

# The Great Simplification

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Nate Hagens (00:00:02):

You're listening to The Great Simplification with Nate Hagens, that's me. On this show, we try to explore and simplify what's happening with energy, the economy, the environment, and our society. Together with scientists, experts, and leaders this show is about understanding the bird's eye view of how everything fits together, where we go from here, and what we can do about it as a society and as individuals.

(00:00:33):

Betsy Taylor has long been an icon in the environmental and social change fields. Betsy founded the Climate Network One Sky, which eventually became threefifty.org. She ran the Center for a New American Dream as well as Breakthrough Strategies and Solutions. Recently, Betsy has shifted to supporting the field of regenerative agriculture, promoting the potential of our lands to sequester carbon pollution while boosting food security and habitat protection. Betsy and I had a wide ranging conversation about climate, consumption, culture, nuclear war, agriculture, and the future. I am happy to welcome Betsy Taylor to The Great Simplification.

(00:01:33):

Hello, Betsy.

Betsy Taylor (00:01:34):

Hey, Nate.

Nate Hagens (00:01:35):

How are you?

Betsy Taylor (00:01:36):

I'm looking forward to this. I am doing well. I'm in Vermont. It's a beautiful day.

Nate Hagens (00:01:41):

Yeah, I imagine there's lots of tourists coming up from New York City for the peak. What are those called? The peepers?

Betsy Taylor (00:01:49):

Yeah.

Nate Hagens (00:01:49):

With all the fall color.

Betsy Taylor (00:01:52):

The sugar maples are turning red. It's gorgeous.

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Nate Hagens (00:01:55):

We have the same thing here right now. It's stunning. I just got back from a bike ride, but I got my PhD in Burlington and I lived close to Mount Mansfield and it was just so gorgeous there.

Betsy Taylor (00:02:07):

It is. It is.

Nate Hagens (00:02:08):

So, I'm jealous. It was so great to see you this summer, and I'm glad we had some time to talk. And now we're going to take a deep dive with the microphone on. So, for people that don't know of you, you have worn many professional hats. One might say you are a progressive leadership polymath. You have been involved in issues ranging from responsible nuclear management, freedom of speech and voters rights. You built a movement to mitigate climate change and now you are working on regenerative agriculture. So, let me just start by asking you how were you drawn to these quite different fields?

Betsy Taylor (00:02:55):

Yeah, yeah. I have seemed to be drawn to the dire threats. And I think part of it, and we've talked about this, part of it stems from my childhood. I only recently figured this out where I grew up in a country setting with a country doctor, nurse team as parents, and our house was connected to the office and there were just always rescue operations underway. It was a huge medical practice. And so I was in the middle of a lot of these rescue operations. And I actually think that really helped form me. But I think if you look at the issues of the nuclear threats of consumption and growth, of climate change, of industrial agriculture, of voter suppression, all of those are kind of linked by a value system of domination of sometimes violence, of I would call extractive, kind of extractive taking values.

(00:03:53):

And I think the opposite of that are the values of connection, interdependence. So, I think there's a value system and a whole way of thinking that just sort for me, and I think it's probably the same for you, Nate. You start working on one thing and there's a seamless connection to these others because they're in the framework of a different way of being and trying to see the worlds and trying to work for that kind of world. So, I think that's it. Otherwise, I have some sort of deep kind of psychological tendency to go to the darkest issues.

Nate Hagens (00:04:25):

Well, let's go there briefly. Do you think that because as a young human growing up with everyday kind of stress and trauma because of your parents' vocation, that you became acclimated to accepting things that normally would be cognitively pushed back, pushed away by most people? So, those things seemed less threatening to you, or not threatening, but you were more able to embrace them?

Betsy Taylor (00:04:53):

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Yeah. I'll share a story that you've heard me share in the past, which I've really only recently realized was formative. But of all the various kind of emergencies that landed in our living room of our home, from people's stomachs being pumped out to people having heart attacks, to people having babies, there was one night when some teenagers were out on the road in my town. I was a young teen, they were seniors in high school and they were bored and they decided to play chicken, which is when two cars raced towards each other at high speed. And the one that pulls out first is the chicken. So, this was a huge event in our town. These kids raced towards each other. They didn't pull away. Three of them died immediately. And one of them was so broken, lost half her blood, both lungs collapsed, brain damage, broken back, just on and on.

(00:05:47):

They couldn't move her to Johns Hopkins Hospital. So, she went to the local hospital. My father was attending her, she was his patient. And this case affected I think my life because twice she was pronounced dead by the two other doctors working with my father. But my father saw that she had brain activity and that she was someone he knew and knew her family and he was going to go for it. And that particular case affected me, I think because he reached out to a network of his medical peers to get help. He went to the National Institute of Health to say, If I treat her the way your books tell me I should, she will die because the chemistry of it wasn't going to work. There was just so much going wrong that the interactions of her collapsing systems would fail if he did the conventional approaches.

(00:06:39):

So, the whole town was praying, there was a whole group of doctors working on it. He didn't sleep. He basically didn't eat. He dropped everything and she did live. And it was such a celebration for the community. She went on to have children and grandchildren. She had no memory of the event and she wasn't the same, exactly. She did have some permanent damage, but she lived a life of gratitude.

(00:07:06):

She was mentally there, I knew her. She's still with us, she's in Florida. So, all of that is to say, I think I did grow up in sort of a situation where my parents had this, do everything you can for life. Don't do everything you can if it's hopeless, if she didn't have brain activity, he wouldn't have tried to save her. But she did. And so I think that's how I'm looking at things. We have multiple collapsing systems. We have a sense of many people pronouncing the systems dead. It's too late. And yet there's so much life, there's so much brain activity, there's so much beauty. And so I think for myself, working on these different threats is just what you do.

Nate Hagens (00:07:55):

Yeah, that's powerful. When I heard you say that this summer, I was thinking about how that affected your own personal psychology. But hearing it again now, it really is a metaphor for our environmental and social situation and things. I'm sure, one question I'd like to ask you is you've been working on these issues your entire career. Do you ever feel like giving up or are you ever exhausted? Because things often do seem quite grim. So, I'll just pause there and ask you that.

Betsy Taylor (00:08:30):

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Yeah, really good question. And yes, of course. I think all of us have those moments when it's just sort of overwhelming. I think there's probably very few people working on some of these big threats, nuclear climate, biodiversity collapse, food security, who don't sometimes just feel like throwing the towel in. And in 2014, I really came to that moment and I really just thought, why don't I just go garden and spend time with my family? And I took a 10 day silent retreat and I decided in advance that I would really hone in on death. And really it was interesting because when I got to the silent retreat, there's always a teacher or a leader who speaks twice a week, but otherwise you're in silence. But when she spoke and she ended up speaking three times while I was there, she says, I just want you to know we'll be talking about death.

(00:09:27):

So, that was interesting. But I really kind of went into mass death, went into collapse, and it was sort of liberating because I think death is not to be feared as much as we fear it, for one thing. I think we're meant for life. I think we are at our deepest core as humans, all of us. We all have this light in us and we all, I think are really meant for love, for connection. And so not trying to be of some help for me would feel like a separation. So, I do think for all of us, we have to find some kind of equanimity, some kind of a way to hold these unbelievable challenges we're faced with while hugging our dogs and cats and lovers and trees. Finding those things that keep us in balance while really still getting out there working for life.

Nate Hagens (00:10:29):

I love that answer. And as you know, that's pretty much how I feel. And the thing that boosts me, as my listeners would know is conversations, interactions with people like you, because there's this cathartic reduction of stress and kind of emotional boost that we are fighting for the things that matter. And even though it looks like a day David and Goliath sort of odds, what else can there be other than to keep trying. And so that is how I feel. By the way I don't think I could do a 10 day silent retreat. I just don't know if that would be physically possible for me. But that does sound interesting. So, getting back to what you said earlier, that all these issues are connected by a shift in values. How could we shift values? Does that have to do with education or media and advertising, or does it have to bubble up from within an individual human's consciousness or what have you found?

Betsy Taylor (00:11:34):

That's a wonderful question. I'd love to ask you the same question. I don't know that I have the answer to that question. I worked on that for many years when I was leading the Center for New American Dream and we were trying to encourage people to have more fun with less stuff and to focus on what really matters. And we had a great response to those messages. So, I do think in terms of the value shift at the core of it I think is this notion of love and connection. And so I think to help people make that shift, they need to feel connected. They need to feel that they're in empathetic relationship with someone. They live in this world, which is so right now pretty dehumanizing. I think one of the best things that we can do to promote a value, a system of sharing and interdependence and kindness is actually to really listen to people, really see them and lock into their eyes and don't go onto your phone or your smart watch, actually connect with that person and really try to get their story.

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(00:12:47):

Really try to find out what's going on with you. So, how's your day? Tell me more about where you've come from. It's actually what you're doing with this podcast, Nate. You're helping people tell their stories and you're helping them feel seen. And I think for all of us, every single person needs that. So, I think that's one of the first things, because right now with technology and with this deluge of bad news, I think people are hunkered down feeling quite separated. The pandemic's adding to that. So, a key part of it is simply reaching out to help people know you see them, you appreciate them, you're listening to them. And you might be very different, but just that act I think helps calm everything down, helps people not feel they have to grasp and get. More is not always better.

Nate Hagens (00:13:39):

So, as individuals then we can play a role in rehumanizing our culture and our interactions?

Betsy Taylor (00:13:47):

Yeah, I mean that's a one by one thing. Obviously education helps, community helps. All the opportunities to be out in nature helps. I think getting off technology helps because so much of the technology now is about the focus on me, selfies. Just like it's all about everything about it is reinforcing a focus on the self. And actually a heavy focus on the self is problematic because it's based on the false notion that we're actually separate selves. And I think in reality there's some deeper reality where we're much more deeply connected than we can grasp. And so if we can find those connections, it helps us move in a different direction. But in terms of a huge system change, if we could have education in our school systems, in our communities, not just education but opportunities for serving together, for being together in a way that's fun and mutually supportive.

(00:14:45):

All of that would help. And it would require massive changes. I remember under Jimmy Carter, this dates me, Tina Hobson was the head of consumer affairs and there was massive education and outreach all over the country about just the simple thing of saving energy, of consuming thoughtfully, of being conscious of how your actions affect the earth. And it was through the government, which is the only time I've actually, I don't think we've done it since then. It was helpful.

Nate Hagens (00:15:15):

So, I have so many thoughts in response to that. First, it's my kind of theory, I don't really know that it's a theory, just an observation, that the focus on the self generally relative to prior cultures and relative to less wealthy, materially wealthy countries today is a product of this vast amount of energy surplus and goods and services that we didn't need human connection the way we did for most of our ancestral past. And that is going to change relatively quickly. So, to start to build social networks now is not only healthier for the people listening to this podcast as individual humans, but that acts as a web of social capital in our culture more broadly. And so I do think that some of our focus on the self is correlated with this carbon pulse of material riches that we've been through the last century or so.

Betsy Taylor (00:16:23):

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Absolutely agree. And absolutely agree that everybody listening to this, we do have excess carbon and energy that allows us do all sorts of amazing things and we will eventually run short of that. But before we get to that total collapse point, I think one of the most important things any individual can do is get into a network of mutual support. Whatever you want to call that. It can just be a few people in your community, can be in your family.

(00:16:52):

But it is really important to have that both in terms of what matters in life, like feeling fulfilled, but also being safe because we're going to be having a lot of disruption. And I think more than anything else in terms of being resilient and safe, it's being in one of these interconnected networks of other people. And when you do that, you then do discover, hey, going to the mall or getting on my smart watch, or maybe that's not what I want to do. Maybe I want to have a potluck meal with people, or maybe we want to walk in the woods, or maybe we want to create a alternative gift fair for the holiday season to support local charities and get involved and figure out what those are. There's just a thousand possibilities and it ends up being kind of fun.

Nate Hagens (00:17:38):

So, let me ask you a tangent to that, that I'm always curious about because I don't understand it. What is the role or the different role or the different incentive in what you just described between women and men? You and I were just at a conference and I've been to several conferences this year that we talk about the poly crisis and collapse and there seems to after a couple days be this self-organization of groups of women talking and groups of men talking. And I don't know if it's dopamine trying to figure out the climate scenarios or the financial depletion and energy versus the embodied response of community and security and belonging. But do you have any thoughts on that and how can women especially engage with what's ahead in this cultural kind of transition to a less materially focused culture?

Betsy Taylor (00:18:36):

That's a great question too. First of all, I do think all men and women have the potential to be protective of the earth, be supportive of other humans and life on the earth. All of us have that possibility. But I do see differences sometimes. I do think there are men feeling great grief and great sadness and from that having the capacity, be incredibly empathetic and compassionate. But I see women doing it more. I do see women at the meeting we were at and since I have been struck by the number of women actually all over the planet right now, women leaving sort of legal professions, economic and engineering jobs to go focus on protection of life in a very tangible way. Protection of places of particular peoples. And there's kind of a deep fierce love about it and there's a kind of courage about it.

(00:19:35):

And I see that in men too. But I see there's something, and it may have to do with the role of mother, I feel that on myself sometimes I feel, what would you do? How far would you go to lay your life down for the young. Not only you are young, but the young. Not only human young, but the young of other

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species. There is something I think almost biological. Now, maybe that's also in men. I'm not a man, but I do see, I'm part of this network of women. We call ourselves the Lionesses and there's a lot of ferocity that's love based. I've just joined and became an advisor to something called Daughters of the Earth.

(00:20:15):

It's a new program and it's about supporting women leaders all over the world that are working to protect places and species of animals, working to protect the mountain gorillas, working to protect, liberate animals from industrial farming situations, working to prove change the way we farm. And it's all women led and it's all women advised. So, there's something happening. I think it's always been there. But there's definitely, I see really high level negotiators and high level people kind of walking away from that world to be in community and place to say, well, at least in this place, I'm laying my life energy down for the beauty and the health of this place for the young. So, yeah, I can't say entirely why that's happening, but my guess would be it is partly biological.

Nate Hagens (00:21:09):

Well, I guess we don't have to know why as long as it's happening. And I for one am very glad that you are not a man given that you're working on all these very important things. So, getting back to what you mentioned before, you were the executive director for the Center for a New American Dream. And like you said, you focused on trying to get away from consumption as our goal and how can we live happier with less? Is it possible that all the work you did there, and I was aware of your work there before we ever met and followed the work 10 years ago or something. Is it possible that what you did was educate and plant a seed in lots of people, but that the dominant culture was so strong with all the media and advertising and algorithms and social media and polarization that people couldn't swim against that current.

(00:22:07):

But the seed was planted. And isn't that our role now to plant as many seeds as possible to change the initial conditions of when events start to accelerate so that people have kind of a recognition and understanding, oh yeah, I've heard about this. Actually in my own life I do feel better when I have more social capital and less technological gadgets. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Betsy Taylor (00:22:32):

Yeah, I think that the work center for an American dream was focused on helping individuals, but also institutions shift patterns of consumption. So, for individuals it was really about looking at what matters and how can you live so that your choices and how you use your money and time are aligned with your deepest values. And we had about 200,000 people after, I don't know, I think I was there for eight - I was the second executive director, but pretty much the first. And we had a really strong response. We also worked with institutions because we felt like we needed to not just have individuals, but we needed to be looking at the larger economic system, which is rooted in consumption and growth as you've written and talked a lot about that.

(00:23:19):

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And so we did mobilize actually billions of dollars in purchasing power and created a purchasing network of mainly state agencies and cities around the country, some federal agencies and corporations. And we did drive things like the first real demand for hybrid vehicles and things like recycled paper. And at that time there was a lot of talk about it. It was post Rio Summit, 1992 Rio Summit where really consumption and growth were talked about. I was part of President Clinton's task force on consumption and population. There was conversation and there were a lot of books, Paul Hawkins books, Schumacher. So, yes, I think we planted seeds. I do think we're inside of, I don't know what you would call it's very advanced, yeah, state supported capitalism out of control.

(00:24:12):

Greed is being reinforced, technology is reinforcing kind of me-ism and the values are really tough to break through. Having said that, I think a lot of people feel an alienation from the system that we're in, especially young people. If you look at the number of young people who just think our current system really is not working. And we know people of color, lower income people, I mean there's been a longstanding critique of the economic paradigm we're operating in. I think our work was some of the work that said for the sake of the planet, for the sake of all people and all non people that are living, animals and plants, we need to share, we need to use less. We need to watch our ecological footprint. And I think we did plant a lot of seeds. I think there's a lot of things happening out there and trying to create new economies, new local systems of economic activity and cultural values.

(00:25:13):

And it's hard. And sometimes I feel we need to capture the reigns of some of those technologies. Sometimes I feel like we just need to have a global conversation. Let's use some of these platforms to have a conversation with one billion people. Let's just shut everything down for a day. Let's just have a conversation about what really matters and let's hear some people's stories. And I think one of the most radical things we can do is be in deep relationship with someone who's on the margins of this economy. Someone who's doing everything they possibly can to protect they're young, to be in community, to do everything right, and they're on the margin, they're barely making it. And there's others of us. And I put myself in that place that are privileged, that have had opportunity. And if we can stay in real relationship with that person on the margin, it changes everything. It changes the way you see, what you want. So, anyway. But yes, I think we planted seeds. I'd love to figure out how to use fertilizer to really make them sprout big time right now.

Nate Hagens (00:26:12):

So, on another track.

Betsy Taylor (00:26:14):

Yeah.

Nate Hagens (00:26:14):

In your past, you were the co-founder and the president of One Sky, which eventually became 350.org, a climate movement. What do you know now that might have informed your activism on that issue 15

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years ago when you founded that with respect to climate change? Or what are your thoughts on that issue, kind of looking back, working on it for so long?

Betsy Taylor (00:26:40):

Yeah, good question. So, One Sky was an effort when we were trying to pass federal legislation on climate, I convened kind of a lot of the climate leadership in the country to look at how do we do what's scientifically required. And so we created a platform that was really calling for deep productions in emissions for the end coal plants and for a huge mobilization on clean energy. And we had tremendous effort on that and we did not prevail. And I think in retrospect, the couple things I think we knew at the time that this climate is not changing on a linear basis. So, we knew, we had a big scientific advisory group that I took the lead in putting together. And we knew we needed a 40% cut in emissions. We had what the science was saying we had to do. But even with that, I don't think we fully grasp how fast things were changing climatically.

(00:27:43):

So, there's that. I think we didn't know just how lost our democracy was. There were deals being cut with all big heavy industry by the big environmental groups that had created their own network. The Climate Action Plan was it. It was led by environmental defense and Fred Krupp and some of the big enviros along with the heavy auto industry, concrete, steel, oil and gas we're all at the table and they had their own climate legislation and agenda. In the end, we didn't get anything. We passed Markey-Waxman, Waxman-Markey. And I think I took away from that, if you're going to play in the system, you need a lot of money because ultimately the members of our elected officials overwhelmingly need money. And if you can provide that to them, they will listen to you. So, on a corrupted basis, you either need to be able to play that game and not just mobilize people power, but actually get in there and figure out how you elect people that will be accountable to you.

(00:28:47):

And there are great efforts to do that right now. Or you need to have so much power rooted in love and courage that you move into the system. There's this thing on the left where we tend to be outside and I've been arrested, I've gone to jail over these issues. I've been at the White House chained myself to the White House. And it all matters. It all matters. But I actually think what takes more courage, and I didn't fully grasp that, is actually going into those halls of power, which are pretty deeply corrupted and sitting down and really creating dissonance for those members of Congress by bringing your children, by bringing the pictures of what's happening with the climate impacts. By actually engaging with them on a human level, not just in a political level, but on a human level to say, really, are you going to be on the watch that lets us go down?

(00:29:45):

You have kids, you have grandchildren, you love these places you've been, they're going. So, I think we knew all of that then, but I think we either need to outplay the game by raising, which I hate the thought of. And there are people doing this and I admire them for doing it. Did mansion changes vote just because of ideas? Was there money? I hate to say it, but the system really is greased by campaign contributions and all of that. And it's all dark money. I mean, we're not a democracy anymore.

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(00:30:21):

So, we either have to do that and play that game, or we have to overwhelm this system with cognitive dissonance and with a confrontation that's rooted in love. And I think civil disobedience is really important and has played a role, but it actually thinks in a way, it's easy. It's easy compared to sitting down with some of these people that are literally taking us into the fires to say, is this really is what you want? Is this really who you are? I think I learned that we need more direct relationship with those in power if we're going to try to fight on the federal level. I mean, the other thing I probably learned is that you can get a lot more done at the local and state level. So, it's a better functioning democracy and you can get a lot done.

Nate Hagens (00:31:08):

The government is corrupt and it's based on money and power. But money and power is tethered in our system to profits. Profits are tethered to energy, and energy is tethered to fossil carbon and hydrocarbons. So, 15 years ago, One Sky and 350.org versus today, how many of the core people in those movements grasp that climate change isn't the problem, but it is a symptom of a much larger biophysical metabolism of a species, a culture living off the principle of an ancient sunlight bank account and treating it as if it were interest or worse that it's irrelevant and we can just wave our technology wands and replace it.

Betsy Taylor (00:32:03):

Yeah, I don't know how many people know that. Certainly when I talk to people in the leadership of the movement, many of them know that climate change is a symptom of a deeper set of causes and problems. I think where it can be overwhelming is you might know that. And then still, what do you do differently? How do you challenge the power and domination of the petrochemical oil, gas, coal industry? And there's a lot of awesome work going on right now to put them on defense, to make them pay, to litigate against them, to deal with their stranded assets, all of that. And that is great work. But as far as how you operate in the political system, I mean, I spent many years advising Phillip Stern who wrote *The Best Congress Money Can Buy* back in the 80s. And he was a philanthropist who did everything he could to expose the corruption and to change campaign finance law.

(00:33:03):

And instead of making things better, it has progressively gotten worse. And it's been tied of course to globalization and the consolidation of wealth at the top so that you can have someone spend billions of dollars on getting somebody elected. That is not a democracy. And so then you've got the Supreme Court ruling in the wrong direction. So, I find myself thinking, given the timing of everything, we're probably not going to reform that. So, then how do you operate? And yes, the fossil fuels sectors, and I would include Big Ag, Petrochemicals, have massive influence on our government, massive influence, and how we push back.

Nate Hagens (00:33:44):

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Well, not to be an apologist for those. Well, I mean this gets back to your center for the New American Dream work on what sort of consumption is aligned with your values and aren't the fossil fuel companies, again, not in their defense, but I think all companies are following the rules of corporations that our culture has. Aren't the fossil fuel companies the dealers, and we're the users. And if we chose to not drive or not do all these things that require fossil fuels, then there wouldn't be the demand for the products.

Betsy Taylor (00:34:22):

Yeah, absolutely. And I think a lot of that is happening and it's happening so successfully that you have these Republican Secretary of States trying to penalize the banks that won't loan to fossil fuel companies or change tax systems to in any way they can support and subsidize fossil fuels. But yes, as consumers, as institutions, as cities, as states, we can withdraw our investments, we can withdraw our consumer dollars. And that's been happening for the last two decades to some extent.

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And I think it's part of why we see, I'm not actually sure now, you probably would know if the global renewable electricity, I think it's 30% of it's now from renewables globally. Pretty sure that's right. I think we're shifting and a lot of it is because we are choosing to consume differently, to buy differently, to invest differently. And we see corruption with ESG funds and with ... So, it's just this continuous effort to put pressure on those fossil fuel companies. And you should speak because I think you probably have a lot to say here.

Nate Hagens (00:35:31):

Yeah.

Betsy Taylor (00:35:32):

I think you have a lot to say. You should say it. I'm looking at you here, Nate.

Nate Hagens (00:35:38):

I do have a lot to say, Betsy. But this is my chance to listen to you.

Betsy Taylor (00:35:42):

But I also like to listen to you.

Nate Hagens (00:35:43):

I do disagree with you slightly on that.

Betsy Taylor (00:35:47):

I think it would be interesting for people to hear how you disagree.

Nate Hagens (00:35:50):

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Yeah. Well, I think that our entire system is based on fossil fuels and as they deplete or as ESG and the environmental movement makes them less socially acceptable to be funded and invested in, which is the upstream investments for more capacity, that there is a approaching a 6% decline rate on global oil. So, all the oil fields in the world that exist, if you stopped drilling everything tomorrow, they would decline at around in aggregate at 6% a year. And that 6% decline is the equivalent of billions in billions of human labor equivalents being subtracted from the global economy, which means the goods and services and benefits that we give to poor people, middle class people, all people, our infrastructure, our bridges, our food, everything becomes more difficult. So, I think the blaming of the fossil fuel companies misses the core issue here, which is we are a social species that is based our entire system over something unbelievably powerful that we only pay for the cost of extraction.

(00:37:12):

And it really is frustrating for me because I've been telling this story for almost 20 years that I deeply, deeply care about climate and biodiversity and other species and ecosystems. And not only that, but future generations of same. And yet the people that are most, their hearts and their minds and their spirits are so aligned with that goal, but they're energy blind. They don't see that without this energy we're going to have to face an economic collapse in tandem or even before an environmental collapse. And I don't know how to fit all this together, but it just seems to me that the climate movement still is unaware of that part of it.

(00:38:02):

And the second part is that renewable energy is not going to plug and play and replace fossil fuels. I don't think 30% is the right number. I'll look and post it in the show notes, but in some way it doesn't matter because renewables are growing faster than fossil fuels. That is for sure. But the total amount of fossil fuels on an absolute basis is growing larger than renewables. In other words, the emissions are continuing a straight line accelerated upward trend irrespective of all of the renewable energy of all of the convening of parties since Kyoto and before. So, we have not made a dent in the emissions.

Betsy Taylor (00:38:49):

I know.

Nate Hagens (00:38:49):

We have made a dent in ... So, that's kind of my angle on that.

Betsy Taylor (00:38:55):

But I'm curious, I'm curious. I mean just to kind of tease out this debate for a second. On the one hand you're saying consumption of oil of fossil fuel has risen, continues to rise, and with that emissions are rising. Did I capture that part right?

Nate Hagens (00:39:08):

I'm saying consumption of energy by humans because we optimize growth as our cultural goal and growth requires energy at a 99% tether.

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Betsy Taylor (00:39:17):

Correlation, yeah.

Nate Hagens (00:39:18):

And most of our energy is fossil. We're now adding more things into that. We're where you live in Vermont 150 years ago, look out your door. Everything was clear cut there, and then we found coal. So, we didn't need wood. But now we're actually using more wood as a global culture than we did 150 years ago on top of all the fossil fuels and renewables. So, we're just getting back to your metaphor earlier, we are shoveling fuel into a runaway train. And the runaway train is powered by this growth imperative that no billionaires, no philanthropists, no NGOs, no institutions can damage or dent. It's going to keep chugging on until it runs out of fuel, is my view.

Betsy Taylor (00:40:04):

Because your first point was about how we're going to run out and with that will come an economic collapse that will precede the ecological collapse.

Nate Hagens (00:40:13):

Well, we're not going to run out, we're going to run out of the scale and the affordability to continue growth. We're not going to run out for a long time.

Betsy Taylor (00:40:22):

So, we should come back to that at some point. Maybe not in this call, but I think this interesting question about, on the one hand, we're assuming this abundant capacity to do all these magical things we do to fly, to jumping cars, to have half the products that we have to have the kind of food that we have just on and on. All the plastics. But we're assuming that.

Nate Hagens (00:40:46):

Yeah, I know I've been learning a lot about that. There was a guy with us in Denmark, Martin Scheringer, who just did a podcast with me. And it is really scary stuff, which I didn't know a lot about.

Betsy Taylor (00:40:58):

It is scary stuff. All the microplastics in our bodies and in the oceans and in everything. There's this crisscrossing thing. On the one hand, we're not facing the fact that we will eventually deplete that and our fundamental economy will have to fall apart and we need to be having be anticipating and preparing. On the other hand, that's not going to happen for a while. And the missions are going up and we're continuing to expand through forestry, fracking and a number of technologies now, liquified gas, exports. So, that infrastructure for fossil fuels is expanding in some ways, even as we're working as a movement to contract it, to stop it, to penalize it, to penalize banks that underwrite it, to encourage investors to shift away from it. With all of that, it continues.

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Nate Hagens (00:41:52):

Well, I'm just wondering in the movement that they're trying to curtail that, they're trying to limit the expansion of fossil fuels, do the people working on that important issue understand that if they're successful, that will probably crash the economy?

Betsy Taylor (00:42:08):

Some are thinking about that and some are not. Yeah. I think most of the people working on it are really looking through the lens of crashing the planet. And so they're looking at the IPCC reports. They're looking at Jim Hansen and Michael Mann and all the reports that are indicating sea level rise, temperature rise, severe climate impacts, which we're already seeing. And I think they're trying to constrain the fossil fuel economy out of a deep sense that we're heading towards an ecological collapse that's going to potentially eliminate homo sapiens on the planet. I think that's how most people are seeing it. They're not thinking about, well, if we're wildly successful, the economy will collapse and everybody will have similar levels of death and loss. I don't think most people are thinking about it that way.

Nate Hagens (00:43:06):

Yeah. Neither you nor I are climate scientists, but both of us know a lot of climate scientists and people working in that field. Even at our meeting, I find it striking. Although to be fair, even within the climate community, there's a vast range of opinions. But why do you think there seems to be such a wide range of opinions in the climate activist movement that there is a certain demographic there that thinks we're ready too late and we're headed for runaway venous effect and near term human extinction. And then there's a lot that still believe in the RCP 8.5 or RCP 6 scenarios of continued use of growth of fossil fuel throughout this century.

(00:43:56):

And then there's a lot more people that think two degrees is plus or minus a likely resting point, but even then some people say that two degrees itself is sufficient to trigger all the runaway feedbacks and its eventually, I don't know, death might be too strong a word. But a very large crimping of the human and other enterprises. What do you think about that maybe in the probability distribution of your mind? What is built in and what is your sense of the range of possible outcomes that exist right now?

Betsy Taylor (00:44:35):

Well, I think people's response to the science in some ways is heavily determined by their psychology and by their organizational identity in some cases. But for myself, I don't spend a lot of time focusing on which number is it going to be. The IPCC has conservatively underestimated where we would be forever. And in their latest report, at least earlier this year as I recall, they said, well, we will definitely hit 1.6. And if we do absolutely everything in terms of sequestering carbon, stopping fossil fuels, getting to net zero, moving renewable energy, reforestation and everything, we might be able to get back down to 1.3. But right now, if you look at what's actually happening, we're not living up to our commitments

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from the Paris Accord. Emissions are going way up. We would have to bring emissions down incredibly dramatically by 2030.

(00:45:47):

I think it's like 48% if we were going to stay at two degrees. And that's not going to happen in my mind, if history is any indicator, we are simply unable to make these changes. And I was looking probably controversial in a digression, but I was listening today to a program on NPR about long COVID and how there's just growing evidence that something like a third of people who've gotten COVID have some symptom of long COVID. And they're now unpacking that what is long COVID? It's different things for different people. But it's affecting brains, it's affecting hearts, it's affecting inflammation in the body, it's reigniting other viruses in the body. So, there's like real threats from long. But is anybody masking right now? Hardly anybody. Hardly anybody is. They just don't want to. And so that's like, that's interesting kind of metaphor for change around climate. I think people don't want to give up the magic of the fossil fuels. I'm the chair of Jim Hansen's board. I get a lot of ... Jim is interesting because he sees how bad it is.

Nate Hagens (00:46:57):

I did not know that.

Betsy Taylor (00:46:58):

Yeah. Yeah. I'm in chair of his board. And so we have our meetings and he shares, and of course just in the last month he came out and said, we're going to hit 1.5 in the next couple years. And it breaks his heart. It breaks his heart that he's been telling us this since before the 80s, but testified before Congress in the 80s. And it just goes on and it just goes on.

Nate Hagens (00:47:21):

I disagree with some of his solutions.

Betsy Taylor (00:47:24):

I do too.

Nate Hagens (00:47:25):

But I have a great deal of respect for him. I've met him. We've spoken together at conferences and I empathize with the continual heartbreak that he must face after spending 40 some years telling this story largely to deaf ears.

Betsy Taylor (00:47:44):

And I mean he was try, Trump tried to eliminate his entire agency.

Nate Hagens (00:47:49):

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Right. But to build on what you said, actually I also have researched long COVID and if that is right, and if the percentage of the population that has long COVID accelerates over time, month by month, quarter by quarter, year by year. And I have no idea whether that's going to happen.

Betsy Taylor (00:48:11):

Right. We don't know.

Nate Hagens (00:48:11):

But I'm just saying if that were to happen, that itself would be a big climate limiter. Because what would happen is there would be a cognitive labor loss of productivity in our economies, and then if it got worse, there would have to be caretakers for those people who wouldn't be productive. And that itself would cause a large economic contraction, which would mean less fossil carbon. Just to show one way that this stuff is connected. Well look at 2020. Look at the emission drop in 2020. Just as an example.

Betsy Taylor (00:48:47):

Yeah, no, absolutely. So, there are always ways of looking at things.

Nate Hagens (00:48:52):

Which the train came roaring back in '21.

Betsy Taylor (00:48:56):

Yes, it did. It came roaring back.

Nate Hagens (00:48:58):

Well, I was just going to say, I agree with you. We can't know. I think we don't have remotely the amount of fossil carbon left to reach some of the disastrous scenarios. I think the biological feedbacks are probably much worse than the IPCC has forecasts. I don't spend too much time trying to nail down what the ultimate ending point will be because it's a fool's errand. We can't know. The best climate scientists in the world can't know. But I will say this, I will say that after we're dead and buried and a couple hundred years go by, if the ending point is 2.4 degrees Celsius, that is infinitely better than 2.5, which is infinitely better than 2.6 and the impacts on the world. So, not all futures are equivalent. And I think we have to do the best we can to midwife and chaperone as much life as we can, human and non-human through the bottlenecks of the 21st century.

Betsy Taylor (00:50:07):

I 100% agree. I 100% agree. Every little bit matters. And I never think we should underestimate what we could do. If we could find our way to our best selves, I think we could do amazing things. And I shifted into nature-based solutions to climate after I confronted my darkness. And it became clear we had to remove carbon from the atmosphere. And that the long held belief that CCS, the Carbon Capture in Storage was the way to go, which I had challenged back a decade before, in 2006. But all the IPCC

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scenarios assumed it, it's not working. And so anyway, I jumped into nature based solutions. And I have to say there's all kinds of problems and challenges with the nature based solutions, great dangers of greenwashing and payments to industrial commodity farmers for just a little nitrogen reduction. But there's also the possibility of something getting awakened.

(00:51:05):

And it's all happening at the same time that we're getting science from all over the world that's showing us the potential of plants, of trees to do amazing things. We're learning more and more about them. And if you want to take a really conservative approach through forestry and agriculture and wetland restoration and bog protection and reseeded of our mangrove forests and our sea grasses, there's a whole range of estimates from about one gigaton a year all the way up to 200 and some gigatons by the end of the century that we could pull out. And I don't know what those numbers are, and I actually think it's kind of not helpful to be overly exaggerating about them because there are all sorts of challenges. Like warming soils makes it harder. Capitalism can make it easier or harder depending on how we harness those markets. But the bottom line is the earth, if you just give it a little help, it can really do a lot.

(00:52:07):

And so I relocated to Vermont in 2021 in part to try it out myself. To see what can be done on 20 acres of land. And we're working with the local county forester, the local land trust, everybody we can get, permaculture experts to figure out what do we plant, how do we monitor it, how do we feed the soil? And this is happening all over the world. So, I'm putting a lot of my life energy into the potential of the planet itself to help us. We just have to give it a little more help. And there's youth getting involved, Protect our Winters. It's all about athletes that are outside that love the earth, and they are becoming relatively kick ass in terms of their political advocacy. And there's a new youth initiative out of Maine that's spread like wildfire all over the country.

(00:53:01):

That's all about getting kids, including urban kids out on the land and from that doing their political advocacy and work. So, I feel kind of excited about this dimension. And it's a no regrets place to put your life energy because even if we don't get all the carbon mitigation by planting, by restoring ecosystems and protecting ecosystems, it makes them safer and us safer. It creates habitat for other animals, birds, pollinators, reptiles. Just in a couple weeks, and I'll be quiet, but I'm helping lead a conference of cities from around the country that are looking at the ways that urban tree canopies reduce heat. So, they sequester carbon, but they actually literally can reduce the heat in that city by up to three degrees Fahrenheit. That's a make or break amount of heat in a lot of places, and particularly in low income communities of colors in those cities.

(00:53:56):

They have less green, they have less canopies. How do we address that? So, there's lots of pushback. I can see the challenges, but I see tremendous momentum in regenerative Ag, agroecology, not just in the US but in Europe. They're doing trials and Finland and the Netherlands and Germany and France in India. They're doing some amazing stuff going with regenerative, organic, chemical-free agriculture to sequester carbon, but to boost food security. So, I mean, it's all kind of really fun and incredibly positive.

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So, I think 2.4 is so much better than 2.5. And I think nature itself can help us pull back, even if we get up to 2.5. I think if we keep working with the natural world itself, we can pull back. So, that's where I'm putting my time.

Nate Hagens (00:54:53):

Yeah, I think that's awesome that you've gone from voter rights and nuclear to climate to changing consumption profiles. And you've kind of landed in this agroecology regenerative agriculture, which I recognize as being super important, but I don't know a lot about it. So, can you just tell me, because a lot of people have told me this, that it's too late to ... Well, unless something radical happens, we're not going to massively reduce the economic emissions in time to avoid some of these scenarios. So, what would be one of the most exciting CO<sub>2</sub> reducing strategies using agriculture that you've heard of or are working with, just planting trees as much as we can? Or are there things more creative?

Betsy Taylor (00:55:46):

Well, one of the most game changing things we could do all over the world, and it's not a surprise that the World Bank and the IMF and the export import commodities groups and Bill Gates Foundation are in the way. But if we simply captured our food waste and our animal waste and created compost and took a small amount of that compost then to rebuild soils for every kind of agriculture, for vineyards, for food production. And of course there are ways of managing cows so that they move across the land and fertilize it rather than destroy it. You have to have smaller herds, but you can manage cows to regenerate the earth.

(00:56:34):

If we just captured our waste and repurpose it to build the soil, which is in fact what indigenous communities and many communities prior to industrial Ag did. We could sequester so much carbon and we could boost food security. So, just a small one fourth of an inch of compost on grasslands or dry lands, massively boosts sequestration. There have been field trials at the University of California for 10 years that demonstrate this. But there are all kinds of incentives that discourage the capturing of waste.

Nate Hagens (00:57:08):

How does that happen? What are the mechanisms of that?

Betsy Taylor (00:57:11):

So, San Francisco is a model city. They have a food waste capturing system. They've created a huge composting system, and you can take compost spray from that and spray it on fields in a very small amount, less than a fourth of inch. This was done by Whendee Silver at the University of California Berkeley. Her paper is out, it's a peer reviewed paper demonstrating that by spraying this compost on these fields, and she did it in two different types of fields in California, which were dry. There was tremendous sequestration per hectare, much more than she anticipated. B, water was held in the soil. So, whether you have fire and drought or floods, if you are feeding the soil with compost, with things that regenerate the soil, that soil is like a sponge and it can manage for floods or droughts. It's holding water. And that boosts productivity.

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(00:58:09):

It allows you to grow even under dry or very wet conditions. So, that's how that works. There are about 34 practices, but the basic practices are don't disrupt the soil, don't till too much, minimize tilling. And Rodale Institute has created this, what they call crimper, where you can get weeds controlled without tilling. And so there's no till. There's cover crops which put nitrogen in back naturally rather than through synthetic fossil fuel based nitrogen fertilizer. You can plant legumes, which is what of course first nations and Native American groups have done forever to put nitrogen back in the soil. You can do crop rotation, you can look at your crops and grow deep seated, deep rooted crops where the sequestration is huge with some of these deep rooted crops. The Land Institute is doing some really interesting demonstration projects in this. So, I could go on and on.

(00:59:05):

But the bottom line is the USDA and much of the European Union and now parts of China, I'm thinking of other countries, Malawi, Columbia, South Africa. There are many countries now actually trying to demonstrate through a variety of agricultural practices that are all about healthy soil. That by building healthy soil, you get so many great outcomes. And healthy soil, food grown in healthy soil is way more nutritious. The Grantham Foundation is leading a lot of their research on this. There's a group called Soil Heroes in the Netherlands doing the work, Rodale's doing work.

(00:59:48):

Demonstrating that when you take care of soil, which we have not been doing, but when you take care of soil, get rid of the chemicals, care for the soil, rotate the crops, cover the soil, not disrupt the soil and feed it with waste, the soil becomes this amazing sponge for carbon, for water, and for productivity of food security. And it's the opposite of what the IMF, the World Bank and the Bill Gates Foundation are doing. And it's deeply distressing. And of course there's the agro industrial complex, which is fossil fuel based, which pushes those fossil fuel based fertilizers all over the world. So, it's a fight, it's a political battle. I could go on and on about regenerative agriculture. And that's just one piece.

Nate Hagens (01:00:32):

I know you could. And that's why I invited you on this. I wanted you to talk. Here's my thought there, because I have looked into this. Jason Bradford was on this show, he's a good friend of mine working on these issues. And we puzzled out that we could grow a lot of food without fossil inputs and it would be healthier and it would be good for climate, like you say. But what that would require is more labor, more human labor added to the fields.

(01:01:07):

Because it's kind of labor intensive and the mechanization, we are optimizing profits. We're not optimizing healthy soils or carbon. So, this again gets back to the root, is this runaway exponential growth dependent system. And if we were to change either the incentives or the values, because if you change the values, then individual humans can choose to devote 10% or 15% of their time to regenerating the soil and their land and their community and their area. But right now, time is money, except what ends up happening is all the time saving devices in the world than we end up spending 57

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minutes more at the end of the day on Instagram or Twitter or Facebook when we should be in the garden.

Betsy Taylor (01:02:04):

I mean theoretically you can integrate technology and labor saving tools with regenerative agriculture. And there are a lot of places doing that. Four to 500 million or I think it's about 400 million. And I was just looking at a recent study that nobody really knows exactly how many farms there are, but about at least 400 million of them are a hectare or less. They're small. These are not farmers that will have the capacity to integrate drones and technology platforms to manage. And this is something that's desperately needed right now. There's something called the Agroecology Fund out of Boston that's working on this. We need to muster the science. And I recently was reviewing some of the science and I was struck going back to maybe your first question of this interview. How many of the young scientists looking at diversified, small and medium sized farms and what they can do to feed the world, how many of those scientists are women?

(01:03:04):

And there is this whole group of young scientists, predominantly women, not exclusively, who are wanting to demonstrate that by shifting to regenerative agroecology practices, we can feed the world not only more but more nutritiously that the nature of what comes out of those soils will make people so much healthier. And yes, there is more labor required and I think that's not bad. Helping some people get back on the land might remind us of really who we are. I think if I was to say something to a young person, it would be think about one thing that you might do is just get off of technology in very explicit and conscious ways for part of the week and get outside. Because when you're out in that land, when you're out in that forest, it changes your values, it changes what you think matters. So, anyway, that was a digression, but maybe not such a bad one.

Nate Hagens (01:04:06):

No, not such a bad one. Yes. Just a point that I think it was the Grantham research that showed that as CO<sub>2</sub> increases, yes we have higher plant growth, but it's carbohydrate plant growth, and the products of the plants that we eat, the grains are lacking certain micronutrients versus 50 years ago. So, that's one of the things that I think you're suggesting could be improved. My question is, given the constraints that you just talked about, is the regenerative agriculture movement progressing differently in other countries relative to the United States and Europe? Is the global south or Asia doing things at a faster pace than we are? Or do you have any evidence or thoughts on that?

Betsy Taylor (01:04:59):

There's a large movement for agroecology in Latin America, parts of Africa and Southeast Asia. And that is rooted in not just a concern for climate, but control over food. Having food was often termed food sovereignty, having control of seeds, which have been of course since 1980, having control of seeds since 1980. There's been patenting of seeds, geoengineering of seeds and control of seeds. So, there's a big movement. So, the answer to your question is agroecology and regenerative agriculture looks different in different parts of the world, but the principles tend to be the same in terms of the soil

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that is, it's about caring for the soil, it's about nourishing the soil. In the US, the incentives are all for commodity ag. They're all for the big wheat, corn, soybean, sugar, rice, cotton. And so a lot of the regenerative rewards that have just come out of a big \$20 billion, or I'm sorry, do I have that right?

(01:06:04):

There's a lot of money. I should have the numbers and I don't have them at the tip of my tongue, but it was billions moved out of USDA to promote regenerative ag. Overwhelmingly going to the big corporate commodity farms, but not exclusively. Funds did go to some wonderful regenerative projects, including projects led by indigenous leaders and communities of color. It is different in different parts of the world because farming looks different in different parts of the world. And the fights are similar though, you've got big fossil fuel backed chemical and fertilizer companies wrapping themselves up in the language of regenerative ag. You have a whole green revolution theory of change led by Bill Gates that the only way will feed the world is with the more fertilizer produced from fossil fuels, more export commodity structures versus a very large growing movement of farmers and nations saying, no, we don't think so.

(01:07:09):

We think actually as things begin to unravel, having diversified food systems in our backyard will make us much safer and healthier. So, there is a big push towards care for the soil all over the world right now, in part because the science is showing that we're depleting our soils. We may only have 60 years left of productive soil if we don't start taking care of it. And I was just talking with mutual friend Ayan about how do we do more to restore soils in the horn of Africa where there's famine and where a lot of the soils are decertified, and there's a lot of growing evidence that by bringing animal and human waste by planting cover crops, by bringing nitrogen fixing crops to that area, that land can come back. So, let's do that.

Nate Hagens (01:08:01):

Betsy, do you think there is any chance for a broad swath of our culture to sufficiently understand and value soil, nature, the sacredness of life and the ecosystems of this one planet and incorporate those things into our prices and our behaviors? And how might this come about or have at least higher odds of coming about?

Betsy Taylor (01:08:28):

I think it's possible. I think there is something happening right now with so many young people actually going to the land. Lots and lots of young people wanting to go into farming and gardening. I think here and where I live, there was just a meeting this morning that involved people of all ages trying to create pollinator pathways all over Vermont, kind of like the wild lands of the west, wildlife corridors, but pathways. So, I think there's all sorts of things going on with people getting back into the natural world and loving it, including in cities where urban gardens are flourishing, many, many people coming into them, there's more demand than supply. So, I think it's a big question. And whether we can incorporate the sacredness of life and ecosystems into our prices, I don't know. But all of us have experienced what happens when we have the loss of a loved one.

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(01:09:24):

And at least for a little while, when you are faced either with your own mortality or their mortality of someone you've deeply been connected to, you pause in this rush of life and you say, good God, what is really going on? And what really matters? And I think if we could create those pauses for people inside of us, there is so much potential, so much courage, so much desire to be called to our best selves. And I think that is there in us. And so the question is how do we unleash that? I feel like there's a great deal of churning going on behind the scenes and also a lot of despair. And it's almost like finding the way to open the door to say, wait, you're needed. You matter. Every single one of you is needed. And I feel like if we could find the way to do that, my God, we could do some stuff. We could reconnect to this incredible world.

Nate Hagens (01:10:17):

I agree with you, and it's in talking with people like you and Ayan and others, it gives me more hope that this isn't a top down solution, though we will need help from institutions and governments down the road. But it almost seems like there is a nascent, emergent pause of mourning for what we're losing and an emergent response to that. And maybe it's our little bubble that these are the people we're talking to. But boy, I've sure heard a lot of examples from you and others lately speaking to this movement.

Betsy Taylor (01:10:53):

Yeah, there's a lot of love and hope to be tapped. It's not found in the mainstream media. We are deluged with the bad news.

Nate Hagens (01:11:03):

Probably on purpose.

Betsy Taylor (01:11:05):

Maybe so. You're a good antidote to that date, Nate.

Nate Hagens (01:11:08):

So, given your lifetime of both personal and community experience, do you have any personal advice to the listeners of this podcast who are quite aware of the global poly crisis? Do you have any personal advice to people listening?

Betsy Taylor (01:11:26):

Well, I suspect the people listening to this are already doing these things. But I mean for myself, and this is just so I suppose predictable, but I do find that having a contemplative life, however you want to define that, is helpful right now. We're being bombarded with too much information, too many negative things going on. And I would just say whether you meditate or whether you just go into silence, I would say I strongly recommend having a period of quiet each day where you're reflecting on who you most want to be and what your intention is for the day.

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(01:12:04):

For me, it's 20 minutes of silent meditation. It can be different things, but I find it's very easy to be buffeted. And I have long to-do lists, and I always have way more to do than I can possibly do. And I do find that with this massive crisis, there is the sense sometimes when you go into this silence, and I do have a bit of a quaker background, that there's a benevolent. There's something that can be tapped. And I'm not a religious person, but I am a person who believes there is something quite extraordinary that is mysterious and impossible to define and ineffable. So, yeah, I would say go to the silence. Give yourself a shot at it. Even if you're deeply skeptical, give yourself a chance to be receptive to not knowing and see what happens.

Nate Hagens (01:12:57):

Thank you. I need to try that more myself.

Betsy Taylor (01:13:00):

We all do.

Nate Hagens (01:13:01):

So, you mentioned earlier, well, you had the experience of a 10 day silent retreat. I just cannot imagine that. But one of my future guests, Patrick Oviles, he went on a three month silent retreat. Oh my God. Don't speak for three months. So, you mentioned earlier some advice to young people is to a couple times a week set down your phones and your technology and be in nature. This morning yet again, I got an email from a 17 year old, I had no idea that there were 17 year olds listening to my podcast. But she said, I love your podcast. I'm learning so much. My absolute favorite part is when you ask your guests at the end, what recommendations do they have for young people? So, do you have any other things to add to the young people listening to this, facing climate, energy depletion, plastics, all these things that they're becoming aware of in addition to being out in nature? Any advice?

Betsy Taylor (01:14:03):

Yeah, I would say know that you are not alone. And there's so many expectations on young people today. There's what you have to do, what you have to be, what you have to get, all that you have to pull together at a time when things seem so tough. So, I would say a couple things. One, don't hesitate to reach out to somebody that you admire or that you think, Gosh, I wonder if I could do that. And ask for a mentorship or ask for a conversation, even if it's a limited conversation to say, look, I'm thinking about this. Would you be willing to talk to me? So, seek out a mentor, your deepest call. And by that I would say try to keep a journal, try to be quiet, maybe talk to a coach or a friend, but don't feel buffeted by school and classes and majors and career. Yes to all of that.

(01:15:03):

But I just encourage you to try to listen to your inner voice and to be quiet. It's the only way you can listen to it. And not to feel afraid. It's so easy to just hunker down in fear right now. And I encourage you to listen to your deepest call and go for it. Jump off cliffs. If you want to be a cook and just like

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serve food to enjoy this moment. If you want to be out farming on the land, if you want to go overseas and work on some of the refugee camps to try to change how they function.

(01:15:40):

Anything, what it is, I guess my encouragement to you is given the crazy world we're in, listen to what you most feel called to and seek help from others. But go for it. Go for what you really feel pulled towards because we need you to do that. The world will be better for it. So, I guess that would be my advice. No, you're not alone. Definitely don't be afraid to ask for help, whether it's a friend, a professor, a teacher, a parent, a mentor that you don't know but would like to. Go for it.

Nate Hagens (01:16:17):

Thank you. I actually fully endorse what you just said, and I do think that the feeling of loneliness, and I understand and feel this, but the mainstream media and our culture is saying something different, that juxtaposition and feeling of not being part of the right team of meaning. And that is almost more tough to bear than the facts sometimes. So, I think that's a great answer. So, I suspect I might know how you would answer this, but what do you care most about in the world, Betsy?

Betsy Taylor (01:16:55):

I actually don't know how to answer that. I care that all living beings have the opportunity to be safe and protected, peaceful and happy, strong and healthy. I really, really care about that. That life is revered, that we see that we are interconnected, we are not separate. We are interconnected, I think, in biological and physical ways that we don't yet grasp. So, I care about the pursuit of that realm and the protection of life. And yes, it includes my grandson.

Nate Hagens (01:17:41):

So, of all the issues we've talked about or any other issue on your mind, what's specifically are you most concerned about? What issue are you most worried about in the next decade or so?

Betsy Taylor (01:17:51):

I think right now the nuclear threat is to me rising rapidly as a threat to our lives. And we need to revive the conversations about the fact that nuclear weapons can never be used. So, we've lost that whole peace movement work that happened in the 1980s where we came to understand that even one nuclear weapon could have an effect on everyone in the world. And right now we have people threatening the use of those weapons out of Korea, Russia, even China. And of course our own government has a huge military industrial complex modernizing our nuclear arsenal, which makes no sense. So, yes, I think the nuclear threat's the greatest imminent threat.

Nate Hagens (01:18:42):

I fully agree. In contrast, what are you most hopeful about in the coming decade or so? You have already offered a few suggestions, but I'll give you another chance to highlight what issue or what growing thing that you're witnessing are you most hopeful about?

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Betsy Taylor (01:19:02):

Well, I do think that there is the potential to use technology. And even though I'm critical of technology and feel that in some ways technology is undermining our society. I think there's the possibility of using communications and technology to help people find each other and to be part of a huge social movement, to restore life on the planet, to restore forests, to restore wetlands, to create the habitat for all that we love, the birds, the pollinators, the turtles, the elephants. And I feel like we could actually do this within the next decade. If we could find the right call, the people to call others to action. So, I'm excited about the fact that there are just a lot of people wanting to help, and there are ways of helping. So, can we find ways to find each other and begin to tell the stories of, hey, you know what? There's some incredible good stuff happening. Let's do more of it. So, I'm hopeful about that. I think there's so much goodness in people and they just need to find each other.

Nate Hagens (01:20:11):

Well, I found you and we should talk more often because I'm agreeing with almost everything you're saying. But I know we're both very busy. Last question, maybe tapping into the benevolence that you find when you meditate. If you were benevolent dictator and there was no personal recourse to your decision, what is one thing that you could implement that would improve human and planetary futures?

Betsy Taylor (01:20:38):

Oh God. I guess in consistent, perhaps with my earlier comment, I would eliminate all nuclear weapons. But I was drawn to say I would eliminate, I don't know. I would require all children and adults to spend a minimum of three hours a day off technology and outside. And preferably doing something fun and beautiful out in nature. I think that would transform everything.

Nate Hagens (01:21:10):

Well, you have my vote on both of those recommendations.

Betsy Taylor (01:21:13):

Okay. Thank you, sir. I'm glad that I'm going to be crowned Queen soon.

Nate Hagens (01:21:21):

Thank you so much, Betsy, for your time and wisdom and for your lifetime of work on these really difficult but critically important issues. Seriously, thank you.

Betsy Taylor (01:21:31):

Well, thank you Nate. I love the podcast. I love listening to it. You're such a force for good in our world. We need more of you. So, thank you for inviting me on. I really appreciate it.

Nate Hagens (01:21:42):

I will talk to you soon.

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Betsy Taylor (01:21:43):

Okay, great. Good to talk to you, Nate.

Nate Hagens (01:21:46):

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