



A Mini-Symposium On Climate Emergency and Extinction Rebellion

Climate as if Change Matters: From Resistance to Rebellion

by **Skeena Finebaum-Rathor**

I've been wondering what it is that inspires courageous acts of rebellion. What feelings came together for Rosa when she refused to give up her chair for a white man? Is it us reaching our 'NO', or is it a discovery of our 'yes'? Or both? At Extinction Rebellion we are asking every citizen to consider rebellion and so we want to know what it takes.

When Gail Bradbrook, founder of Extinction Rebellion (Ex R),¹ asked if I would plant a fruit tree in the middle of Parliament Square as my rebellious offering, I felt my nerves tingle. Could it ever feel 'right' to break the law? In that moment would it feel dignified and loving? Do I truly want to risk my freedom for the sake of others and the earth?

Rosa Parks said, 'People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically.... No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in'. In reading that, I felt my own truth waving like the flame of a candle. I'm tired of being in protest, of campaigning 'against', of asking for a 'stop-to', of petitioning and resisting. Naomi Klein is right: "'No" is not enough',² because what is our corresponding and harmonizing 'yes'? What are we here 'FOR'?; and thank you, dear Theresa May, for putting us in touch with our red lines.

A rising of my 'yes' has felt like an acknowledging of my whole self and of what my heart is asking me to do. In all of us we have a capability, a compulsion and an instinct to protect and to nurture what we love and that which is life giving. It could be described as a mothering instinct and it resides in all of us, male and female, parent and non-parent; and perhaps 'mother earth' has the equivalent instinct. But my 'yes' has also been about my discovery of my courage, my freedom and my honest rebelliousness.

In his book *Living an Examined Life*,³ Jungian analyst James Hollis writes:

the task of the hero within is to overthrow the powers of darkness, namely, fear and lethargy. Sooner or

later, we are each called to face what we fear, respond to our summons to show up, and overcome the vast lethargic powers within us.

This is exactly what Extinction Rebellion is asking of us, and it's no small ask. It's asking us to find our courage in the face of fear and for us to throw off the shackles of lethargy. We are scared for humanity's future and we mourn the loss of the earth's abundance and beauty; so how, then, in the face of these overwhelming emotions, do we find the courage to act?

Courage does not just happen. Courage is a sparkingly attractive cocktail connected to our spiritual intelligence. A person acting with courage goes beyond the boundaries of what seems possible to perform some act for the sake of others. In the case of Rosa Parks and in the case of people volunteering themselves for peaceful, non-violent civil disobedience for Extinction Rebellion, these are people who are willing to relinquish their personal power for the power of something else. What I realise now, after trialling and witnessing disobedience, is that it works most effectively when it's an unconscious choice, decided in the moment – to take an enormous risk, to not seek for yourself anything in return, to not know if you have the ability to do what is needed: that's courage, and it's not always available to you when the situation demands it. It could also be described as *practical spirituality*, living for the sake of the world and for others, going beyond what is safe and what we know, living on the edge, on the verge, on the brink of everything. What Extinction Rebellion has done thus far is that it has created opportunities for courageous action and practical spirituality.

For our rebels there is an extremely poignant paradox at play here. In facing the issues of a probable climate emergency and in accepting an agenda for deep adaptation as outlined by Jem Bendell,⁴ we can see that humanity's very freedom is at stake. This is also true if you accept the central tenants of Yuval Noah Harari's latest work⁵ highlighting the degradation of our liberty

and freedoms from the merger of info-tech and bio-tech. The rampant technologizing of the world has cut away at the depths of human life experience, and this is only set to accelerate. So here it is: by offering up our personal freedom to the authorities upholding harmful systems, can we re-claim the freedom of human beings to have response ABILITY? By being disobedient, will we find our freedom? Any teenager will tell you that's how it's done. The wisdom of childhood and the developmental patterns of human beings offer us valuable clues.

The issue for Ex R now is that it is asking for courage to be present in more than just individual momentary acts, where courage isn't only present in large-scale, pre-determined actions. Over the next four months Ex R will be asking for it to become a day-to-day way of living, for random acts of courage and rebellion to be present everywhere and all the time. Yet this is about a certain level of inner development and liberation. A testing of the acuity of the inner ear to the soul voice which always seeks freedom. Courage is then experienced not as a matter of choice, demanded on request or under duress, but it's experienced as a natural way of being. From a heightened sense of awareness. When you feel the truth of your being, the soul quality of courage emerges. We could call it 'sacred courage'. This kind of collective courage will act as 'truth bombs' spreading like wildfire, a 'rising up' (the mother organization of Extinction Rebellion)⁶ of hearts and voices and a full-scale compassionate revolution. Extinction Rebellion requires no less than *mass collective sacred courage* as the key to its demand for systems transformation.

This is an intense moment for humanity: there is an intensity of life being felt by millions, and an intensity of soul action. It doesn't really exist in the realm of thinking. Over these last few months I have met many a keen strategist, intellectual and academic soothsayers, and those with technological solutions. Their contributions have been superbly valuable and necessary, and yet in my heart I know that I have not yet seen the epicentre of the breakthrough.

The most unconscious aspect of our being is our will. Montessori teachers know that their chief purpose is to protect and nurture the will of the young child. The will serves our freedom of thought and our connection to self-love. Perhaps one of Western civilization's most destructive emotional forces has been to crush the will of our children. Will does not exist in the realm of thinking, but in our doing and in our physical intelligence. Thus, courage can also be thought of as a fundamental act of the body engaged by the execution of the will with self and selfless love. If we take this back to dear Rosa Parks, then perhaps what happened in her refusal to move from her chair was her physical acknowledgement of the alignment of her will and her truth which was then able to result in an act of great courage. She was acting in wholeness. Her body, her spirit and her conscious awareness were in deep communication and coherence, and underneath all

of this, her will was at work.

What excites and delights me is what courage accomplishes in our world. Thresholds get leaped over, creative genius is enabled and breakthroughs occur. When we find our courage, it affects others in miraculous and unpredictable ways, and we enter a different sense of time and space. The highly esteemed author and former psychotherapist, Robert Sardello, has written that 'courage requires that we develop the capacity to do two radically different things at the same time: to be in this world and the spiritual worlds simultaneously'.⁷ Courage is an ecstatic, galvanizing and translucent energy.

In these next few months, Extinction Rebellion as an organization will have to mine the depths of its courage. There will need to be a flow and a highly sensitive responsiveness so that we are able to recognize what is needed to allow for the collection of courage. We will need to trust in our will and in our spirits. Because courageous action is swift, the cognitive may be obscured but present. We will get caught in thinking about what might be the 'right' thing to do, what might be the wrong thing, and what might be most 'successful'. In this our own courage may be thwarted – where the alignment of our physical, our will and our spirit can play its alchemy. We are told there is a formula for social change, codes, numbers and models, an integral process. All useful starting points, but I have a feeling transformation lies in the living of what we don't yet know, can't yet imagine, in our surrender to the unknown, in the mystery and in our prayer to the universe.

If you don't join Extinction Rebellion, then pray for us. The power will be in our collective prayers and the willing love we have for each other.

Notes and References

- 1 See the Ex R website at rebellion.earth/
- 2 Naomi Klein, *No Is Not Enough: Defeating the New Shock Politics*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 2018.
- 3 James Hollis, *Living an Examined Life: Wisdom for the Second Half of the Journey*, Sounds True, Boulder, CO, 2018.
- 4 Jem Bendell, 'Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy', IFLAS Occasional Paper 2 (www.iflas.info), 27 July 2018; available at goo.gl/qvvzES.
- 5 Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2018.
- 6 See the Rising Up! website at risingup.org.uk/
- 7 Robert Sardello, *The Power of the Soul: Living the Twelve Virtues*, Hampton Roads Publ., Charlottesville, VA, 2002, pp. 175–6.

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Climate as if change matters – a commentary

by **Denis Postle**

My awakening to global heating was undramatic: I began to assemble a video potpourri of 'life learnings' for my grandchildren, stuff that might be relevant to their lives. As I dug deeper in this task, I woke up to the extent to which the Climate Emergency was of over-riding importance – so I began to assemble video material and writing that explored and evoked the situation we seemed to be heading towards. The result:

'Messages From The Blue Planet' (50 mins),¹ 'Business as Usual' (10 mins),² and a forthcoming event as I write, The Climate Tsunami.³

Producing these films took me to a very scary artistic place, and the multiple repetitions of the editing took me through a lot of pain and grief. As I struggled to find courage to be publicly direct and uncensored, my eldest son, Elmer, pointed me to these lines from *King Lear*:

'The weight of this sad time, we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.'

This, then, is context for what follows in response to Skeena's article 'Climate as if change matters'.

I warm to Skeena's story of the need to find or grow the courage for a 'yes' to direct action. I also warm to Extinction Rebellion as a local instance of a global awakening – that global heating is taking us towards an uninhabitable biosphere.

Extinction Rebellion seeks to interrupt the status quo of Climate Change inertia – and as I understand it, so far as the pain of a lost future that this entails has been felt, Extinction Rebellion provides a vehicle for the transmuting of grief and rage into resolute, determined resistance.

As Eveleyn Wasdell puts it, 'What is in the pipeline requires a lot more psychological resilience than any of us at present appear to have'; and because of this, while Extinction Rebellion is a powerful vehicle for direct action, until the grief for the likely loss of what we treasure in our lives is more widely felt and the tears shed, or the rage finds expression, actions of the Extinction Rebellion variety seem likely to remain a limited (and yet valuable) phenomenon.

Why might it be limited? While Extinction Rebellion puts its thumb on the need for government attention to climate heating, their actions generate media images that evoke uproar and disorder but not, in my experience, the pain of loss and grief due

to the climate emergency. It is a choice that seems likely to be very inspiring for some people, but in so far as *the direct action* is a form of transmutation of *participants' distress*, then at least unconsciously, it might be easy for people to ignore their actions, or find them resistible.

What additions or enhancements to Extinction Rebellion might an ally working in a different idiom be able to helpfully suggest? One reparable omission seems to be that, powerful as the naming of Extinction Rebellion is, it resembles other similar namings, 'Green', 'Sustainable', 'Re-wilding', 'Environment', 'De-growth', or 'Conservation' that seem to be context free, inviting instant comprehensive commitment, and thus psychologically, mimicking the forms of trance-induction common under neoliberal marketization. Is this inevitable? Why might context matter?

The *symptoms* of climate change are increasingly present, if often massaged for public consumption. But what is required, I feel, alongside direct action, protest and sci metrics, is a deep, loud and detailed disassembly of the *systems* we have created and through which we live our daily lives. The global scale of consumption, luxury, the global fiction of debt, and capital accumulation as the carcinogenic driver of unlimited growth plus their extreme fragility and complexity, e.g. the recent Gatwick Airport interruption of service. This context, in which we are all complicit, seems to be missing from Skeena's account of Extinction Rebellion, and perhaps from the initiative itself. I hope I am mistaken.

Notes

- 1 'Messages From The Blue Planet'; see vimeo.com/257467422.
- 2 'Business as Usual – Messages From the Blue Planet, 2'; see vimeo.com/298238163.
- 3 At St Mary's Church, Ealing, London W5 5RH, Saturday 26 January, 7 p.m.; see goo.gl/w4bcBD.

Denis Postle is a veteran broadcast film-maker, father and grandfather, and author of over 30 films and five books. After 35 years as a therapist, activist and one of the founders of a commons-based psychotherapy network, he has lately been recovering his earlier underground film idioms, exploring how best global heating might be approached, emotionally, practically and politically.

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Climate as if change matters – a commentary

by **Nicola Saunders**

On the same day Extinction Rebellion blocked five bridges in central London, Saturday 17 November 2018, football fans in their team colours marched alongside LGBT+ activists, seasoned anti-racist campaigners, Muslim associations, trade unionists and Women's groups on the National Unity March. This was a counter-demonstration to the protest being held nearby by the far-right street movement, the Football Lad's Alliance. The counter march was to show our solidarity with victims of the government's 'really really hostile' immigration environment – most notably, the children of the Windrush generation and refugees seeking safety and security in Britain.

What's the connection with the climate crisis? – the rise of the far or 'alt right'. Whilst politicians on the liberal left of the political spectrum have disappointingly been at odds with civil society's growing urgency to address the climate crisis, it's clear with the election of Trump in the USA and Bolsonaro in Brazil that the alt right not only do not care about climate change, but are tearing up the liberal democratic consensus that reforms are required to limit further environmental harm. Trump made his scepticism about the reality of climate change known by twitter before demonstrating his commitment to undermining efforts to slow climate change by taking the USA out of the Paris climate accord to reduce greenhouse gases. Here we are at the start of 2019 and we read that US greenhouse gas levels have increased by 3.4 per cent over the last year. Meanwhile, Bolsonaro used his executive powers prior to his formal presidential inauguration to transfer the regulation of indigenous resources to the agricultural ministry – which is, says the *Guardian*, in the control of agribusiness. The indigenous groups of Brazil who have lived in the Amazon for thousands of years say they fear a 'genocide' under Bolsonaro.

High rents in the private sector combined with years of a lack of a political commitment to council and affordable housing have left us with an increase in homelessness and people living in expensive, unstable and unsafe housing in Britain. Climate change and environmental damage make people homeless, too. It displaces people from their homes and towns within their countries and can leave them with few options but to seek security abroad. Coverage in the British press often mentions

refugees from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, but little of the environmental damage to these countries is caused by war and conflicts.

In 2003 the British Green Party released a press briefing warning of the long-term environmental legacy of the war on Iraq, stating that neither the USA nor the British governments had conducted (or made publicly available, if they had) an assessment of the potential damage to the environment that any conflict would cause. Fast forward to 2018, and the Institute of Development Studies published a document detailing the environmental crisis Iraq is facing; not only from climate change and a rise in temperature, but from conflict-related environmental pollution and contamination which has resulted in fires and poor air quality.

We hear reports of drought as a contributory factor to the large numbers of people who are being displaced within Syria, and an internet search led me to a UN Environment report on its work in Afghanistan with the Afghan government and Afghan environment experts to address the devastating impact of decades of conflict on Afghanistan's natural environment. All countries require the social and economic infrastructure to respond to climate change, and both Syria and Iraq are countries whose infrastructures have been devastated by war and ongoing conflict.

Climate change refugees do not have to be viewed as a tragic inevitability nor a nuisance; hardly surprisingly, people at risk do not want to become refugees. Pacific Islanders experiencing rising sea levels responded to New Zealand's Labour and Green Party's offer of allocating them the world's first climate change refugee places by saying, 'Help us to stay in our homes and islands first'. And this is where we come full circle to Extinction Rebellion and Skeena Rathor's call to arms; in our solidarity with refugees and our opposition to the far right, we stand together with Extinction Rebellion and their demand for us to act now.

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