

relatedness can be experienced and acknowledged. We may focus on our relatedness as fellow human beings and on our interconnectedness with other living beings and inorganic elements of our universe.

I am an active part of a multitude of living systems. Any change to one aspect of the system affects the others, because a system is a web of relationships. My existence makes a difference.

The most fundamental of the systems

that I identify with is the planet I dwell on. I relate to it in manifold ways. I know that if I feel low I can go into the garden and touch the earth and feel better. It is when I am open to my environment, to natural processes, that I most easily connect to and with my spirit. I walk on a beach and see the countless shells and pebbles and grains of sand and worms and flies and bones and the motion of the waves and feel properly humble about my place in the life of the planet across the years.

Giving up Being Consumed by Consumerism

Mary-Jayne Rust

Over the past few years I have grown weary of hearing myself complain about the degradation of the environment, the fast pace of life, and the madness in which we all live. In the midst of such vast problems, it is easy to feel that one's contribution towards change, as an individual, will make no difference. My response, like many others, is either to get stuck in a hole of rage and despair, or to concentrate solely on my own patch, where it is possible to effect change.

It is also tempting to polarise individual versus large-scale structural change; clearly we must act on a political/economic/structural/global level if we are to

get out of this mess. Some would say, therefore, it is not worth acting individually as this will make such little difference to the whole. Recently, I have heard one radical environmental activist say that making changes within one's own personal life is even damaging, as it takes the focus away from corporate responsibility and makes people feel guilty about their own greed. This is an interesting debate. I happen to believe that the truth must lie somewhere in between; we need to take action on all points of the spectrum. Finding my way out of my own consumerism has led to both clearer thinking and the drive towards contributing to a collective

Mary-Jayne Rust is a Jungian analyst; she lives and works in North London.

change on a political level.

Recently I decided I could no longer tolerate believing in one thing and doing another (e.g. complaining about the traffic when I am the traffic). Even if I could only make certain changes for a short while, it would be an interesting experiment, I thought. This included the following:

- giving up driving, in favour of cycling and public transport.
- giving up using aeroplanes, taking holidays in jolly old England, or even at home
- buying organic foods
- buying local products, as un-packaged as possible
- recycling waste
- living more simply and slowly, giving up being frantically busy
- talking about what I was doing

I was surprised to discover all kinds of hidden psychological difficulties in the process which seemed to shed some more light on why it is, given the mess we are in, most people seem so reluctant to make even the most obvious changes in their own lives. Before going any further, it is worth pointing out that there are, of course, many practical reasons why many people cannot make certain changes. Organic foods cost more (curiously, things are more expensive, the less you add, these days) and have become a product only for those privileged enough to be able to afford them; there is little public transport available in rural areas; less able-bodied people need cars; this reorganisation requires a good deal of time and thought and it is not easy going against the majority.

But as I went further along this path, I realised that there were many more blocks to change lying within our psyches. These

hidden obstacles seem far more pernicious to me. The whole process has reminded me of the struggle I went through in giving up my eating problem and becoming more involved in a larger feminist debate. Structural changes in society are necessary, but the inner changes that are needed for women to take their power are harder to see and slower to take effect. Similarly, I suspect that for a sustainable society to come into being, outer, structural changes can be put into place, but the longings and myths that are encapsulated within our glamorous, fast, consumer society will take much longer to alter. Change is not easy, even when there is a strong, conscious will for making it. Of course, for psychotherapists this is a very fundamental assumption: we cannot make changes unless we work with the unconscious resistance.

In the course of making these changes to my own life, I was beginning to understand my own resistances, and those of the people close to me. I started talking excitedly to friends about what I was doing, but I was met with a barrage of reasons as to why they did not see the need, or could not make the same changes. 'I'm addicted to my car' said one friend, while another asked me anxiously, 'When are you going to get another car?'. When someone said to me one day, 'You make me feel so guilty', I realised that the dynamic I had set up by being different was very threatening. It reminded me of the days when I would go on a diet; girlfriends still intent on bingeing would try to seduce me back into indulging in sensual delights. It's no fun when there is no friend to collude with. If we all continue with our bingeing, we think we can escape the guilt. Giving up anything

requires tumbling into a temporary hole in which appears a range of uncomfortable feelings and thoughts. It is no wonder that most of us choose the more instantly gratifying option of using whatever consumer delight might come to hand.

Most people seemed to see me as some green lunatic, revisiting an adolescent phase which I would soon grow out of. As for the idea of having a compost toilet in my garden it was laughable. Two years on, I continue to get comments like, 'Have you still not got a car? That's amazing!' Perhaps it is easier to deal with other peoples' reactions than my own internal responses, from which I could not escape. When I got back onto my bike, I did feel a rush of adolescent rebellion. Despite being thoroughly enjoyable, it was distinctly unglamorous. Giving up my car felt like giving up part of my hard-earned adulthood. Looking back, I realised that passing my driving test in my teens was a rite of passage. It promised freedom from home, freedom from reliance on parents to fetch and carry. I remember what a thrill it was to pass my test and how getting my first car was a real mark of material success. Returning to being driven felt uncomfortably like being a child again. Likewise, giving up flying to exotic places, returning to a low-tech life, is not only giving up excitement but it is also giving up adult status symbols and a (mistaken) sense of freedom.

There is something erotic about fast cars, aeroplanes (feel that rush of taking off), making money, living fast. Look at the ads at the moment: cars change into black panthers; expensive scents conjure up jungle life; they would have us believe that living as fast as possible, with all the new high-tech aids, will put us in touch with

our most basic instincts, unlocking vast reserves of energy and creativity. Very many women have the same association to being thin: deep in their psyches they have somehow associated thin with success, with getting and achieving all that they desire. It is about the lure of glamour, of becoming one of those Hollywood stars who appear to have it all. Being high-tech and modern is associated with success in the same way. Perhaps, like becoming thin, it holds some promise of becoming a new person. This is a very powerful myth. If this is so, downshifting and living sustainably would feel like giving up the power to transform oneself.

Where does this power of transformation reside? I wonder whether, in this modern world where consumerism rules, money has become our new God. Whereas God or spirit used to hold this key, money is now seen as the basic unit of energy which can change into anything. But somehow the spiritual has got all confused with material, such that we now believe that gaining and transforming the material is the answer to our prayers. Relocating the power to transform, away from the material, is quite a task.

Having all the latest technology might also appear to hold the key to transformation. I was talking to someone recently who seemed hell bent on getting yet another new computer. Why did he need this, I asked him. He told me that it would be faster and would give him access to even more information. Despite being a green person himself, he was also hankering after a mobile phone. What for, I asked him. Well, he told me, just in case of that odd time when he might just need it! I shook my head in disbelief and we tried to

think together what might lie behind this drive to be absolutely up to date with all the latest gadgets. Some of it was his desire to be as in control as possible. Another part was his need to have knowledge at the tips of his fingers (let's not forget the added attraction of how much fun it is to play with a new toy!). It was beginning to look like some fantasy of being an omnipotent God; another very powerful lure.

Another part of my journey was attempting to live more slowly. For many years I have lived at a fast pace, always complaining about being overstretched. As the gaps began to widen in my diary I noticed an uncomfortable feeling inside. It is not a politically correct achievement to have plenty of leisure time these days. For me it smacks too much of the days of the idle rich. Others have commented that it would make them feel like a social waster, left behind, afraid of being on the streets. For women, there is status in having work, rather than being stuck at home. I realised I was entering into all kinds of territory where, despite my best interests, I was struggling with deeply held belief systems about the image of the modern person and modern woman. Again, it reminded me of the days of unpicking my body image problems. Despite knowing that to be too thin was unhealthy, part of me still longed for that image which held so much desire culturally. I had to admit that the image of the modern person, like the thin woman, was a myth that had deeply embedded itself into my psyche and would take some time to change, especially when the society surrounding me still adored it. It was not easy to do less. I felt as though I would get 'left behind'.

Living sustainably is not yet modern;

attempting it is to risk being branded as going back to the past. If consumerism has become the new religion, change becomes the new faith. This is quite a task, especially at a time when all familiar forms of containment (such as religion, family, community) are breaking down around us. Without our familiar structures we are vulnerable creatures, prone to failing into despair. We need the support of those around us to find meaning, to go beyond the mundane. It seems that within Western culture, our current ways of finding meaning are through getting, having and doing, rather than through renunciation and being. Our rites of passage, which guide us through the chapters of our lives, are intimately linked to getting the latest technology, having a car, getting the right education, having the right image. Even a spiritual path in the West can fall into the same trap of having a guru.

If we could use insights about the processes involved in personal change from the world of psychotherapy, and apply them to the process of cultural change, we might have a very powerful tool to facilitate the kinds of shifts we need to happen for our environment to continue to support our species. But this valuable resource of insight into the nature of change is rarely used in the world of social and political change. In my opinion, this is the area in which psychotherapists could offer something crucial to the green movement. There is a great will for change amongst the majority of people but we are each resisting it like mad. Making resistance conscious, and the capacity to envisage different ways forward, are just two of the many helpful means of facilitating personal change. What would happen if we

used these methods on a larger scale?

I would suggest that as well as the much needed structural/political changes that need to take place, we must also inquire into the myths that surround modernity. If we can begin to unpack our desires for

technology, fast living, travel, to really understand what these things hold below their surface lures, then perhaps we have a chance to make our resistances conscious. Only then can we move forward to a different kind of sustainable future.

What is an 'Ecological Self'?

A personal account of a 'deep ecology' experience

Tania Dolley

At a weekend meeting that I attended recently, I took part in a group activity that was designed to invite people to find and express whatever feelings they have about environmental issues and the state of the planet. It was called a Truth Mandala, and I was surprised to find this a very powerful experience. We started in pairs, each asking and then answering three specific 'open-ended' questions about our thoughts and feelings about the environment. Then followed a group 'ritual' where people were invited to share whatever they felt, be that anger, hope, despair, grief or numbness.

My first surprise was to realise how rarely, if ever, anyone actually asks me how I feel about these things. It was in fact a delight to be asked, and to be given the space both to ask myself, and then to speak about how I did feel. I already knew I felt

strongly about some of these issues, but I did not anticipate the power and depth of some of the emotions that I contacted when given the opportunity to do so. In particular I discovered a huge pot of boiling anger and rage. This seething fury was directed in general towards the prevailing attitudes of greed, exploitation and profit motive that appear to fuel our economy. Whether thinking about rainforest destruction, genetic modification of food, climate change or pollution, the specific targets of my anger seemed to be the corporations and governments involved in creating the policies and activities that result in environmental damage of whatever kind. I know these matters and the issues involved are hugely complex, and that there are unfortunately no simple 'instant fix' solutions. But I am talking about a gut level, instinctual feeling response,

Tania Dolley's first degree was in Environmental Studies. She has an MSc in Counselling Psychology and trained as a Hakomi therapist, working in the NHS, schools and private practice.