

CHANGE?

September and October used to be the nicest, most pleasant months here in Hawai'i. Not this year. The summer was unusually dry and hot, September was less dry and still hot. October, so far, is quite a few degrees above what it was last year and years before. It is raining enough now, plants grow furiously, my water tank is full. I remember a time when nobody in Hawai'i had air conditioning, cars sold in Hawai'i did not have air conditioning, because "it rarely gets above 80° here." This week it has been 85° and over every day around two in the afternoon, nights don't get cooler than 70°. Checked my diaries for 2005, 2006, 2007: October day temperatures were in the seventies, and at night lower sixties were the norm.

Of course I know there are fluctuations from day to day, from year to year. But there have been other changes here. The biggest changes came during the "housing bubble" when this quiet rural area suddenly became a destination for planeloads of speculators — calling themselves investors — who bought and sold lots in a crazy crescendo. Before the bubble land sold for \$15-17,000 an acre, and I know people who paid considerably less. Suddenly the price shot up, doubling every six months. The top was \$125,000 per acre, Now, back to maybe \$45,000 but that is doubtful because not much has sold in the last year. During the two or three year bubble time maybe two dozen acre lots on this little street were completely clear cut of trees and bushes that, after a hundred or more years had found ways to grow on lava. Houses were built; half of those now empty. Our narrow road was paved, and now is a too narrow highway between six and eight in the morning. The two lanes are barely wide enough for the enormous trucks people think necessary here, the road has no shoulder. It is virtually a one-way road, passing is an adventure.

I've seen some strange changes where I live. It has rained less than normal, in what used to be the rainy season. A kind of large tree has suddenly died, all over this part of the island; nobody seems to know why. Ours is now leafless, but beginning to be covered with a rich mantle of beautiful ferns. And a vine, almost unbelievably aggressive, climbs furiously, and strangles soft leaved plants. It has always been here, the Hawaiian name is *maile pilau*: *maile* means vine, *pilau* is stink. The plant does not stink, but it is a pest. It has a thin but amazingly strong stem and leaves no more than an inch long. Now it has the same thin stem but the leaves get twice as big. And there are now two other strangling vines, one the same family I'm told, the other an entirely different family, with a different flower (the flower shows it to be in the pea family?). The leaves look the same, small, but three to a side stem; *maile pilau* has one. This year it is everywhere, climbs 20-30 feet in trees, and it spreads as ground cover so dense and thick that it kills grass and sedge. A thick mat, staying just below the level of lawn mowers. It climbs on anything and everything that goes up, trees, plants, the poles that support my house, fences, an outdoor chair.

For years we had wild chickens. Everybody has chickens, they live in the trees, and obviously wander through or fly over fences that some people have. Suddenly we have less than half of the chickens we used to. It is impossible that the neighbor dogs have killed that many, we would have found remnants. A disease? We would have found dead chickens. A mystery.

It is 5 a.m., dark outside. It is raining, but what I call a drip rain. I hear drips on the roof and from the branches of the trees in front of the window. Not really rain but a saturated mist, measured in mm, at most a quarter of an inch overnight. Outside temperature is 72°, inside it is warmer although I have the windows open. No wind. That means another day of 85° close to the end of October.

We have many tropical fruit trees here, planted 20-30 years ago. This year we have had no mangoes at all, lots of citrus but in a very short season. Less of almost everything else. I grow all my own vegetables, in large pots. They do well, because during the dry days I watered them morning and evening. We still have some chickens, ducks, dogs, cats. And an abundance of small birds that squeak and squabble loudly at sunset. It sounds like a celebration, they chase each other, tumble and circle, fly from tree to tree, squeaking their delight at each other. For the hour before it gets dark they own the world. I've come to expect their exuberance and rejoice with them. When it is dark there is a daily concert of frogs and lizards and other animals I don't know that is closer to my little house. To me they are jungle noises that remind me of the familiar sounds of my growing up; others find them obnoxiously loud and "uncivilized." Thank God for *uncivilized*, reminding me, daily, that Nature is still alive and well. In fact, getting stronger and wilder, while our civilization is so obviously collapsing, imploding, or exploding.

A few weeks more than eight years ago nineteen men hijacked four passenger planes and flew two of them into two tall towers in New York, and one into part of the Pentagon building. The fourth plane is thought to have been forced down by courageous passengers. There were no American fighter planes in the air to stop any of the attacks. The two towers miraculously pulverized, almost elegantly collapsing into their own foot print, and a third building that was not hit did the same. Fewer than three thousand people were killed; probably a lot more people were sickened by the pollution of the air around those collapsing buildings.

As retaliation we invaded two countries halfway around the world. Then occupied them, and in the course of the last eight years destroyed whole cities (Holy cities), caused at least a hundred thousand deaths, four million people displaced. Our troops are still there. That is called asymmetrical warfare.

Our War on Drugs is asymmetrical warfare. The punishment for possessing a so-called drug (not prescribed by a doctor) is utterly out of proportion to what we define as a crime if it is used, smoked, eaten. Some of the forbidden drugs are known to be much less harmful than alcohol, much less dangerous than the possession of guns (even assault weapons) that is legal. Are we proud to have more people, as a percentage of total population, locked away in prisons than any other country of the world, and for far longer sentences? This 30 or more year long war, has changed the drugs, they have become far more dangerous. And, of course, the sale of illegal drugs has created a whole new economy. Anywhere in the world when a market is controlled or artificially restricted, there is a black market. I know that from my own experiences in other countries.

So-called modern agriculture is asymmetrical warfare on Nature. All indigenous peoples knew that food plants must be planted mixed. As I have been told in three different countries, "what one plant takes out of the ground, another puts back in." That kind of agriculture was sustainable for thousands of years. But no, we modern man, knew better. We flatten a thousand acres of rich soil, and plant a thousand acres of corn in straight rows so that a few machines can do the work of a thousand men and women. It so happens that there is a tiny animal that loves corn; an insect probably. When there is one corn plant that is grown in the middle of a bean plant that climbs all over it, the insect may have a bite here and there, but does little damage. Where there is a whole row of nothing but corn. Oh boy! Insects multiply fast, and soon a thousand acres of corn has a million or more little insects leaving a thousand acres of damaged corn overnight. Modern man has modern chemistry. We make ever more poisonous chemicals to destroy that particular insect. But there are other insects; we design a stronger chemical. We spray the thousand acres of corn from low flying airplanes. Some of the chemicals cover the growing corn (which animals eat, and we eat parts of the animal) but quite a bit of the very poisonous chemicals drifts in the wind, gets into the water we drink, and in the soil that grows vegetables for a family of nine. Nature adapts faster than chemists can design more potent poisons. A lot of corn gets lost. What is equally discouraging is that modern man discovers what indigenous people have always known that if you grow one thing, one plant, on a piece of land it depletes the land of whatever that particular plant needs to grow. Growing corn again on the same thousand acres is impossible, unless you can invent another chemical to artificially "fertilize" that soil again. Modern agriculture is not sustainable without chemistry. It severely depletes soil and chemicals spread far and wide. Many of these chemicals are now known to cause cancer in humans and eradicate plants and animals that we had not planned to kill.

Our modern food industry is another asymmetrical war. Even half a century ago our food came from farms, family farms. Now a very small percentage of farms are family owned (something like 7%). Our food is grown by enormous Agribusinesses, produced in factories, sold to us in super markets, wrapped in plastic (it seems *everything* has to be wrapped in tight plastic). Oh yes, the package says what the product consists of, but the print is so tiny and there are so many ingredients and chemicals that even if we wanted to we would need degrees in chemistry and biology to really understand what all went into bread, or a hot dog. Most of what we buy daily has chemicals to lengthen shelf life, other chemicals for taste, or color, and almost certainly too much sugar, fat, and salt, because we have been conditioned to need the taste of sugar, fat, and salt. This is a war on us, not even on Nature any more. And we don't know it — we don't want to know it because where else could we buy bread?

Fortunately, but naturally, there are more and more farmer's markets where people bring home made bread, made from wheat or a mixture of grains, a little salt, a pinch of sugar to activate the yeast, perhaps some oil, but no chemicals. In many parts of this country you can find, with a bit of searching, fresh vegetables that have grown in real soil without poisons. They may cost a few cents more, but you need less *real* food to be much healthier.

Our so-called health industry is another asymmetrical war on us. By inserting a for-profit business between me and my doctor, the doctor and I both pay a price. And in the last 20 years that price has more than doubled, so that more and more of us can no longer afford the insurance that is supposed to pay for whatever ill health comes our way. Now that a new president is trying to get Congress to find a way out of this war, the insurance industry is spending millions (of our dollars) to — let's be honest — bribe both Houses of Congress to not vote for a real change, but continue the monopoly of the miscalled Health Industry.

What we call our "health" system is really a *medical* industry, more and more concentrated on the extreme high cost side of treating illness or trauma. Why do we spend twice as much, per person, on *medical* care as any other country in the world? Somehow we have come to think of health as the expensive technologically sophisticated treatment of serious sickness. We've forgotten what "health" means. Our system is oriented almost entirely to the most lucrative extreme: highly specialized, treating serious disease and breaks with the most sophisticated (and expensive) technology that requires the most expensive machinery and the most highly trained, and so the most highly rewarded, doctors and other specialists. That is *medical* care. Health care is on the ground, not in a surgical theatre. Health care should be in every neighborhood, in every village, accessible to all. When you catch a beginning diabetes in a 13-year old boy, you can change his life style, food habits, maybe some simple medication. When there is no affordable or even available health care, the man of 33 now has advanced diabetes, lands in an ER with a gangrenous leg. Dealing with that will cost the hospital, and so the state, or the Federal Government, half a million or more dollars for hospitalization, amputation, a new artificial leg, training, etc.

We are at war with Nature by our life style, our standard of living, our profligate use of resources, our overwhelming waste, our poisons. So far it has been a very asymmetrical war. We imagine we are winning with our science and seemingly unlimited power, but the long history of this planet tells us that Nature always wins. Nature, the planetary ecology, changes constantly, but always in the direction of more complexity, more variety. We, humans, who want to organize what we see as chaos, work against the very essence of the universe.

Are asymmetrical wars more winnable than old-fashioned wars? No asymmetrical war has even ended, let alone won. More force simply makes more counter-force.

**All wars are follies, very expensive and very mischievous ones.
In my opinion, there never was a good war or a bad peace.**

**When will mankind be convinced and agree to settle their
difficulties by arbitration?**

Benjamin Franklin

How to understand our world today? By "world" I mean the man-made world we live in, built by us on top of the planet which we think of as just a surface, and an inexhaustible resource.

Yesterday I listened to a presentation and learned that 37 cents of every federal tax dollar I pay goes to wars and preparing for future wars with ever more inhuman weapons. I heard that one gallon of gas costs \$400 in Afghanistan, and Humvees, tanks, and other war machines do not get miles per gallon but use gallons per mile. In Afghanistan our armies use a few million dollars worth of gas every day. How much CO₂ do we spew into the air over that country into the atmosphere that, after all, we share with all air-breathing beings?

Who or what is it we are fighting? Terrorists, we are told. Or bad dictators. Or people who want us out of their country, or who prevent their country to have the kind of government we call "democracy" and insist they too must have. Have we forgotten how we got our own democracy: by fighting a far away king who thought he owned us. The British army did not force, or talk us into, a democracy in America. No, we fought to get them out of here so that we could make it ourselves. How can we imagine that now we can impose democracy by force halfway around the world in countries we do not know or understand.

47% of what all of mankind spends on war, or making ready for war, is spent by 4% of the people of the world. Totally asymmetrical. We think we are the richest, most powerful 4% of the world's people, but we spend so much money on what we are told to believe is "security" that we have no universal health care, we cannot bail out our own States that make up the Union, we cannot help the people who lose their house, their job, their livelihood. Ten percent unemployment (I know it is more on this island). The people who make the rules, who determine who gets what, seem to have lost all contact with *we the people*, they ignore what all polls say we want, what we desperately need. It is hard to believe, but we all know why: because above and behind the political top there is the real top, the one percent of all people who own half and more of the world. It is that top top that wants wars because most of the trillions we spend on wars goes to their pockets. They need to save the banks that are too big to fail. It is they who do not want us to have health care because high end medical care is much more lucrative. Surely even they, the very very rich, must know that the planet is warming, resulting in climate change that may well make our planet unfit for humans to live in, but they continue to twist arms and get one more mountain top removed to get at coal to burn to make electricity, knowing full well that burning coal makes global warming worse. China is said to open a new coal burning plant every week But this country — we who think ourselves the smartest, most scientific, technological advanced nation of the world -- are the second most polluting country in the world. 4% of the world's population responsible for 25% of the poisons we continue to pump into the atmosphere. Asymmetrical, out of balance. Wrong.

We have a new president, who many of us thought would make the changes he promised. I'm sure he is trying. But so far what I see from here, not quite as far away from Washington as Baghdad, is that almost all the States of this United

States have serious budget deficits — which, legally, they are not allowed to have — when the combined deficit of all States is less than what we plan to spend on wars and preparation for future wars in this budget year. And so, the States are forced to reduce expenses like schools, libraries, infrastructure, all the things that make life for *we the people* possible. In Hawai'i it means involuntary "furloughs" on a number of Fridays for all government workers, teachers, and others: many four day work weeks for this and next year. A dangerous loss of income for many families

Our new president was awarded, and he accepted, the Nobel Peace prize, probably for his promises rather than accomplishments in the first eight or nine months of his term. Perhaps people all over the world are relieved to have an America with a different program and a different approach to international problems than the programs and approach we had for the past eight years. But the new America may not be as new as we all expected. The people who govern may have changed, but the people behind and above them have not, and it is becoming all too clear that they are our real rulers, and the rulers of large parts of the world.

Probably more than half of the people of the world have heard of, perhaps even accepted, the Old Testament, which lists Ten Commandments. One of these says Thou Shalt Not Kill. It could not be said simpler. And yet many, I dare say most, of the believers in that Commandment have found ways to disguise or ignore such a simple statement.

The Old Testament also has the phrase, An eye for an eye... Asymmetrical warfare has twisted that to, A million heads for one eye.

What is called the Golden Rule is the core of every religion and moral system of this world. It can be, and is, worded in many ways, but they all mean the same: *don't do to anyone what you don't want anyone to do to you, or, do to others as you want others to do to you*. Also called compassion, literally "feeling with." That does not mean love, or even like another, but accept another as she or he is. Be in another's shoes for a minute. Reach across words and lies, look in his or her eyes.

Change is certainly happening; change is always happening. Change of the planet: ice all over the planet melting faster than the scientists predicted. Droughts here, floods there. Fiercer storms. Wild fires more extensive than any we have known before. Here in my little corner of the planet a sudden invasion of a weed that is taking over acres of grass — and I always thought grass the one plant that can grow in concrete!

Yet there is hardly any change in how we, humans, are dealing with a planetary disaster that very possibly can lead to our own undoing. Are we intent on destroying ourselves? The men (and a few women perhaps) at the very very top seem to be interested only in yet another billion in their bank account, more power to control the man-made world as well as the planet.

It was not the dinosaurs, the beasts too big to fail, who survived.

Tiny mammals survived — and now we seem to have evolved into another kind of monster.

And yet, when you look for the right web sites (not at all difficult to find), it is abundantly clear that there are a thousand, a million, groups and bands of the poor, the oppressed, the suffering masses, who are rebelling, finding a voice, who are agitating and protesting. In the end, I am certain, they are the Meek who shall inherit the earth.

The French national anthem has a refrain: *Aux armes citoyens!* "Citizens, get your weapons." Then, the weapons were pitchforks, sticks, knives, bare knuckles.. But even a few hundred years ago it was not the pitchforks that made the French Revolution that was the inspiration for ours. It is always the heart and spirit of the people at the bottom that make a new world. Today it is the spirit of simple souls who know the rightness of the simple laws of Life that can restore the balance that always has been the essence of the planetary ecology — any ecology.

Charles Darwin said, "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change." *Survival of the fittest* does not refer to the powerful, but to those who fit into Nature as it is.

All humans used to fit into what environment they found themselves in, that was our unique strength: we survived in the Arctic and in deserts, at 20,000 feet altitude, and on small islands. Mankind, the human species, learned from the first that fitting in does not mean force, on the contrary, it means submission. We learned to make dwellings from snow, from the bamboo that grew all around us in a jungle. In deserts we found shade and we learned to find water, sufficient to keep us alive. All humans know that life eats life, but we also knew that we must be careful to preserve life so that we will eat tomorrow.

Over time we changed ourselves. Now we are accustomed to think we must adapt Nature to our needs, rather than fitting in. We interpret that to mean we must force Nature to do our will — our whim. There is no end to our needs, no end to ever more wants. And so we have made an asymmetrical world on top of a live planet.

We, all Life, live in (and as part of) what we call the Biosphere, the thin layer of water, rock and air around the planet, energized by the sun. We, mankind, are badly stirring up the Biosphere with our wanton destruction, poisoning, and our non-degradable waste.

Our man-made world is entirely out of balance, and it is we who are forcing the planet to restore its balance. That is what ecologies do: maintaining an organic, changing, growing, balance. And we know so little about how to fit into a live ecology any more, that we cannot imagine that the consequence of the planet's adjustments may well change our planet to make this a very inhospitable place for us to be as we are today.

A "smarter planet" is not "designed" as IBM wants us to believe. Can we stop, or slow down, global warming? That would require a total change of how we live on this earth. It would require us to change our points of view, our values. We are not the boss, we do not own this planet. We cannot afford to squander the riches of this earth, our only home. In order to survive we must respect — each other, all other life. And we must learn to fit in again. Can we?

Real change always comes from the ground, the bottom. Every plant, the biggest tree, begins as a small seed. A human begins as one fertilized cell, then two, four, eight, until an immensely complex organism grows we know as a person.

A community grows from two or three people. A tribe grows from a few villages. A culture and its language grow from a group of communities, ordinary people, because cultures, languages, are alive — and Life grows. All life, our lives, and the lives of all beings on a live planet grow from simple starts to complex wholes.

Asymmetry is death, Life is balanced growth.

robert wolff 22 october 2009

Resources:

http://www.ted.com/talks/karen_armstrong_let_s_revive_the_golden_rule.html

http://www.democracynow.org/2009/10/21/cashing_in_the_war_dividend_as

<http://lauraflanders.firedoglake.com/2009/10/22/the-f-word-where-are-the-fighting-dems/>

And many more...