

An open letter to the permaculture community, family, and friends;

First of all I want to thank you, not only for your good efforts, time, and energy but for your caring...your caring not only for this living earth but for the people and the beauty of life. Thank you.

Many of you may know of my work from the example of Flowering Tree in Toby Hemenway's excellent book *Gaia's Garden* or the video 30 Years of Greening the Desert, others from my regenerative community development work with Regenesis. In any case I know that you share my concerns for the degrading condition of the ecological and human communities of our biosphere and I am writing to you to ask for your help.

We are at a crisis point, a crossroads and if we are to turn the corner we need to use everything at our disposal to its greatest effect. My concern is that we are not using the very powerful perspective of permaculture to its greatest potential and that we need to up our game. We know that the living world is calling for this from us.

I often feel that permaculture design is like a fine Japanese chisel that is mostly used like a garden trowel, for transplanting seedlings. It can of course be used for this purpose, but is not its highest use.

Permaculture Design has often been compared to a martial art such as Aikido because at its heart it is about observing the forces at play to find the "least change for the greatest effect"; a small move the changes entire systems. This is how nature works and is precisely the sort of shortcut we desperately need.

The lowest level of any martial art is learning to take a hit well. Yet this is where so much of our energy seems to be directed: setting ourselves and our communities up to be resilient in the face of the impacts of climate change and the breakdown of current food, water, energy, and financial systems.

The next level is to avoid the blow, either through dodging, blocking or redirecting it. Much of the carbon farming and other efforts directed toward pulling carbon out of the atmosphere and developing non-carbon sources of energy fall into this category.

At their highest expression practitioners track patterns to their source, shifting them *before* they take form, redirecting them in regenerative directions. This is what is behind principles like "obtain a yield" or "the problem is the solution" and the reason for protracted thoughtful observation. We learn to read energies and to find the acupuncture-like inoculation or disturbance that changes the manifestation by changing the underlying pattern. Problems are turned into solutions and provide us with yields if we can stop trying to stop or block them. This is the pattern of Regeneration.

Every permaculture technique is a small disturbance that shifts the underlying pattern and hence the system. Water-harvesting structures, rotational grazing, chicken tractors, mulching, spreading seed-balls, setting cool ground fires in rank meadows or forests, transforming spoiling milk into creamy cheese, revolving loan funds, libraries, and even the design course itself all follow this pattern. The point is to disturb brittle senescent systems to allow the emergence of the next level of evolution, even if the system is our preconceptions and habits of thought. This is at the heart of self-organizing systems and the key to designing effective change efforts.

In a world of electronic information technology, information is no longer the weak link. It is easy to find most techniques and practices on-line. And in a changing world it does no good to teach a man to fish. What happens when currents or climate or communities change? It is essential to teach to how to *think about* fishing, whatever can be fished with whatever is at hand. This is why it is called permaculture DESIGN.

In its highest form permaculture is not about designing *anything*. It is a pattern-based approach to designing systemic change efforts. This is the point of the PDC as well as all that time spent in the forest or garden. It is to learn how living systems work and how to observe them to find the effective change so that we can apply those skills to shifting the living systems most in need of shifting: human systems including how we think about the world.

Changing paradigm tops systems thinker Donella Meadows list of the most effective places to intervene in systems. To effectively change the systems that are causing global degeneration we need to change the human paradigm and we need to start by shifting our paradigm of what permaculture is. If we do not shift these larger human systems our lovely gardens and beautiful hand built homes don't have a chance.

Although the PDC contains many techniques and ways of doing it is about changing how we think about the world. It is meant to crack our certainties about everything from agriculture to economics and how the world works. This is why so many of the principles are like a whack on the side of the head. "What do you mean the problem is the solution? Or that yield is limited only by my mind?"

If the PDC is designed to shift our paradigm, then it shows us the pattern of shifting people's paradigms. And this is the greatest use of our skills. Not to create gardens or to train gardeners, but to shift the thinking of folks who understand business and economics, laws and governance, so that they can all be re-thought and re-worked to follow the patterns of living systems.

We have been warned that "the map is not the territory" and then have mistaken the map of permaculture as the territory of permaculture. Living in a materialistic and mechanistic culture we have grabbed onto the stuff and mechanisms of permaculture rather than the essential patterns. Just because we learn about living

systems through gardens, forests, and fields does not mean that is where our art is most fruitfully applied.

So what am I asking of you? Please just think about this. Let it burn out the choked underbrush of your certainty. Watch how it effects how you think, and teach, design, and work. Let it open room to let something new emerge in the sunlit space. While cracks in structures need to be fixed, in nature from splitting seed coats, hatching chicks, or birthing babies or ideas, cracks are the doorways to new life.

Please forward this around your networks. Debate it. Trash it. Try it on and try it out. If you would like to know more or let me know your thoughts please go to patternmind.org.

Many thanks for your open hearts and minds
Joel Glanzberg