

# ESCAPE FROM AFFLUENZA: FINDING OUR WAY BACK HOME TO MOTHER EARTH BY PEGGY LAND

In the video, *Escape from Affluenza*<sup>1</sup>, it is suggested that in order to be happy, we need to have just three things happening in our lives. These are presumably after our basic needs for food and shelter have been met, and they include: creative outlets, functional connection with each other, and with the natural world. I agree with this. I also think that failure to meet these needs can lead to dysfunctional compensation in the form of excess consumerism, and/or in never-ending quests for status and power. I find it hard to imagine that those who have had the good fortune to grow up in happy functional families and communities, in harmony with the natural world, and where creativity has been consistently encouraged would ever have felt the urge to destroy or exploit that which sustains them. It's just too bad there are very few, if any, of us however, who can say this describes our own up-bringing or current circumstances.

Most of us, if prodded gently, would admit that we do feel lonely from time to time, are at least somewhat uncomfortable in the wilds, and that we're not as creative as we'd like to be, or even as we were once as children. It's also not surprising, when you think about it in such terms, that apparently

those who have won a jack-pot lottery of a million dollars or more, are generally no happier on follow-up one year after such windfalls. We have become sadly alienated from, even resistant to, that which has the power to sustain us and make us happy — and it is not money.

There is considerable evidence that long ago, the Divine was known to some as the Mother Goddess or the Earth Mother. She was, and gave birth to humans from,

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the Earth itself. If she was not an authoritarian, power-over deity up there somewhere who demanded sacrifice and obedience, but rather offered unconditional love in the form of life-giving energy, while maintaining the delicate balance for a self-sustaining world, she was and is certainly worthy of huge respect in my books. Whether or not this is the kind of image that was worshipped historically, it is one that I can currently honour with joy and humility. I believe She is still there for us, but it seems, sadly, that we have lost our way home. Every time

we think we need more money and stuff, and then plunder Her body as if it was our right to do so, we are only killing ourselves and our vital and respectful connection with Her.

Keith Helmuth, in his 2004 Sunderland P. Gardner Lecture, pointedly reminded us that “our spiritual tradition teaches us that above all else, the essence of life — the reality the Quakers called that of God — is known in relationship.” Indeed, we know this to be so, for we have experienced the power of Love, Light and Connection with the natural world, never mind which gender we attribute to a personified deity of our imagination. The real challenge now is in finding our way back to the Garden.

The David Suzuki Foundation has researched the top ten most effective actions we can take on an individual basis, in order to help save the planet, or at least to buy some more time for our descendants. These actions are:

- *Reduce home energy use by 10%.*
- *Choose an energy-efficient home, and appliances.*
- *Don't use pesticides.*
- *Eat meat-free meals at least one day a week.*
- *Buy food that is grown and produced locally.*
- *Choose a fuel-efficient vehicle.*

- *Walk, bike, carpool or take public transit.*
- *Choose a home close to work or school.*
- *Support alternative transportation.*
- *Learn more, and share this information with others.*

These are practical, do-able actions most of us can take, may quite possibly be doing already, or hope to do soon. We follow in the footsteps of those early Quakers

who honored Creation and practiced simplicity, centuries before it became clear that the planet's resources were becoming seriously depleted.

We need to experience humbly and acutely that being in right or respectful relationship with the Earth and each other, is indeed to experience that of God / Goddess / the very essence of life. Just as importantly, this is by no means a sacrifice; rather, it is guaranteed to bring unexpected bonuses. So start the celebrations, folks, because such re-connection takes on a life of its own and carries us back 'home' — towards increased health, happiness and friendships.

Thomas Berry, the cultural historian, reminds us that the antidote for excess consumerism is in community — the support of family, friends, co-workers and neighbours. If we tackle living more lightly on the Earth together, we cannot lose.

Consider carefully any one of the top ten suggested actions and what advantages

they can bring. From reducing our use of energy to learning and sharing more about sustainability issues with each other, we can save money, get healthier, make new friends, discover new talents and have fun while we increase our survival chances. Our imagined need for more stuff to fill the voids of loneliness and alienation will fade into obsolescence.

There is the hard reality that while some actions might cost more in dollars initially, we simply can't afford not to help one another do them all — and more.

If we take such actions in a spirit of sacrifice and self-righteousness, however, we inspire no-one, and have no fun ourselves. How Quakerly can that be? To be Friends to each other and the Earth is to live the very meaning of religion, for "re-ligio" actually means "to re-connect." While religion can and does mean other things, too, this is one accepted derivative of the word. It is ours for the re-claiming, and it offers the way home. \*

*Note: The video, "Escape from Affluenza" is available for the asking from the CYM library (p. 25). It was purchased on the recommendation of the Quaker Ecology Action Network.*

*Peggy Land, a member of Ottawa Monthly Meeting, is also a member of the Quaker Ecology Action Network (QEAN), a national e-mailing network open to all. Web site at: <www.quaker.cal qean>.*

## Miracles By Jack Ross

Some friends from deep silence  
offer considered thought  
while other dear ones stammer  
"I'm sorry" and leave  
as I lay dying

Some come to offer remedies  
the only ones worth trying  
treasured friends  
as I lay dying

I like best the very few  
who simply say "I love you"  
"what can I do?"  
and I reply

"I'd like a miracle."

*Jack Ross, a member of Argenta Monthly Meeting, wrote this poem in December, 2004.*

### *From Draft Chapter – The Meeting Community – for the New "CYM Faith and Practice"*

36. Meeting is not a place of shelter from the world so much as a place where we are shaped in order to become God's instrument in the world. The primary reality is our relationship with God, and the world is an arena in which that relationship is lived out.

*– Lloyd Lee Wilson, 1993*