

## Chapter 7. Yes, because all flourishing is mutual.

### George Tinker, “An American Indian Cultural Universe”

An American Indian environmental concern begins with a deeply embedded sensitivity to our relation with all life-forms. It seeks to maintain harmony and balance through responsible, conscious actions and ceremonies of renewal. If we act recklessly and thoughtlessly we could easily put the whole of the world out of balance. In our understanding of a shared Earth, what we take we must give back.

#### *Reading Questions*

1. Given what Tinker says, what are the main philosophical differences between American Indian beliefs and those of the dominant Western culture?
2. How is it that these philosophical beliefs manifest themselves in actions and policies in the world, according to Tinker?

### Fred W. Allendorf, “No Separation Between Present and Future”

Ecological science and Buddhist philosophy tell us the same things—nothing is fixed, all is impermanent, all life is interdependent, and no person is independent of the mountains, the air, the rivers. If we succeed in ridding ourselves of the delusion of independence, we will naturally act in ways that will prevent harm in the future.

#### *Reading Questions*

1. What principles do ecologists and Buddhists hold in common?
2. Why is it important that ecologists and Buddhists agree?
3. When did your life begin, in your view?
4. Examine your breakfast: What world is present there?

### Jonathan F. P. Rose, “A Transformational Ecology”

The ecological issues we face are ontological issues—mistakes we make about the nature of the world. The perceptual boundary we draw between ourselves and the rest of the world is a mental construct. We will find our way when we transform our view from one of parts to one of the whole. The ethics of many religions are based on the interconnection of all things, which leads us to compassion, restraint, and responsibility.

#### *Reading Questions*

1. Rose speaks of the world as a fabric, now torn. In what ways does the world resemble a fabric?
2. Rose believes that the root cause of the problems we face is our definition of self. Who are you? What are you made of?
3. Rose’s last question is important: “If not now, when?” Suppose we do fail to take action in a timely manner (as seems likely). Who, then, will take action? When? Can you tell a story about those people taking those actions?

### Mary Catherine Bateson, “Why Should I Inconvenience Myself?”

The idea of an individual, the idea that someone can exist separate from relationships, is simply an error. That error infuses our practices of child-rearing and care of the aging, as it leads us to ignore our responsibilities to the future. The fact is that, despite our differences, we are “always parts nested within larger wholes” for which we have responsibility. Our differences must be seen as sources of mutual benefits and thus justification for action on behalf of the whole.

#### *Reading Questions*

1. The idea of an individual is simply a mistake, Bateson argues. What is she talking about? What are we, if not individuals?
2. Suppose you are talking with a friend who thinks she has no reason at all to alter her life for the sake of the future. How would you convince her otherwise? Are your arguments the same as Bateson’s, or different?

### Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley, “Extra! Extra! New Consciousness Needed”

Although most people can recognize the connectedness of all life, we often lack direction and guidance for right action. The Yupiaq people believe that God is in Nature. Thus we have a responsibility to give respect, honor, and dignity to all resources of the living Earth. This understanding is the ultimate gift of the Indigenous people to the global world.

#### *Reading Questions*

1. If it’s true that we owe utmost respect to everything, how do we show that respect? Can we respect an apple while we are eating it? Or does our dependence on the Earth require us to be disrespectful?
2. “The consciousness that was used to construct a system cannot be used to make changes to it” (p. 218), Kawagley and Einstein aver. Derrick Jensen, however, argues that it’s futile to expect a change in consciousness that happens quickly enough to save a stable climate (pp. 60–64). So: Are we doomed?

### Edwin P. Pister, “Just a Few More Yards”

In 1969, scientists saved the endangered Owen’s pupfish from extinction by carrying the world’s entire population to safety in two buckets. Since then, the development of what Aldo Leopold called an “ecological conscience” has been slow and difficult. We are learning the value of all the pieces of the ecological system, understanding that to save an endangered species is to save ourselves.

*Reading Questions*

1. “In a very real sense, we and all our planet’s life-forms are slopping in two buckets while wild and poorly understood forces carry us into the future” (p. 224), Pister says, referring of course to the desert pupfish. Biologists carried the pupfish to safety. Who will carry our buckets? Really—it’s a serious question. Whose job is this?
2. What do you think: Is Pister an ecological hero, or did he unjustifiably intervene in a natural process?

**Kimberly A. Wade-Benzoni, “Why Sacrifice for Future Generations?”**

It is difficult for people in the present generation to sacrifice their own self-interest for the benefit of future others. Yet a number of factors can help promote intergenerational beneficence—affinity or “perceived oneness” with future others, reciprocity, and the urge to leave the symbolic immortality of a legacy. Intergenerational beneficence enables people to make a connection with something that will continue to exist after they are gone.

*Reading Questions*

1. Is it really true that people have a hard time sacrificing for the future? What counterexamples can you offer from your own life, times when you have denied yourself for the sake of others to come?
2. “Acting on behalf of future generations thus paradoxically represents a dramatic form of self-interest” (p. 229), Wade-Benzoni argues. Think of your own efforts to leave a legacy. Are they selfish?

**Jesse M. Fink, “Hope and the New Energy Economy”**

Business-as-usual cannot address the problems of climate change for two reasons: the time frame of business is far shorter than natural cycles, and the fallacy that current business success is inconsistent with long-term sustainability is widespread. A new energy economy could deploy various sorts of capital to invest in solutions. Once the real costs of destructive energy are reflected in prices, the new economy will create new jobs, new consumer choices, and new sustainable practices.

*Reading Questions*

1. Fink departs from many of the other writers in this book in his belief that structural social changes, particularly different business models, can meet the challenges of reducing carbon. Do you agree?
2. Do you think that a change in consciousness creates change in practices, or that change in practices causes change in ways of thinking? Can you offer some examples of each?

**Ethics Background: What are dualistic and holistic worldviews?**

A **worldview** is a set of beliefs about the fundamental questions of human existence: What is the world? What is the place of humans in the world? How then shall we live? Although we seldom notice or examine our worldview, it shapes all our ways of seeing and acting in the world.

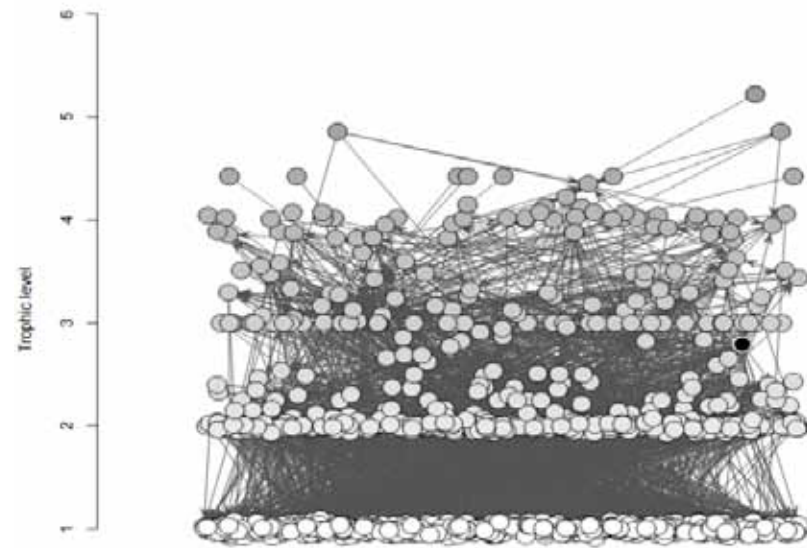
**Dualism**—which has roots in Greek atomism, Judeo-Christian creation stories, capitalism, and the European Enlightenment—is the worldview that has predominated in the Western world for hundreds of years; it is the worldview that has allowed industrial growth economies, the worldview that has allowed climate change. Dualism is the view that human beings are separate from the Earth and exceptions to its rules. We alone have spirit; the rest of the Earth is dumb matter. We alone have moral worth; the rest of the Earth derives all of its value from its usefulness to us. We alone were specially created in the image of God; the rest of the world was created for our use. It follows that our role is to learn how the Earth operates, so that we can control it and turn it more effectively to our purposes, or alter it substantially, in effect destroying our habitat without destroying ourselves. The dualistic view might be represented by a Christmas tree: we are the star on the top, the pinnacle of creation. All the rest of the green material is merely support structure, a tree whose very purpose is to hold up a star. Yes, there are beautiful ornaments here and there, but that’s all they are.

But ecological science and almost all of the world’s religions (except some forms of the monotheistic religions) renounce that worldview as simply false and deeply dangerous. We may be on the cusp of a paradigm shift toward a different worldview, called holism.

**Holism** presupposes that humans are part of a great whole made up of intricate, delicately balanced systems of living and dying that have created a richness of life greater than the world has ever seen. We are kin to all the world, sharing a kinship of common substance, a kinship of common origins, a kinship of interdependence, and, surely, the kinship of a common fate. Because we are part of the Earth’s systems, we are utterly dependent on their thriving. The holistic view can be represented by the ecologists’ diagram of trophic levels, with its intricate patterns of interdependence. In this diagram, *Homo sapiens* is the black dot in the middle on the right.

Like dualism, holism has profound moral implications. The web of relationships to which we belong creates and defines us and gives us our worth. As Aldo Leopold wrote in *A Sand County Almanac*, “The first premise of any ethic is that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts.” The challenge we face is to imagine what it is to be a good person and to act rightly as a member of that community.

\*Kathleen Dean Moore and Roly Russell, “Toward a New Ethic for the Oceans,” *Ecosystem-Based Management of the Oceans*, eds. Karen McLeod and Heather Leslie (Island Press, 2009).



**Activity / Application 1: Inupiaq values**

Dr. Kawagley carries in his pocket a list of the Inupiaq virtues. The same list hangs on meeting room walls and in homes. In what way does this express the view that all flourishing is mutual? What would an analogous list look like for Euro-American culture? What worldview does it express?

Avoidance of Conflict: Paaqtaktautainniq. The Inupiaq way is to think positive, act positive, speak positive and live positive.

Humility: Qinuinniq. Our hearts command we act on goodness and expect no reward in return.

Spirituality: Ukpiaqtuqagniq. We know the power of prayer. We are spiritual people.

Cooperation: Paammaagigniq. Together we have an awesome power to accomplish anything.

Compassion: Nagliktuutiqugniq. Though the environment is harsh and cold, our ancestors learned to live with warmth.

Hunting Traditions: Anguniallaniq. Reverence for the land, sea, and animals is the foundation of our hunting traditions.

Knowledge of Language: Inupiuraallaniq. With our language we have an identity. It helps us find out who we are in our minds.

Sharing: Aviktuaqatigiigniq. It is amazing how sharing works. Your acts of giving always come back.

Family and Kinship: Ilagiigniq. As Inupiaq people we believe in knowing who we are and how we are related to one another.

Humor: Quvianguniq. Indeed, laughter is the best medicine.

Respect for Elders and One Another: Piqqakutiqagniq Suli qiksiksrautiqagniq utuqqpanaanun allann. Our elders model our traditions and ways of being, providing a light of hope to younger people, as elders have taught us.

Respect for Nature: Qiksiksrautiqagniq Inuunigvigmun. Our creator gave us the gift of our surroundings. Those before us placed ultimate importance on this gift for future generations.

**Activity / Application 2: Clean water exports could be worth millions**

Use the arguments presented by the writers in this section—all the beautiful evocations of the principle that all flourishing is mutual—to argue for or against this sale. Remember that the point is to use the philosophical reasons to think clearly about a real-life decision:

Sitka, Alaska, a small town at the base of glacier-carved mountains, is sitting on a gold mine. But its not a mineral that can make it wealthy, but rather fresh water. Blue Lake, adjoining the town, holds trillions of gallons of clear, pure glacier water. The city plans to sell rights to 3 billion gallons of water a year to True Alaska Bottling. The corporation will siphon the water into tankers, ship it to Mumbai, India, for bottling, and sell it to S2C Global, which will then distribute it in cities in the Middle East. The potential for Sitka is a \$90 million industry. Critics point out that this plan involves transferring a massive amount of water from public ownership, and they ask if the interests of the ecosystem as well as the interests of the citizens have been fully considered.

## Chapter 8. Yes, For the Stewardship of God's Creation.

### Sallie McFague, "A Manifesto to North American Middle-Class Christians"

The times call for an Ecological Reformation that renounces the individualistic misconception of being apart from others and replaces it with a functional creation story based on "new house rules." These rules update our moral frameworks for action based on how reality is understood now: we are integral parts of an interdependent world in which "the glory of God is every creature fully alive" (p. 248).

#### *Reading Questions*

1. What is a manifesto, and in what way is McFague's essay a manifesto?
2. Does she believe that humans are "participating members of the comprehensive Earth community" (Berry) or simply dependent on nature? What difference does this make?
3. When (if ever) has Christianity "reconstructed its doctrine in light of reality as currently understood"? What reality do we currently understand that might prompt such a reconstruction?
4. What is the likelihood that Christians will redefine "the abundant life"? What do you think the abundant life is?

### Marcus J. Borg, "God's Passion in the Bible: The World"

God cares passionately about this world; the biblical evidence of his passion provides all we need for an environmental ethic. The Earth is good; human relate to this world as shepherd to their flocks of sheep. The Earth is the Lord's. The world is filled with the glory of God. Biblical eschatology is not about the destruction of the world, but about its renewal and restoration. We are called to participate in "God's dream for the Earth."

#### *Reading Questions*

1. "The world is good," God says, and it follows that we should value it and care for it. Is the world good? Sort of good, sort of bad? Bad? What evidence do you bring? What follows from that evidence?
2. How would we live, what decisions would we make, if we actually participated in God's dream for the Earth?

### Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Our Obligation to Tomorrow"

The Qur'an makes clear that we are God's vicegerents on Earth, responsible for the trust He has left in our hands. We are responsible for the survival of human life, and for the preservation of the great cultural, intellectual, and spiritual legacy we have inherited from the past. Since our intelligence has the power of anticipation, we can hear "the cry of the future, beckoning us to heed its call and fulfill our responsibilities toward it" (p. 258).

#### *Reading Questions*

1. This is a stirring passage: "In the eyes of God it is a blessed act to plant a tree, even if it be a day before the end of the world" (p. 257). Let's take this seriously. Why should we plant a tree under such circumstances? What lesson does this hold for those who have given up hope that we can save the world from calamitous climate change?
2. What is a vicegerent? What are we called to do as vicegerents?

### Tri Robinson, "The Biblical Mandate for Creation Care"

Evangelical Christians are called to tend God's garden, "on Earth, as it is in Heaven." It is impossible to separate passion for the Kingdom of God from commitment to care for God's creation. Christians have been mandated by God to be leaders in a global environmental movement. One-third of the world's people profess to be Christian; united in their care for creation, 2.5 billion Christians of the world can make a lasting difference.

#### *Reading Questions*

1. What exactly does it mean to say that we are called to tend God's garden? What does this tell us about the garden itself? What does it say about our relation to it?
2. Robinson points out that there are 2.5 billion Christians in the world, easily enough to make a dramatic change, and that Christians believe we have an obligation to care for creation. If so, why do we face the problems we do? How can the power of belief be turned to good action?

### Martin S. Kaplan, "Will Religions Guide Us on Our Dangerous Journey?"

How will the religions of the world respond to the challenges of the ultimate catastrophe, climate change? Will they look to the personal salvation of the faithful only? Or will they, as the "ancient formulators of culture and values in the world [and] the primary source of ethics" (p. 266), provide essential moral leadership? As political and economic institutions fail in their responsibilities to respond meaningfully to climate change, can faith communities "provide the value structures to change consciousness and behavior as we face existential threats to the very survival of the biosphere and human life" (p. 266)?

#### *Reading Questions*

- Let's ask Kaplan's questions. They're good ones. What do you think? What evidence supports your views?
1. Will any religious traditions find reason to argue against saving human life?
  2. Will religious institutions be concerned only when it affects their own faithful?
  3. Will people look to religion only for their own salvation?
  4. If people flooded out from Bangladesh look to your particular church or faith community, will you welcome them into your lives? Should you?

**Activity / Application:** “And it was good.”

Read the following aloud, with one person reading the parts of God, another reading the boldface text, and another reading the remaining text. Then consider this question. “And it was good” appears again and again; it is the chorus to creation, the repeating refrain. Clearly it has an overriding significance in the creation story. What is its moral significance?

Can God weep?

Is there any grief greater than a parent's grief over the moral ruin of their children?

Genesis 1 (from the King James Version of the Bible, adapted for classroom use)

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4 **And God saw that the light was good;** and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. 6 And God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 7 And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. 8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day. 9 And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. **And God saw that it was good.** 11 And God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.” And it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. **And God saw that it was good.** 13 And there was evening and there was morning, a third day. 14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. 16 And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. 17 And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. **And God saw that it was good.** 19 And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day. 20 And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.” 21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. **And God saw that it was good.** 22 And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”

23 And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. 24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. 25 And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” 29 And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

## Chapter 9. Yes, Because Compassion Requires It.

### Libby Roderick, “Winter Wheat”

When we plant shade trees that we will not sit under, when we sow wheat that other hands will harvest, when we struggle for justice that will not be achieved in our lifetimes, we dream the Earth’s dream for a world in which children can live in peace.

#### *Reading Questions*

1. What did you believe as a young person that you no longer believe? What beliefs have only grown stronger with time?
2. That beautiful refrain: “We will plant shade trees that we will not sit under . . .” Can you write some more lines for that refrain? What else will we do?
3. Consider the bridge in the song, which begins, “Each generation passes like the leaves . . .” If you have the heart to do it, rewrite those four lines, considering what climate change is likely to do to the oaks. If that’s too sad, tell us instead what makes the oak’s roots strong.

### Wangari Maathai, “We Are Called to Help the Earth to Heal”

The experiences of women in Africa demonstrate that when the environment is destroyed or degraded, humans suffer, as do their children and grandchildren in a hungrier, less fertile, and less stable world. It is time to rise to a higher moral ground. Our calling is to embrace the role of environmental custodians and “protect the rights of generations, of all species that cannot speak for themselves today” (p. 274).

#### *Reading Questions*

1. Imagine the conversation that might occur between two beautiful souls: songwriter Libby Roderick, who wrote the line “We will plant shade trees,” and Wangari Maathai, who organized women to plant 30 million trees.
2. Maathai rightly points out that Africa will suffer the life-and-death consequences of climate change largely caused by the developed nations. Do Africans have legitimate claims against the developed world for reparations? What form might they take?

### Ming Xu and Xin Wei, “An Invisible Killer”

Fulin Wang, a forty-three-year-old farmer in southern China, sits weeping under his dead cherry trees, his successive orchards destroyed by the violence and vagaries of increasingly unstable weather. His story illustrates the immediate need for actions against climate change. To overcome the greed and selfishness of humans, we must “work together across nations, cultures, religions, and socioeconomic status” (p. 277) to fix the problems we have created.

#### *Reading Questions*

1. Ming Xu, the coauthor of this article, is a prominent scientist in China, specializing in climate change. What questions would you want to ask him if you had the chance?
2. This article illustrates the power of a story of a single person. What makes stories so powerful? Write a story about a person who bears the consequences of climate change, real or imagined, on this continent or any other, on an island, at the edge of the Arctic Ocean, in Mississippi or Ghana.

### James Garvey, “Climate Change Is a Moral Problem for You, Right Now”

If a strong swimmer hears the cries of a drowning child, that person has the responsibility to save her. Failure to do so is a moral failure. If that swimmer has in fact pushed the child in, the obligation is overwhelming. By analogy, we in the developed world are, through reckless use of fossil fuels, causing untold suffering and death. We have the capacity to prevent and/or mitigate that suffering. Failure to do so is a moral failure. Moreover, the failure is a moral problem for each of us personally, because we are confronted by climate change every day in choices we make. We are called to evaluate our lives, our values, and our decisions. Are we willing to let our lives be a moral outrage?

#### *Reading Questions*

1. Consider the case of the drowning child. What effect does each of the following (considered separately) have on your personal responsibility?
  - a. You know the child is drowning.
  - b. You cannot swim.
  - c. A thousand people are standing with you, watching the child.
  - d. You didn’t push the child in the water.
  - e. You are busy, on your way to an important meeting.
  - f. Saving the child would require some financial sacrifice, since the expensive clothes and watch you are wearing would be ruined.
2. Now, how is this case similar to and dissimilar from our personal responsibility to take action to counter climate change?

### Sulak Sivaraksa, “From Engagement to Emancipation”

Socially engaged Buddhists work for social transformations that end suffering and unjust exploitation. The structural violence of climate change must be confronted. “Politics without spirituality or ethics is cold and blind,” but “spirituality without politics is simply inconsequential” (p. 284). Buddhism cannot become a New Age indifference to injustice. Buddhists must ask the hard questions: What are the meaningful acts that will bring an end to suffering? How can peace-loving and compassionate people confront structural violence?

*Reading Questions*

1. “We must learn to develop ethical responsibility for structural violence” (p. 285), Sivaraksa states. What is structural violence? Give some examples from your own country, then from others.
2. How might one “spiritualize politics”? Or “politicize spirituality”? What are the benefits? The dangers?

**Quincy Troupe, “The Architecture of Language, Parts 9 and 10”**

Hurricane Katrina’s “savage flooding tongue” (p. 287) speaks in the language of fierce winds and scattered coffins. Where is the scaffolding language of music and metaphor, and where can it take us?

*Reading Questions*

1. Consider the recent natural disaster that took place closest to your home. Think about the images you saw on TV and the reports in the papers. Create a list of powerful (concrete, specific, vivid) words to describe the aftermath of the disaster. Now write a poem.
2. Perhaps part of the reason we are so slow to respond to environmental emergencies is that we can’t picture them, since they often unfold slowly or far away. Or we can’t picture an alternative. What is the role of art in facing these emergencies?

**Activity / Application:** Taking the pledge for responsible food choices

The farmer in Ming Xu’s essay weeps at the base of his drought-killed trees. His story stands for a thousand other stories of people who will not be able to provide food for their families, as the weather makes abrupt and unpredictable shifts. Hunger calls for the greatest compassion. One response to the expected food crises is to learn now to eat more thoughtfully. One example is to choose foods that are raised close to home (and so do not require the fuel for long-distance shipping). What are other examples of more responsible food choices—ways in which you can reduce your carbon or toxic footprint, just by the food choices you make?

Now, everyone choose one change that you would be able to make. It doesn’t have to be big. Maybe you’ll give up meat on Fridays. Or something else. Write it on a piece of paper, fold the paper, and put it in the center of the room. When all the participants have added their paper, go back to the center of the room and choose a paper other than your own. That is your assignment.

Go around the room, telling what your new assignment is and indicating whether this is something you can do. Trading is perfectly appropriate at this point.