

## PARADIGMS AS LEVERAGES FOR CHANGE

Paradigms are somehow worlds in themselves, worlds in which we either live or could live in. We presently are part of one paradigm, a worldview about which we can form some judgments when we raise our perspectives toward embracing all its aspects, or as many of them as possible. By managing to gain some distance, with effort we can formulate how the paradigm operates, what are its assumptions and ground rules, whether it fulfills the goals it pursues, and so on.

This book approaches other paradigms than the prevailing ones when it comes to social change. It looks at paradigms as leverage points for social change. Why more than one paradigm? Wouldn't it be sufficient to predicate that one paradigm is the solution and the next destination? As a researcher and author, but first of all as an individual participating within my means in the creation of a new social reality, I have not set out to find paradigms. They have come my way, and naturally I did not see them at first. It is only through immersion in a paradigm that something surfaces into consciousness, and that I start to realize that I live between paradigms and can choose which one fits me best, and which one has the greatest potential to more fully embrace reality and create new, more life-fulfilling scenarios. Ultimately the validity of a paradigm lies in how faithfully it embraces and encompasses some part of our given reality. Because, ideally a paradigm is a fuller way of relating to reality around us, acting from an understanding of it offers us a powerful leverage point to more effectively effect social change.

However, there is a problem, or a challenge! A paradigm cannot be given an easy definition, nor be used in the spirit of a manifesto, a quick solution, a political platform. In fact the reverse is true. At first, and even for a long time, it is not possible to perceive the reality of a paradigm. To know a paradigm is to grow into it, to be *altered and made new* by it. When the reality of a paradigm fully penetrates our own inner world, we become aware of a before and an after, and of a gap between the two. The paradigm in which I live now—better said *predominantly live in* now—cannot be referred to in terms of what I knew before. In describing a new paradigm I enter into a collision course with the prevailing paradigm, from which I have to borrow words and usual terms of reference in order to portray what is essentially different. An alternative lies in looking for examples, analogies, and a contemplation of the results of embracing another paradigm. In essence, unless I want to take an

epistemological or philosophical approach, I need to take a pragmatic approach to a larger world of ideas or experiences. This will be my choice.

Parts of what I will offer will sound self-evident to those who have lived and explored a given paradigm. Others will find that something of the paradigm is already known and/or speaks to them, either because they have been exposed to it, or because we could say they are "naturals." Other paradigms will simply not approach their horizon of experience.

So how do I propose to move into this ever-shifting territory? I will explore the lay of the land with stories, analogies, and a very basic field exploration before directing the reader to the resources that will allow her to accomplish her own paradigm shift. For the purpose of this book I will start by looking at the food system: what it looks like under the present paradigm and what new directions future-looking paradigms are mapping out. Occasionally I will offer examples from other fields as well.

All throughout the book I will compare a paradigm to an iceberg. A paradigm makes itself visible through what comes to the surface in our present culture. Much of it remains hidden as potential yet untapped. The overview I will offer will be like exploring the tip of the iceberg: what is most visible. Through some examples I will sound the depths of the iceberg in a few particular spots and direct you to the whole iceberg if you intend to explore it further.

I will start with some general considerations. We don't need to encompass and understand a paradigm to walk toward it. But we do need to practice with discipline new ways of seeing / thinking / relating / connecting / operating / being in order to make the new reality perceptible over time. An example from my life: I took on Nonviolent Communication (NVC) with extensive training and practice especially over the first five to six years of complete immersion. NVC was already satisfying in terms of a tool/method that allowed me greater expression of self-disclosure, empathy and self-connection in my life. It allowed me and still allows me to better respond to life challenges and better meet my needs.

It could have continued to be a "method," except that every now and then some experience stood out from the routine of all other little experiences. I was seeing that at those moments the practice was allowing me to pierce behind the veil of everyday experience, as it were. When it came time to express it to myself and put it into words, I could awkwardly say that I had what amounted to a spiritual experience, no matter how faint that may be, that I pierced through a veil of everyday reality into something else. I had in

fact no doubt that the new experience had led me to something more real than what I normally perceive. It became a beacon, an indicator of what is possible. What I can say for myself I have often also heard from others in very similar terms; thus I knew it wasn't just an arbitrary, subjective experience.

Over the years it became less and less important to impart to people that I practice NVC; I would actually perceive this as a stereotype. Rather I would say that I prize the consciousness for which NVC has opened the door, and that is where I want to live rather than in the practice of the NVC method alone. This is how I can put it into words. I know of many others who express this inner reality in different, though very convergent ways. They have come to similar conclusions from tools other than NVC. We know the same level of reality and we each see various facets of it, though I would dare say only some facets of it. When we all express what these facets are, we may come to a fuller articulation of the paradigm and what degree of change it creates in our lives.

In essence, to return to my example, I know that there is another way of being than what I was used to relating to that gives me deeper satisfaction and understanding of myself and other fellow human beings. I know that I have no reason to revert to the old paradigm in which I experienced separation and alienation to a high degree. Soberly speaking, I still live between the two paradigms but am more and more anchored in the new. I daresay I will never cease this dialogue and tension in my lifetime.

I encountered the reality of the paradigm through NVC, but NVC is not the paradigm. What I have achieved through NVC others have reached through a multitude of other practices. When we talk to each other we can recognize the bedrock of truth from which we can all have parallel and similar experiences. When it comes to expressing the bedrock of the paradigm, we all encounter the limitations of prevailing words, expressions, and ideas from which we try to express that which is different and new.

### **Prevailing Paradigm/Future Paradigms**

We live in a time of great evolutionary potential as well as escalating challenges. Trailblazers are first intuiting, then offering the world new ways forward. Those who seek will hear right and left about new territory charted into the unknown, of new ways to confront seemingly intractable problems. Below are a few examples just within the food system.

In Burkina Faso, a man by the name of Yacouba Sawadogo has found ways to reclaim land from the advancing desert in the Sahel region.<sup>1</sup> Before his ideas took root, people thought he was crazy. The Tigray region of northern Ethiopia is reclaiming hundreds of square miles that seemed lost to desertification. A man by the name of Aba Hawi, and many other organizations, have played a pivotal role.<sup>2</sup> Now the effort is spreading over the whole of Ethiopia and even beyond. Aba Hawi too was branded crazy and mistreated before his ideas and hopes gained ground. Before then the world knew of the work of Wangari Maathai in reforesting Kenya, so much so that she received a Nobel Prize. Through the Green Belt Movement, which she helped start, Kenya has been reforested on a large scale.<sup>3</sup> Wangari deeply embraced her own culture, but also threw it some unique challenges. For a time, as a woman who loudly challenged culture and regime, she was the laughing stock of Kenyan elites and large majorities in Kenya who bought into their message. That too passed. The community of Gaviotas, in western Colombia, has found ways to reclaim the rather infertile llanos and revert them to the original tropical forest from which they came.<sup>4</sup> What seemed an irreversible natural process—the loss of the rain forest—can now be reversed. These are few examples among a multitude.

And yes, for all of the above, the good I mention goes hand in hand with obvious downward trends, continuing and even accelerating the destruction of the past. Who will win, there is no way to tell. Those who engage in this epochal struggle don't even ask the question. They just play their part, moved somewhere deep inside by a quiet hope that they have wrested something from the forces of destruction, within and outside of themselves.

Since the fifteenth century the European West and then North America have inaugurated the paradigm that accompanied the scientific revolution. It was marked by the empirical and deterministic approach to knowledge—a change oh so necessary, since it has emancipated the individual from all tradition, from all dogma and habits of the past, and allowed the expression

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<sup>1</sup> See the documentary: *The Man Who Stopped the Desert*, directed by Mark Dodd at <http://www.1080films.co.uk/Yacoubamovie/>

<sup>2</sup> See *Ethiopia Rising: Red Terror to Green Revolution*, documentary directed by Mark Dodd at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5089398/>. It follows the story of the phenomenal transformation of a nation told through the experience of one man, Aba Hawi.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of Wangari Maathai's life and the work of the Green Belt Movement see *Taking Root: the Vision of Wangari Maathai*, directed by Lisa Merton and Alan Dater at <http://takingrootfilm.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> For a story of Gaviotas see *Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent the World* by Alan Weisman.

of full individuality, at least potentially. All individuals who speak against this paradigm today, those like Aba Hawi, Yacouba Sawadogo, Wangari Maathai, and Allan Savory, are almost invariably those who, even while respecting them, break away from all those traditions of the past that stifle the future; who are able to stand as one person against all when necessary; who are willing to be maligned before receiving recognition, not for themselves, but for what they have to offer. They have benefited from being modern human beings, fully emancipated from tradition.

The paradigm of the past is one of separation. It can be expressed in terms of a spectator consciousness. By separating, we are able to be individuals against all odds; able to offer something different from what all the past ideas have offered to humanity. Because it is a spectator consciousness, we can so detach ourselves from nature and our fellow human beings that potentially, if we so choose, nothing matters any longer. Herein lies the possibility of destruction that we witness on so many levels and on such a large scale.

The present paradigm predicates that what is true is only that which can be apprehended through analytical thinking, through indirect observation (microscope, telescope, spectro-analysis, etc.) and quantitative measurement. Quantity is the norm. Humanity has collectively lost sight of qualities and of a more synthetic/holistic way of thinking, relating, and acting. By *quality* I mean such things as what we can learn from colors and forms and what they express of plant or animal nature, gestures such as we can find them in the movements of water or in the tides, patterns of relation both in the natural world and in the social world, and so on. All of these things reach us through the senses, but unlike everything else of this nature, they are discarded from the scientific method.

We could say that the scientific revolution has set the trend for what can be characterized as dualistic thinking: black and white, right and wrong, good or bad, more or less, yes or no, 1 or 0 of binary computer language, and so forth. All of these criteria can be quantified. While this thinking emancipates, it also sows in itself the forces of isolation and destruction because it originates from a one-sided perspective, that of quantity. By excluding quality it is constantly at war with self and world. Nature all around us does not know of dualistic patterns, nor does our mind or soul. Neither one can be so simplistically explored and understood. In the final analysis, we seem to stand powerless in front of the enigmas and riddles of the human being and of nature, because so much depends on those qualities that we leave out of the equation and that mean so much in the expression of every living being.

The forces in nature cannot be understood through dualism but rather through a wholistic gymnastics of yin and yang as traditional cultures intuitively knew. In the living world growth holds the balance with decay, expansion with contraction, night with day, winter with summer, anabolism with catabolism, photosynthesis with respiration, plant with animal. Problems in nature arise when there is imbalance. The forces at work in our souls/minds are likewise forces that hold each other in balance: attraction and repulsion, love and hate, depression and mania, wakefulness and sleep, introversion and extroversion, individualistic and communal, and so on. Problems arise when one pole loses the balancing power of the other.

It has often been pointed out that science has gone awry because it has been used for selfish purposes. It can be argued that science itself has set in motion the larger, inherent limitations of exclusively dualistic thinking. But science also has in itself the capacity to overcome, to break through to a more living understanding of world and self. Ultimately we need an enlarged scientific perspective, not a return to pre-scientific worldviews. It is the lot of the modern human being of wanting to act because he understands, no longer because he has been told or he blindly believes.

The paradigms we will present here set the tone for breaking beyond dualism, while retaining the scientific mindset; they are paradigms that move away from either/or to both/and, from "thinking in twos" to "thinking in threes." This is the great watershed of our time, which is articulated in many ways.

By the same token the new paradigms are not paradigms of opposition, not even to the paradigms of the present. They seek to include and transcend. That is the greatest strength of the paradigms of social change when they are fully practiced and internalized. It is by transcending and including that what look like unsurmountable obstacles become approachable. The greatest leverage point for the problems of the present is neither inward nor outward. It is both. It is a continuous dialogue between self and world. Through what others have made their own, we can borrow the tools they have generated and see their effects in the world. Conversely, through the effects of this work we can strengthen our consciousness and better use the tools. When we start to align with powerful inner forces, we express ourselves in the world in ways that do not oppose and say no; instead they say yes and invite the new from unforeseen leverage points. They no longer oppose the world because they no longer fear it, or at least don't fear it as much.