

## Reflections on the State of the World — 3

### Speeding Toward Extinction

by Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D.

What will it take for humanity to make the necessary turn-about to safeguard Nature's future? The environmental crisis continues unabated, and is now an emergency. There are no signs that global warming or the Sixth Mass Extinction associated with it are slowing down. On the contrary, scientists expect that the destructive trend to which humanity has subjected its home planet will accelerate as time goes by.

With a staggering extinction rate of 150 species per day, unchecked deforestation, and a rising mean global temperature, we must ask: Which species will be next? When will the light go out on humanity? Increasing droughts, which wreak havoc with crops, are bound to put enormous strain on a species that is already experiencing widespread water shortages and hunger at a forbidding scale.

Recently, the world's leading expert on mass extinctions, Norman Myers, gave a talk at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon in which he warned of an imminent breakdown of civilization as we know it. In an interview conducted by CBC radio, he gave our civilization ten years at the most. Ten years!

This is a dire prediction. Myers, who first talked about the current mass extinction back in the 1980s, is no crank but a scientific authority to be reckoned with. When his observations about the sixth mass extinction—our present misfortune—first made the news, his academic colleagues deemed his extrapolations to be exaggerated. In the meantime, they all have become converted to his earlier views, which, however, have already proven way too modest in light of actual events.

One of the developed countries that is among the first to suffer the baneful consequences of planetary climate change is Australia. Over half of Australia agricultural land is gripped by a devastating drought, which has been characterized as a 1000-year event.

Water rationing has been introduced. Yet, Australians are not known for prudent water consumption both privately and organizationally. For instance, South Australia's large Olympic Dam uranium mine squanders 33 million liters of water per day without paying a penny for its use/abuse of a rare resource. In the meantime, this mine has produced 60 million tonnes (!) of radioactive tailings and is expected to add 10 million tonnes to this dangerous waste mountain every year.

Land clearing is seriously endangering many native species of birds and mammals. Pollution of air, water, and soil is rampant.

Australia's former prime minister John Howard, who came into power in 1996 and, following U.S. president George Bush's notorious example of inaction, did nothing to

forestall further environmental degradation. He was finally voted out of office in 2007 and was replaced by Kevin Rudd, who on the day of assuming office, promptly, if belatedly, signed the Kyoto Protocol. Not that the Kyoto Protocol is particularly sensible or at this stage even very meaningful, but signing the Protocol represents a beginning for Australia.

Together with the United States, Brazil, and Malaysia, Australia has been considered part of the "Axis of Ecocide." Perhaps, under the new prime minister's leadership, this will change for the better. The Australian public is slowly becoming aware of the huge environmental disaster that their country (and the world) is facing. Not surprisingly, many orders for *Green Yoga* reach our TYS office from Australia.

By comparison, the response from Yoga practitioners in the United States has been rather sluggish. Some individuals are even hostile toward us, because we dare tell the truth without mincing words. When Brenda and I were working on [Green Yoga](#), we were agreed that the urgency was far too pressing for a nice, polite presentation and that the Yoga practicing public needed a bit of a jolt. We still feel the same way, even more so because the public's slumber is quite deep.

Australia's serious environmental problems foreshadow what will unquestionably be the destiny of the rest of the world, and worse. Time is running out on all of us, wherever we may live. Norman Myers apocalyptic vision of the imminent demise of civilization as we know it has a disquieting ring of truth to it. He is not alone in his prediction. Foresightful folk are starting to prepare for what seems like an inevitability. One doesn't have to be a pessimist anymore to expect bad news. All too few people are willing or able to stop the insane lifestyle in which they are involved. Thus, they are busy consuming themselves into oblivion.

Those who can assimilate the evidence and have the will to change their lifestyle may not be any better off in the end, but at least they won't be surprised when the day of reckoning comes. They might even have learned the necessary skills to survive with a lot less than our modern consumer society insists we need.

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