAL

Humans are an intelligent, self-aware, choice-making species participating in an epic creative journey. When Creation bestowed on us humans a capacity for wise and creative choice, it was presumably with the intention that we use this capacity to beneficial ends. The birthing of Earth Community begins with liberating the mind from the tyranny of the belief that there is no alternative to Empire. It moves forward as millions of people who glimpse possibilities long denied translate their deepening awareness into new practice. Whether our time will be known as the time of the Great Turning or the time of the Great Unraveling is a question of choice, not destiny.

CHAPTER 22: CHANGE THE STORY, CHANGE THE FUTURE

Many of us have serious doubts about the validity and values of the prevailing imperial stories. Yet because we rarely hear them challenged by credible voices, we fear ridicule if we give voice to our doubts. Truth silenced becomes truth denied. The process of change begins as those who experience an awakening of the higher orders of human consciousness find the courage to break the silence by speaking openly of the truth in their hearts. The more openly we each speak our truth, the more readily others find the courage to speak theirs. We can then more easily find one another and end our isolation as we form communities of congruence in which we share our insights, bolster our courage, and give expression to stories that demonstrate and celebrate the possibilities of Earth Community. As we learn to communicate these stories to an ever growing audience, we begin to tip the cultural balance in favor of Earth Community, thereby changing the course of the human future.