

HOPE – September 2021

With much of the news focusing on what is going wrong in the world, it can be difficult to imagine a future for planet Earth that is socially just, biologically diverse, and prosperous. Yet, if we don't envision an alternative to the dominate dystopian narrative featuring plastic pollution, environmental degradation, societal polarization and collapse, we are fulfilling the prophecy. It's easy to be hopeless, but hopelessness creates a feedback loop of despair and inaction. Negative news can overwhelm us and cause us to shut down. Shut down people aren't truly able to take helpful action. If there are no helpful actions, a situation gets worse. And so on.

The stories we tell matter and they change over time. Our collective stories help create what happens next. If we only ever talk of coming disasters we are more likely to suffer from the psychological effects (i.e. environmental grief, climate rage, eco-paralysis) of believing we are on a sinking ship. So how do we live on a dangerously warming planet without breaking down under the psychological weight of impending catastrophe? According to Elin Kelsey, a biologist, educator and writer, we cultivate evidence-based hope. We look for the positive change and shifts happening around us and work to amplify them.

When we find hope, we're more motivated to take positive action to care for the planet. When we seek and share stories of resilience and recovery, we encourage hope and contract cynicism and emotional paralysis. Hope inspires action. It's wild and contagious. It's a powerful political act! (It's also a muscle we need to keep exercising.)

Elin Kelsey says in her book *Hope Matters*, that “when we accept doom and gloom as truth, we extinguish not only our own agency but the agency of the more than 8.7 million other species that live on the planet.” For example, since industrial whaling stopped, humpback whale populations have been rebounding. Humpbacks are social and cultural networkers. As their numbers increase, plankton increases, which leads to more fish. Whales, it turns out, are positive climate activators. The ability of whales to capture carbon and encourage phytoplankton have made them more valuable alive, than dead, and therefore there are more efforts to protect them.

FMI: www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2019/12/natures-solution-to-climate-change-chami.htm

Also a great you tube video explaining how whales change the climate is at:
<https://youtu.be/rwZR28su0FU>

When cultivating hope, it's important to remember that the Earth's climate is a complex system. Even with the best scientific modeling, climate change remains subject to a great deal of uncertainty. What we do know is that the planet historically has had a remarkable capacity for renewal. So we shouldn't give up yet!

It's important to look at the direction things are moving towards over time. Some positive trends of today look to Indigenous-led conservation, re-wilding (or ecological restoration) and shareholders divesting from oil and gas and other industrial polluters that fuel climate change.

The website Seeds Of Good Anthropocene (<https://goodanthropocenes.net>) outlines how a good story can help to create a positive future. First, the story illuminates realistic pathways. Second, it shows a different place for humanity on the planet as a humble part of the greater whole and third, it inspires us. The great news is, humans are already building these new stories by taking new pathways.

“Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the Earth gives me daily and I must return the gift.” Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of *Braiding Sweetgrass* (highly recommended reading for cultivating hope.)

Some other hopeful websites to check out <https://drawdown.org/solutions>

<https://storytracker.solutionsjournalism.org>