

Often, when we hear the word Simplicity, we think in terms of Going Green, or Green Sanctuary, where the focus is on being more environmentally friendly, living life in a more sustainable way. Living in a way that sustains both individuals and the environment is a good thing. Its living in alignment with nature, with what “is”.

So much of the way we live these days is not in alignment with nature. We’re learning more and more about bio-systems and eco-systems; what they need to stay healthy and what works to destroy them. We’re learning about our earth as an eco-system and we’re finding that the way we live is not sustainable. We’ve learned that Global warming is caused in large part by greenhouse gases, and that we as humans are causing it by burning too many fossil fuels.

We’ve learned that global warming is making the icebergs melt. A 2007 report said: “Climate models project that summer sea ice in the Arctic Basin will retreat further and further away from most Arctic landmasses, opening new shipping routes and extending the navigation season in the Northern Sea Route by between two and four months. Previously frozen areas in the Arctic may therefore become seasonally or permanently navigable”.

In 2009, the first two international commercial cargo vessels traveled north of Russia between Europe and Asia. In 2011, 18 ships made the now mostly ice-free crossing, cutting 4000 nautical miles off the journey between Rotterdam and Korea, with estimated savings of some 300,000 euros when compared to the normal route by way of the Suez Canal. The water from all that melted ice is raising the sea level and places where people live will be underwater.

As the earth warms, and sea levels rise, our climate will change. We’re told we should expect more extreme weather conditions, a significant impact on animal and plant species, and possible disruption of what we can grow and where we can grow it.

Records of winter temperatures (December, January, February), for the 48 contiguous states are pretty striking. Records from 1895 to present, show that this past winter was the 4th warmest winter on record, following the years 2000, 1999, and 1992.

This was also the third least snowy winter on record for the contiguous U.S. Warm and dry conditions during the winter of 2011 – 2012 led to the 3rd lowest snow cover that was in the 46-year history of satellite records, according to the Rutgers Global Snow Lab.

We know these facts and much more, but knowing that Global warming is happening is not enough to change it. Changing it will take a change in the way we think and more importantly, it will require us to change our behavior, ultimately on a global scale.

Changing the way we think and changing our behavior is not going to be easy. I know this for a fact. I’ve labored long and hard to learn to get to meetings on time. I’ve gone from being mostly unsuccessful to being mostly successful. I’ve stopped making New Year resolutions; they so seldom seem to come to fruition.

Changing behavior is awfully hard, especially in this consumer world of ours, where someone is always trying to sell you something. They want you to think you need something newer, bigger or better, or something smaller, faster and more convenient. I see ads for cars that can back up and park themselves—all the driver needs to do is sit behind the wheel and smile. But they shouldn’t be talking on their cell phones.

I decided something was wrong with the way we were living when stores started selling bottled water. Water is free, you can get it almost anywhere, yet, someone has convinced us to buy it in little bottles made out

of plastic that we then throw away—often on the side of the road. I decided something wasn't right when you have to pay to put air in your tires.

Many of you will remember when you could go to any gas station, find where they kept the air hose and just put air in your bike or car tire. Not anymore! Now you have to put a quarter in a machine that seems to seldom have enough air pressure to be of much use.

Companies have even gotten us to do their marketing for them. How many of you right now are carrying something or wearing something that has someone else's name on it—right out in plain view? How many of us asked to have someone else put their name on our clothes?

Now I must admit, there was a time when I wanted someone else's name on my back. When I was a kid, I'd get a magic marker and put #32, on my tee-shirts and sweat shirts and go out and play football with my friends. I wanted to be Jim Brown, a great running back for the Cleveland Browns. He had played for Syracuse University, and my oldest brother was at Syracuse—it was a great image in my head. Before long..., well, you'll notice you haven't seen the number 32 on my back. As adults, many of us wake up one morning and realize there's no joy in being the attorney, doctor, engineer or accountant our dad wanted us to be.

Being what someone else wants us to be is an example of living from the outside in. That's often what consumerism asks us to do. Live from the outside in. They sell us images of how we should be, what we should wear, what we should own, in order to be seen as young, sexy, smart, good or successful. We get sold images of how we can be just like everyone else, AND at the same time, we're sold images of how we can be different from everyone else. Just buy this or that and you'll have the best lawn and be the envy of everyone on your block.

This is not what we talk about when we're talking about Simplicity. We are not talking about living in someone else's images. We're not talking about living from the outside in. Simplicity to me is the exact opposite. It's learning to live from the inside out. It's learning how to live our lives in alignment with nature, with what's sustainable, learning to live in alignment with our values and who we truly are as individuals. To help us do that, we need to ask the question, does this serve me, does it support my deeply held beliefs and values, does it feed me and help me be my best self? Or, is this purchase/effort/activity designed to feed my ego, make me look good in other people's eyes?

Asking such a question takes us in the direction of knowing or having a sense of who we really are and what's important to us. At some point, we need to know what our principles and values are. Maybe we need to spend some time with ourselves, rather than the computer or TV. Maybe we need to do some digging to separate ourselves from cultural "shoulds" and what Madison Ave tells us. Maybe we need to spend time with a therapist.

On the other hand, maybe it doesn't require any thinking at all, maybe it just requires us to trust our deep internal knowing, that quiet inner voice.

When I think of being myself, the image of the oak tree comes to mind. The oak tree just does what it does, it grows where it is. The oak tree knows what to do, it grows, it bends and adapts as best it can to keep doing what it's intended to do. And all from a little acorn.

An acorn, you hold it up and look at it—who would think it could become a big, strong, beautiful oak tree? But that acorn, if its in the right place, and surrounds itself with the right stuff, can grow to be more than 100' tall and branch out at least that far. All from an acorn that's driven by it's internal desire. The acorn does it naturally, it just does what it does. The acorn and oak tree doesn't concern itself with what others think, or how it looks to others, it just does what it's meant to do.

It doesn't worry that its natural state of being might shade out the grass in its shadow. It doesn't fret that its branches may be inadequate for a bird's nest. It doesn't stay small out of fear of the winds that may come.

I think we can be like the oak tree. I think we can learn to live from the inside out, and just be who we are and do what we do, because that's who we are. But because we are not oak trees, we have to be careful here. We have minds that think and egos we like to stroke, dress up and present to the world. Sometimes, maybe often, we do what someone else thinks we should do, or what we think will make us likable and therefore happy. Some things run counter to our authenticity. Some things do not reflect who we truly are.

We have to be careful to make sure we hear our true inner voice. We have to come to know our selves so we can distinguish between what's true for us and what some image tells us we should be or do. We all have a natural inclination, an internal compass, and if we listen carefully to what's in our heart of hearts, we'll know just what to do and when to do it. Even if we can't know the outcome. Just like the oak tree.

Some of us will want to build things, some of us will want to fix them. Some will want to teach while others will seek to discover something new. Some of us will want to be out front and lead, others will feel most comfortable following and doing. Some will want to work with people, some will prefer to work alone.

What I find extraordinarily profound is that the world needs all these different types. The world could not exist with only acorns and oak trees. Sustainable, vibrant communities, as a microcosm of the world's population, requires all types, including the nay-sayers, the knuckleheads, and the boastful. There is not only room for everyone, but balance and wholeness requires variety and diversity. That's what the yin and yang symbol tells us.

So listen to what's in your heart of hearts. Make friends with your inner voice. Follow your deepest desires. Then, go do what makes you feel most alive. The world needs exactly, what's uniquely yours to give.

Amen