

Earth's atmosphere is heating up - and right along with it the tempers and fears of our communities and nations

Our responses range from denial to complacency to 'Hey everybody - Mother Earth's running a fever..! Whatever can we DO?'

Nan Moss with David Corbin

WAKING UP the GIANTS



Earth's atmosphere is heating up - and right along with it are the tempers and fears of our communities and nations. Amidst all our squabbles, the predicament of global warming and its consequences continues to reveal threatening changes to the world as we know it, our ways of life, and the survival of many. The contentious 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen demonstrated to all who listened that the nations of our world are embroiled in a daunting tangle of economics and special interests - though there was enough agreement for delegates to show up and convene.

Whether global warming is entirely because of our doings is less important at this moment than our penchant for taking sides - battle stances - of disbelief or blame. An old paradigm brought us to this place and cannot show us the way out.

As practitioners of shamanism, who live within an expanded world view, we have the ability to shape-shift the prevalent fearful and divisive perspective of global warming towards a change of focus that doesn't squander our chance for the motivation and grounded optimism we need for renewal. Our task is not to overcome global warming, but to understand and align with its flow, on behalf of sustainable living for all.

At the 2009 Climate Change Conference, former US Vice President Al Gore and Danish ice scientist Dorthe Dahl Jensen presented two slide shows to a full house on the rapid melting of polar ice and glaciers¹.

As aware as she is of the gravity of the ongoing situation, Jensen spoke in non-combative terms as she admitted that the dissolution of Greenland's titanic ice sheet 'has really surprised us' and that 'With global warming, we have woken giants.'

Ruth Curry, an American climatologist from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution was recently interviewed aboard the Greenpeace icebreaker hosting a team of scientists in Sermilik Fjord, Greenland. She said "We're heading off to a climate extreme and this is just going to snowball... I think that we've done it, really kicked Earth's climate system. And that says a lot. It's a beast. It's huge. And to have moved it in as

short a period of time as one hundred years, basically, to have done that is enormous."

Both scientists characterise the changes they feel strongly about through statements that reflect a sense of awe, of wonderment. Awe has a way of engendering respect, and respect can open the door to understanding, and a more compatible world view for life.

When we declare 'war' (such as 'the war on global warming') then we have to face a fight - which leaves little or no room to entertain the possibility of something better.

ASKING THE SPIRITS

In a shamanic journey, I asked my ancestor weather teacher for insight into these matters, and right away I saw that global warming is 'us', and thus requires our human attention and actions. Climate change, however, is something beyond our effects, and yet intimately related to our reality of 'global warming.' Our task is to learn that we and weather reflect one another - always.

The teaching continued: our population on the Earth has crested to the point where everything about us, by virtue of sheer numbers at the least, is magnified - our emotions, thoughts, activities, dreams... And this then is also the weather's state of being - intensified in its activity - less predictable, less hospitable in realms where it was once more so, and with a greater capacity for altering the face of the earth and our lives - just like us. And so we are also the 'huge beast' that Ruth Curry speaks of.

Humans know something about our intimacy with the heart of weather - somewhere in our beings it breathes its life force into our consciousness. Yet we continue to focus on the nasty side, as we speak of the 'fury' of the hurricane.

The storm in the autumn of 2009, that travelled up the east coast of the USA as a remnant of Hurricane Ida, combined with another low-pressure system, and was referred to as a 'vicious storm.' Again just like us.

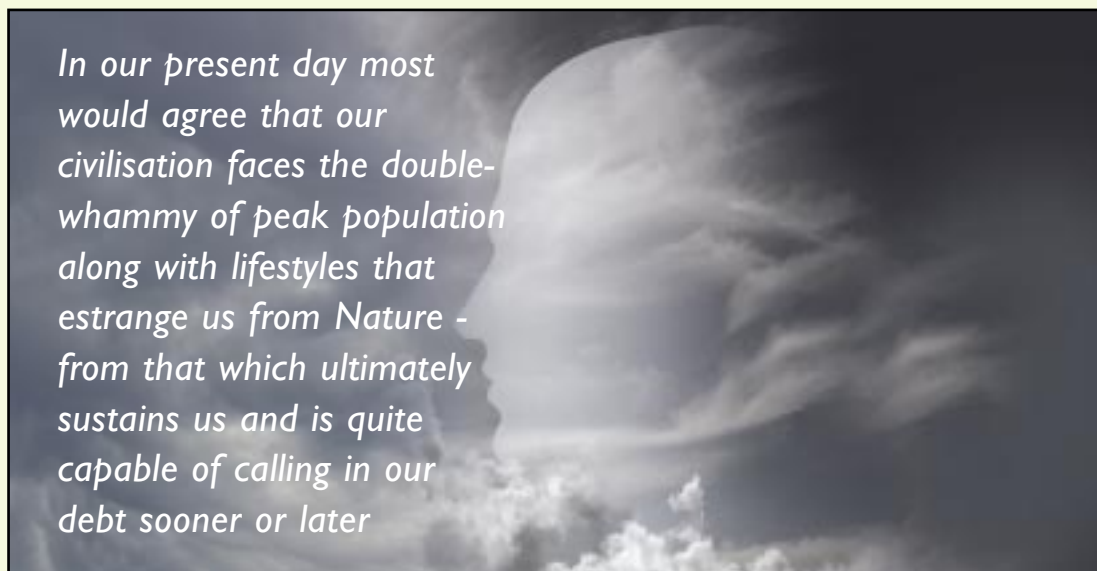
It is time to recognise that we are far more than our capacity for mean-spiritedness and destruction. This is not our whole story, nor is it the weather's.

My journey wrapped up with the admonition that big change is here and coming - and that our choices of light bulbs, recycling, and all those other worthy actions available to us are no more important than our internal states, our capacity for alignment with that which engenders well-being and balance - internally and externally.

We would do well to align with that which supports good living - in other words living sustainably on the Earth. For how far can our changing of light bulbs go towards restoring balance if we're still frenzied, scattered, confused, overwhelmed, cranky, and scared?

HISTORICAL PATTERNS

In the face of the enormous scope of climatic events and changes



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that the Earth and humans have experienced time and again, we find a lot of evidence for slow changes, ones barely noticeable except for the hindsight of generations and longer.

What we may face today is the spectre of dramatic shifts - the kind that delivers catastrophic hardship to a multitude of species of plants and animals in any given region - which includes human communities. We have the example of that infamous period of a few hundred years between the mid C16th to the mid C19th - a mere blip on Earth's timeline - which we call the 'Little Ice Age,' where the weather seemingly turned on us.

Before that there had been a time of easier, more hospitable weather - from around 900 to 1300 CE. This period of unusually mild, stable weather was fairly dependable for the inhabitants of the northern hemisphere, and made possible successful explorations and colonisations in the far north, where the Vikings created viable settlements in Iceland and Greenland.

Additionally, during this mild period, English and Basque fishermen followed vast shoals of cod across the North Atlantic and down the eastern seaboard of North America, long before the Pilgrims came ashore.

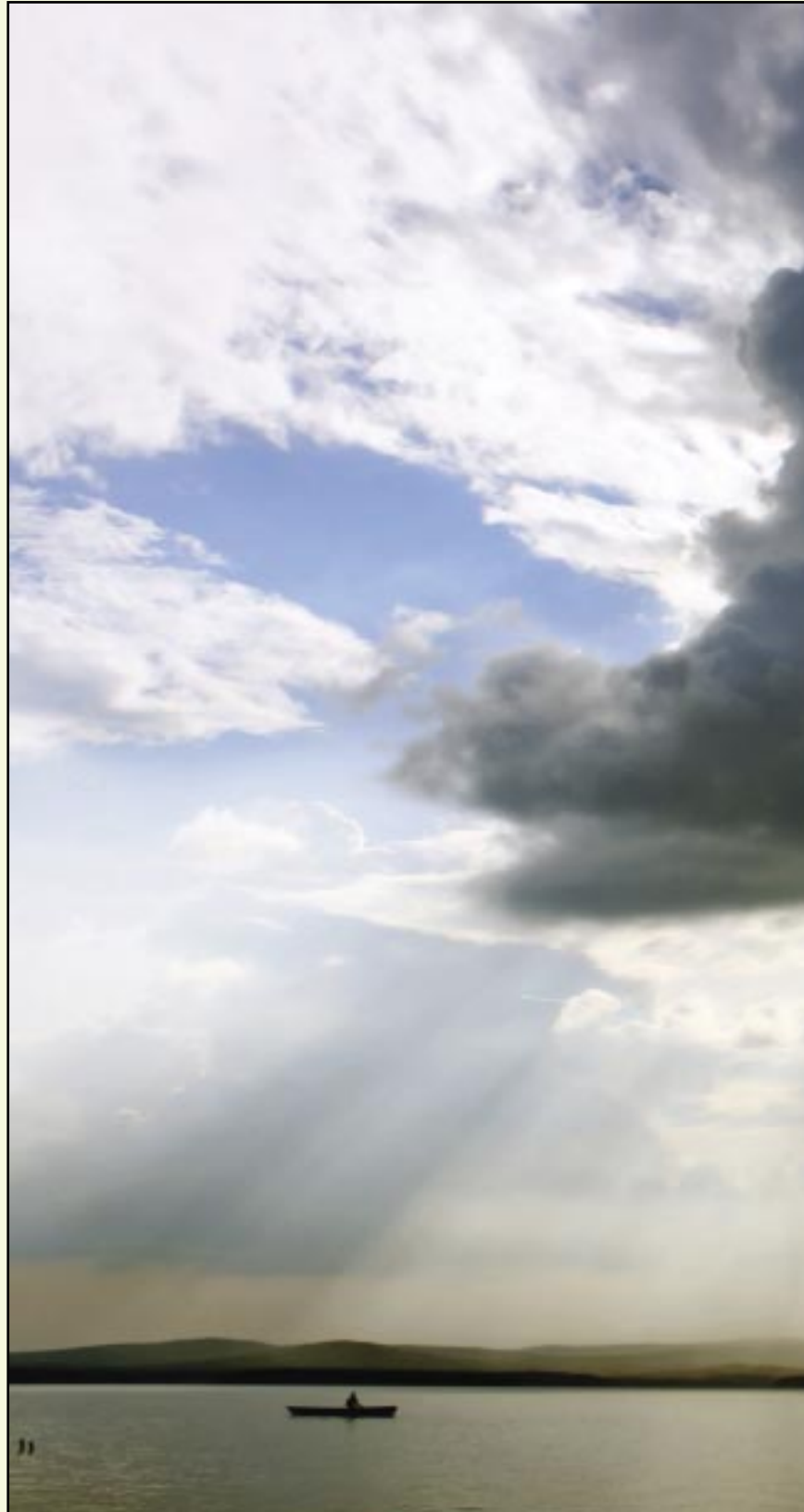
But when the Little Ice Age arrived the weather our ancestors experienced ranged from serious droughts to years of torrential rains during prime growing seasons, from severe heat in summer to frigid winters - and with very little clue as to what would come next.

There were also years of bountiful harvests - with mild winters and warm summers - and yet overall, the climate presented a far less hospitable run of local and regional weather than populations were accustomed to.

Brian Fagan writes, 'Cycles of excessive cold and unusual rainfall could last a decade, a few years, or just a single season. The pendulum

of climate change rarely paused for more than a generation².' As a result crops failed repeatedly and famine, then diseases (the 'black death' for one) ensued. All this instigated great social unrest and havoc. It is noteworthy that the 100 Years War and French Revolution came from this time of aberrant weather.

Nor was the catastrophic predicament of changing climate and weather confined to Europe: serious hardship and upheaval also visited China, Korea, and Japan during this time period. Severe drought-induced famines, then floods, epidemics, and violence added to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.



Right: tornado forming above a lake


The troubles of this era also prompted emigrations to what would hopefully be a better chance at life and well-being. And so the waves of social unrest led to diasporas where many deserted the cities of their homelands and ventured forth to other realms in Europe and to other continents, particularly North America. The

earlier Norse colonies of Greenland failed due to the changing climate, and now the English, French, Spanish and others sought wealth and homes in the New World.

For thousands of years city-states around the world have risen and fallen, and it was always up to those who could go back to a simpler land-based life (or who never

left it) to hold and tend the seeds for the next flowering of civilisation.

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A DREAM MESSAGE

So how can our shamanic work address the hugeness of climate change and its inexorable refashioning of our world? What is key for us now is that even in the face of the enormity of climate change, we have real work to do at a spiritual level.

I remember a vivid dream where I am with a group of people who are leaving for somewhere. We know we have to leave - abandon the place that shelters us - and make a trek somewhere out on a great plain where we will be vulnerable in transit.



Above: a hurricane forms in Earth's atmosphere

I cannot recall if we knew where we were headed, or what we hoped to find, other than the certainty that we would not survive if we remained where we were.

And as it turned out, we really did face a crisis, an immediate threat to our survival, as the weather abruptly shifted and the world around us began to freeze. With the temperature plummeting, I dropped back in the company of a few others, while the rest of our group proceeded on towards our destination, so that we could perform ceremony to coax the sun's heat to return.

RELATING TO WEATHER

Though the practice of weather shamanism is not for all, anyone can learn to relate to the weather - to begin to understand that we and weather are intimately related and

that our actions, thoughts and feelings do make a difference in the world.

Everybody can do their part in simple ways to restore a healthy, balanced relationship between we humans and Nature's weathers. Dan Petroski of Larkmead Vineyards in Napa Valley, California in the USA, has recently seen his prized merlot grapes wither instead of ripening due to severe temperature fluctuations. But he says "The weather tells you what you get. You don't want to fight the weather - you want to work with it".

Instead of struggling against these changes we can all work to revive and recreate those nearly forgotten, venerable relationships between humans and the spirits of weather. We can all learn to respect weather and its doings.

As practitioners of shamanism we too can take up the long-held responsibility of the 'true human being' to heal and safeguard the web of kinship between the human community and its home environs.

We can draw inspiration from traditional peoples: the Inuit of the far north, for instance, face significant hardship and losses to their life-ways thanks to global warming-climate change, yet remember their kinship with Nature and name today's weather *uggianaqtuq* - 'like a familiar friend acting strangely.'

SEEING THE WHOLE PICTURE

Contrast this with a current project of the humanitarian software genius and billionaire, Bill Gates. Reporting online in July 2009 Huffington Post, Katherine Goldstein describes Bill Gates' Hurricane-Fighting Invention: 'He and several other scientists and engineers have a patent-pending project that plans to release barge-like contraptions into brewing offshore hurricanes, which would pump cold water up from the bottom of the ocean, thus calming the rough weather that's caused by warm ocean temperatures.'

Sounds like another battle - another instance of a failure of imagination so that we cannot recognise our designated 'enemy' as anything other than what we think of as 'bad', 'worthless', 'evil', 'destructive' - and where 'the only good hurricane is a dead hurricane.'

Never mind the life-giving work of the great tempests - co-creators and sustainers of our atmosphere at the very least. Never mind the integrity of the ocean's currents and populations. Never mind that other peoples in arid lands recognise and depend upon the rains of hurricanes and tropical storms. Never mind that we in our ignorance may not have the whole story.

A CALL TO WAKE UP

To face global warming, we are not served by wrapping our imaginations around conflict so that the term 'global warming' is automatically a battle cry. It is rather a call to wake up, to face ourselves.

To successfully deal with global warming we have to own our part in it all, and come to terms with the requirements of its reality. The Earth has seen change of this magnitude before - and so have our ancestors. If we fail to respond, right now, we may actually have a battle on our hands - but it will not be a matched conflict - and it will be a fight for our lives.

The key is to live with it. For this we need to continue to learn more about the reality and potential of this great shift in its process of changing our world, and we need to know the reality of our potential for aligning with change. We have successfully faced enormous challenges to our life-ways and survival before. We can do it now. However, the time is undeniably 'now'. We have no more slack if we are to achieve a fortunate outcome for our other plant and animal relations and descendants.

POWER OF BLESSING

We can remember that changes from the heart go far deeper in their reach than changes made from a place of fear. A primary task - and gift - along the path of weather shamanism is the calling to bless the weather, no matter what.

This is not a way to lie to ourselves - or to the weather. It is an opportunity to acknowledge genuine feelings around threatening conditions and still be willing to 'kiss the cailleach even when she stinks'. If we're lucky, this kind of discipline will not only bring joy, it will be contagious. It will spill over into our lives in other areas. We can also support one another in the great endeavour of turning a war into a relationship. We can



share what we learn, tell the simple stories of our experiences as we seek a life-sustaining alignment with the Earth - her atmosphere and weathers.

Few of us are brought up in indigenous traditions with elders who can show the way, and yet we can access some of their general ancestral knowledge.

Most fortunately we have the advantage of our ability to work with compassionate helping spirits in all the worlds. We really are all in it together, no matter where we come from, no matter which way things go in the end.

I think about the 'rainmakers' we hear of from time to time. Who is a rainmaker really - and how do they work? They do not battle or attempt to control weather. Most simply described, a rainmaker 'allows'.

This is not easy for most of us to grasp. Somehow a rainmaker finds a way to align with that which they seek. It may be an inborn, natural talent for relationship, or a degree of sensitivity that can be learned and cultivated. True rainmakers don't indulge in confronting or attempting to control that which they cannot. They don't battle. Yet they seem to be capable of creating or 'calling down' the weather conditions that are needed - and at the right time and place.

Furthermore their abilities are not limited to weather. It is said that rainmakers engender well-being effortlessly, wherever they go. My guess is they understand what alignment truly is, and seemingly effortlessly, bring themselves into a state of being that creates harmony around them. This is likely a big part of the back-story of many of weather's sympathetic responses to our doings⁵.

A NEW DREAM OF BALANCE

And should we feel called to spiritually work with the weather on behalf of a realm in need, we have to remain mindful to not impose our personal sense of balance without a clear sense of the deeper picture.

It is true, that as residents of a particular realm we count as part of its reality. We too are affected by the local weathers and we, in turn, affect them along with the other local beings. We all share in the Middle World experience and yet as individuals we are not the whole story, just as the local weathers

are not the entire story of the overall climate, and its relentlessly changing nature. If we make our spiritual work a priority we can be of real service to our communities in these matters, especially aligning ourselves with a new story, such as one of a beautiful, viable planet Earth and all therein.

And we can't stop there - we have to continue the story, enliven and affirm it with daily appreciation, gratitude for the reality of this story, this sustainable and lasting vision of our world wherever we find it. And we have to live it, in every way we can manage - small or large.

Secondly we can cultivate good relationships with the spirits and forces of Nature. At the most basic level we can practice awareness of self to better learn where we are - or are not - respectful to others.

And being aware of how we respond to the world, and when we act habitually. We can watch our thoughts, our language, and remember that what comes out of our mouths resides within, and has creative power.

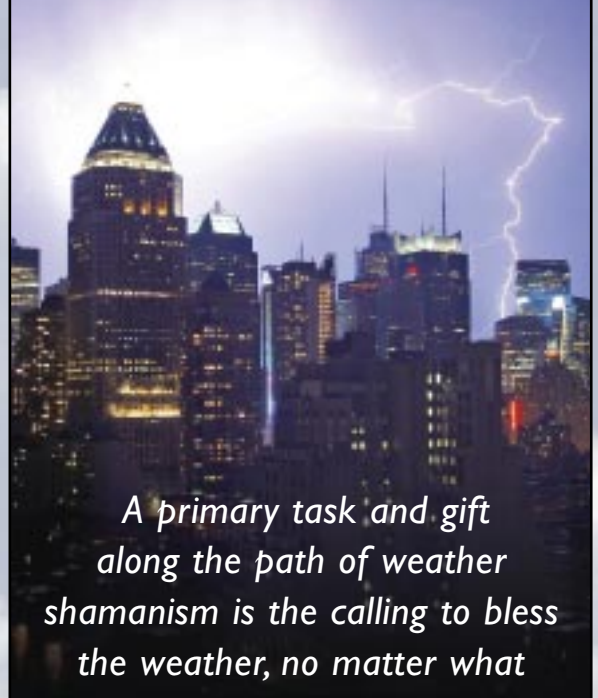
As always, we can reach out to our helping spirits to enlist their inspiration, support, and collaboration. Together with the spirits we can create and perform ceremonies dedicated to the restoration of harmony, to the continuation of life on the Earth as we would want for our descendants.

Along with our ceremonies we can celebrate. That which we celebrate flourishes through our love and attention. Throughout it all we can continue to recycle, re-use, amend our activities where they are wasteful, take just what we need and not more just because we can.

POWER OF SIMPLICITY

If this approach sounds too simplistic in comparison to the complexity of our problems then take a closer look. Is endless complexity something we need more of? So often simple is equated with easy. In practice however, that which is simple can be anything but. It is often the simple practices that are most capable of bringing the greatest rewards.

And through the teaching work we do together on our workshops and trainings, we see that it is these deceptively simple practices



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that students readily overlook the most - the very ones that can elicit profound results tend to be the most undervalued.

Just look at how many varieties and choices we now have for a cup of coffee on the road! Who cares about a plain cup of coffee when we can order up a 'grande-soy-no-water-chai-cappuccino' and actually get it? I'll opt for just a cup of coffee - and I want mine organic, shade-grown, fair-trade, low-acid, yet strong and good tasting...

To go slow takes trust that the results will be worthwhile. It takes honoring the path over the destination. This is commonly held wisdom that humans have garnered over the ages, and that has lost nothing in its relevance to our lives today.

"What do the spirits of weather want from us?" I once asked my ancestor weather teacher. "Honour weather. And understand that humans are co-creators in the world - along with all the other spirits and beings of Earth and Atmosphere."

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Nan and David are deeply committed to their relationships and explorations of the spiritual nature of weather and the Middle World, and share their work through writings and workshops. They are the authors of 'Weather Shamanism: Harmonizing Our Connection with the Elements', published by Inner Traditions-Bear & Co., and 'CloudDancing: Wisdom from the Sky', a set of divination cards and guidebook. www.shamanscircle.com.

NOTES:

1. Dorthe Dahl Jensen, AI Gore: 'Polar Ice May Vanish in 5-7 Years.'
2. B Fagan, 'The Little Ice Age', New York, NY: Basic Books: 2000, p48
3. Elizabeth Svoboda, 'Can Winemakers Take the Heat?' Onearth, Winter 2010, p23
4. Tom Cowan, personal communication, 2009
5. N Moss, D Corbin, 'Weather Shamanism: Harmonizing Our Connection With the Elements'. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions - Bear & Co; 2008