

# Change

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There is a saying that goes something like, "save me from interesting times." Well, I'm afraid we don't have a choice. What with a failing economy, the energy crisis, war, terrorism and rising sea levels, can boils and frogs be far behind? Interesting times are here; we can either run for cover or jump into the fray.

Regardless of who wins the coming election, the social, economic and environmental conditions on our small planet foretell the end of an era. The era of continual growth, continual prosperity and abundance is over. That materialistic mind-set is finally at its enduring limits. It has always been an unequal and wasteful reality, and the resulting anger and the frustration of unsatisfied desire drives the need for change. But the call for change can elicit superficial, short-term responses. (As both presidential candidates seem to be offering to varied degrees.) A new era actually needs a new mind set, a change in understanding of what life is all about.

That new mind-set will take time struggling into reality and meanwhile changing times necessitate changes in behavior. High gasoline cost can restrict your driving habits; house foreclosures may require additions to your home to house relatives; and franks & beans may have to pass for haute cuisine. Often those changes in behavior are not original responses but come to us from offstage. People don't make the decision to get rid of their SUV because the vehicle is environmentally wasteful but because they hear news reports about the tanking of the car's value.

The offstage promoter encourages us to remain in the mind-set of self-interest. As we respond to changing times we can just accept the advice of the pundits and news reports that helped get us into the mess, or we can think our way to behavior that fits our sense of what is good. Changing times require personal reflection.

As people who generally hold contrarian views on social policy (economic policy, environmental policy, military policy, etc.) we are now confronted with the possibility that our noble beliefs may actually move from the realm of wishful thinking into viable options for practical policy. And in that situation, dreams are confronted with the reality of our actual living.

While we may hold contrarian noble values, we live within this materialistic, individualistic world and, whether we want to admit it or not, the values of that world become part of us. And as acceptance grows that our larger world must change course, we can help the change by being true to our long-held noble values. Life is changing, and that necessitates an internal dialogue between our dreams for a better world and personal needs. Can our wish for an end to worldwide hunger necessitate a change in our diet? Can our wish for economic equality mean acceptance of wage control on our income?

But more fundamentally our contrarian point of view reflects a contrarian understanding of life. All that worth and dignity of the individual stuff is a challenge to the traditional mind-set in which individuals are treated as economic units. The biggest question that changing times brings forward is, what is human living all about? How will any change affect the unique character of individual human beings? The excesses of the materialistic mind-set have taken us to the brink of collapse. What change will an ethical mind-set offer?

