

The Great Simplification

[00:00:00] **Mamphela Ramphela:** This self liberation is an ongoing process, and it is also relevant to this issue of planetary emergencies and climate change. It is not a question of green energy versus fossil fuel, it's a question of re-imagining the relationship we have with energy, the relationships we have with biodiversity, the relationships we have with water, the relationships we have with other people.

[00:00:30] Because if we don't question those relationships, we will continue to consume more than is possible. We are consuming the equivalent of seven planets, so we can't sustain that.

[00:00:47] **Nate Hagens:** Today, I'm pleased to welcome Dr. Mamphela Ramphela to the show to discuss her decades of experience in activism and movement building as the co-founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa during the 1960s and 1970s under the racially segregated apartheid regime. Dr. Ramphela has a celebrated career as an activist, global public servant, academic, businesswoman, and thought leader.

[00:01:16] She holds a PhD in social activism. anthropology, is a medical doctor, is the co-founder of Reimagine SA, the former co-president of the Club of Rome, and is the chair at the Desmond Tutu IP Trust. Usually of late, people interview her and ask her about the activities of Club of Rome, but I wanted to go back to the roots and ask her opinion of what it was like to change the social situation of a very small percentage of people in a broader society, to see how that applies to the broader social movements of today.

[00:01:51] During this conversation, which is full of Mamphela's wisdom and knowledge that can only come from decades of experience trying to change seemingly unchangeable systems, I invite you, the viewers, to think about how you can get involved in your own communities in order to change the initial conditions of the future.

[00:02:11] Lastly, I'd like to remind listeners that we are not a monetized podcast. So one of the biggest ways you can support us is by following and subscribing on YouTube or whatever platform you use to listen. Additionally, if you'd like to donate to our organization, please use the link in the description. All donations are tax deductible and go directly to our operating costs.

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[00:02:32] We appreciate your continued viewership. With that, please welcome Dr. Mamphela Ramphele. Good to see you this morning or this afternoon where you are in South Africa.

[00:02:45] **Mamphela Ramphele:** Good to see you, Nate, and look forward to our conversation.

[00:02:50] **Nate Hagens:** So you were recently the president of the Club of Rome I believe for the last four years or so, and we could talk a lot about your experiences with the efforts there, but you also have many other experiences and successes in your lifetime of work, especially as one of the early leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement.

[00:03:16] And I think for our viewers, I would like to apply the learnings and the wisdom and what you experienced there and kind of give us insights into the broader ecological, climate, systems movements around the world. So maybe you could start by telling us a bit about your early years in the Black Consciousness Movement.

[00:03:39] What was life like in South Africa at the time? And how did you get involved in the anti-apartheid activism?

[00:03:47] **Mamphela Ramphele:** Thank you. I cut my political teeth in the Black Consciousness Movement that we co-founded. We found ourselves, in 1968, at the University of Natal in Durban at a section of the university that was set aside for so called "non-whites", "non-Europeans".

[00:04:21] And we happily called ourselves We the Non-White Students of South Africa. Until, one day, we started asking the question, How can one explain that less than 10 percent of the population can hold in bondage more than 90 percent of the population?" That question was a recurring decimal for many weeks, when we as students, of course, medical students work very hard during the week, and then during the weekend, we played very hard, and we didn't have money, so we were drinking very cheap wines, and beer and really just having a good time as young people who, for the first time, I got to have deep conversations with students of Indian descent, people from the Eastern Cape, people from KZN.

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[00:05:20] I'd never been to KZN until I got used to the university. And so we, in a sense, as young people between 19 and, let's say, 24, were cutting our teeth in what it means to live in a South Africa where there are no barriers, at least amongst black people. But we didn't call ourselves black people until, in answer to our question of why can less than 10 percent of the population hold in bondage more than 90 percent of the population.

[00:06:07] It was like the scales fell off our eyes to realize that for as long as you call yourself non-somebody, you are nobody. And you are indentured, you are... you have offered your identity to that person, that group of people, to do as they please. And you have set them as a standard against which you judge yourself.

[00:06:41] It was like an aha moment. And once that happened, we said, but if you are a non-somebody, the very person who's oppressing, you cannot successfully free yourself, liberate yourself. And that weekend was the birth of a new realization of the importance of self liberation of the self you truly are inside. So that you can then enter into engagements with others on the basis of your understanding of what it means to be human and to be this unique human being, because each one of us is unique, but each one of us is connected to others in an inextricable way. And each one of us is interdependent with others as members of the human family within the web of life.

[00:07:53] So we realized that we had bought into the logic of colonial conquests, and the logic of European dominance, and the logic of their entitlement to capturing our heritage, as in our country and its resources, all because we give them permission by agreeing that we are non-them, therefore we are less than.

[00:08:30] And that weekend we made a call, a decision. We agreed that from now onwards we are going to make sure that we hold our heads high as black and proud young people. Fully recognizing that our parents had also been captured by this non-whitism, this non-Europeanism, which has made them less than the people that we love and respect so much.

[00:09:08] We decided the first step would be to have a meeting with the principal of the university, Professor Holt, who later became the Minister of Finance in the National Party Government. And we sent a delegation of two people to go and talk to him. In those days you didn't have to wait for a week for an appointment.

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[00:09:31] You just arrive at the door and you ask to see the principal. And he welcomed our delegation and they put to him that we, as black students at the university, do not want to continue to be called non-whites or non-Europeans. And our section has to be renamed the University of Natal Black Section. And all the letterheads, everything has to be changed.

[00:10:00] He said, sure thing. He didn't argue. It was like, wow, well done. And so within a week, everything was changed. You can imagine the excitement. And of course, once that happened we realized that we cannot just mobilize the students at the University of Natal Medical School. We had to go broader. So we started engaging with students from the other universities in KZN, the University College at Westville, which was for so called "Indian students", and also the University of Zululand. And so from that small group of 15, we grew into a larger and larger group from representations from other campuses. And that is when Stephen Bantu Biku decided that he has to give time. He was at the time doing his first year, repeating his first year at medical school.

[00:11:18] And so he had only one course to do and he dedicated the rest of his time traveling around the country by train, with very little money and therefore we normally travel third class. And it was a labor of love. And so he was able to go to Fort Hare, to the University of the North, and everywhere.

[00:11:43] And the response was overwhelming, because everybody kind of said, "Wow, why did it take so long for us to recognize this?" And so the central lesson we learned at that seminal moment was that to be a free human being, you've got to liberate your own self, the inner person within you, to become fully who you are.

[00:12:17] And once that inner person is free, a free spirit is unstoppable. Of course, as a woman, it didn't take long for me to figure out, wow, if this freedom is so important for us as black people, it's equally important for us as women. So you can imagine my male chauvinist friends were absolutely dismayed when I said, "Okay, let's also deal with this issue of the dominance of men over women because I'm not prepared to continue to be seen as the person who makes the tea and brings this and gets things figured out. No, I am black, proud woman, and I want to be able to free my femininity as well as my blackness from being undermined by the system of power which is male dominated and white dominated."

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[00:13:32] So the argument of my friends was, "Oh, you're going to divide the struggle." I said, "Thank you very much. Divide me then between Mamphela the woman and Mamphela the black activist." It's obviously not possible. And so that's when we could start thinking systematically about power relationships and how if we want to be free, we've got to have a different relationship to power.

[00:14:08] Power is not power to dominate. Power is there is the power to enable. And the more people are enabled to be free to have full flower of their spirits, the greater the power of the group to effect change.

[00:14:32] **Nate Hagens:** I sent you a list of questions and now I have so many more. After that beautiful opening story.

[00:14:40] So you believe then that it's not a top down issue, that it starts with n=1 of enabling the freedom within the self, that needs to be liberated first and then scaled from there.

[00:14:54] **Mamphela Ramphela:** Absolutely. And you can think about it in terms of my own country, South Africa. We had this powerful Black Consciousness Movement and we took it into our professional life.

[00:15:09] So as a medical doctor, after qualifying, I practiced as a health professional in a way that liberated the inner persons of each and every one of the people that I encountered as mothers, as grandmothers, as children, and as traditional leaders and traditional healers.

[00:15:35] **Nate Hagens:** I have numerous questions on advice that you would give to young people and any people, but I want to circle back to the Black Consciousness Movement. Looking back now, 50, more than 50 years, what were some key catalytic moments or things that you know that worked and you were like, wow this really worked in changing policies, changing awareness, changing consciousness, changing government and what didn't work?

[00:16:08] What things were kind of dead ends and that your wisdom today could say, yeah, this didn't work.

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[00:16:14] **Mamphela Ramphela:** What really worked was a willingness to ask difficult questions. And we asked those questions of ourselves because we didn't have champions. The Mandelas were in jail, others were, the Tambos were in exile, and Sobukwe was also in jail.

[00:16:37] And so we realized that we are on our own. We, as that generation, were the generation that had the responsibility of asking ourselves the tough questions. And once the scales fell off our eyes, as I said earlier, we then had fire in our belly to use our education, our professions to conscientize, to inspire others to join this wave of self liberation. And so what worked then was that we were non-hierarchical, we would open conversations, and we listened to one another. There wasn't a leader who said, "No, this is the way." No. Yes, that is your insight... Some of the people in our group were more knowledgeable than others.

[00:17:46] For example, Steve read a lot of books, including Franz Fanon and all of that, but some of us were glued to the laboratories of medical school, so we didn't really. So we had to learn and learn to learn. And people like Bonny Pityana, who then came to join as well, he was a lawyer and a priest and still a friend to date, where they were able, because they were broader, they had broader access to, at the time, banned literature. We had to find ways of getting the information we needed to understand what was going on with the Black Power Movement in the U.S. What can we learn from them? What can we learn from the student movements which were all over Europe and North America. And also what can we learn from the liberation struggles on the African continent that were not available to us either in the school classroom or in the books? So, we didn't accept that there were barriers that were insurmountable. So we had the can-do mentality.

[00:19:00] If we didn't know something, we would learn how to get to know. And we were also open. We were open to older generations like people like Dr. Ben Khoapa, who's now passed on, who really adopted us. He was a social worker. He had studied in the U.S. and came back and found these young people on fire, and he helped us shape our thinking and challenged us to become better able to make our arguments, and so my message to young people today is don't be satisfied with what is offered to you in the classroom or in a lecture hall or on these devices.

[00:19:50] You must continue to ask tough questions. And it starts with you liberating yourself, so that you can be fully who you are. Young people have gone

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back to those slave names completely unaware of what we are talking about now. And it's not that this history of the Black Consciousness Movement is not available.

[00:20:13] It's available in the libraries. But very few young people give themselves the time to read. I say to people, you can't write if you can't read. And you can't read just anything. You've got to read the things that will enrich you and that will make you a better person. And also to listen to people with different viewpoints.

[00:20:39] This intolerance of differences is unfortunate because you cannot learn by only listening to those who agree with you. What didn't work was we didn't have the resources. I mean, we used to, as a medical officer in the various projects that we were running first in King Williamstown and later in Tzaneen in Limpopo.

[00:21:10] We were operating on the smell of an oil rig. We had very little money, but we never, ever gave up. And that's what inspired people who see what we're doing with so little to support us. I remember the health center that I built in Lenyenye in Tzaneen. I had been promised money by the World University Service, but then Craig Williamson,

[00:21:41] who was then a spy who had infiltrated the ANC, stopped it, stopped that money. And so here I am having already commissioned a builder who was busy building and up to the window level. Now I must produce the money. I didn't have it. And I remember Desmond Tutu, who was then the secretary general of the South African Council of Churches, he used to call me every Monday. He called me and I just burst out crying. Here is the problem I have. He said, "Oh dear," he said, "Leave it with me." And he mobilized the British Council of Churches to give him the okay to use SACC funding for me to continue that building, and then they replenished that money.

[00:22:38] So, never, ever give up. That's the message that I can give to any young person.

[00:22:45] **Nate Hagens:** Do you have grandchildren?

[00:22:48] **Mamphela Ramphela:** Yes, I've got two beautiful grandchildren, fifteen and three.

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[00:22:53] **Nate Hagens:** What could you describe about how young people maybe your fifteen year old grandchild is still younger than you were when you started this work, but compared to your parents and grandparents and what they experienced and then what you described and now young people in South Africa, black South Africans, what is the feeling and the recognition? And did the self liberation not necessarily have to come from individual minds because the culture caught up to it or what can you describe about that?

[00:23:29] **Mamphela Ramphele:** I think before we talk about my grandchildren because they are special in that I am absolutely determined to make sure that they grow up as self liberated people who will shape the future they want. But remember what I was describing about how the personal, the professional, and the political was infused by the same self liberation value system.

[00:23:59] And we, as this Black Consciousness Movement, having qualified as doctors, some as teachers, others as nurses, and so on, we continue to mobilize the rest of South Africa, including the faith based leaders. People like Desmond Tutu were conscientized by us. Not the other way around. The fact of the matter is that Desmond Tutu had his theological education at the King's College in London, and so very Anglicized.

[00:24:41] Yes, he had written his thesis on Ubuntu, but it wasn't really an integrated way of thinking about not just being able to be a good priest, but to be a leader of a liberation, of the liberation process. That came about because first of all, it was Beyers Naudé, and the Anglican priests who were supporting us, who encouraged him to come to King Williamstown, where he spent a whole day and a half with us, particularly with Steve Biko, because I was busy in the health center. And so he was able to understand the logic of this internal liberation and how it should find expression in the faith community because the white Jesus that was sold to us by missionaries was exactly to continue to keep us thinking of whiteness includes even God is white. I mean, preposterous, but there it is.

[00:26:03] That process of conscientizing various sections of the community, it was the faith community, it was the the labor movement, and students in high school. It is those students in high school who burst onto the scene that the world woke up to the fact that black people in South Africa are no longer prepared to tolerate being treated as less than.

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[00:26:43] So June 16, 1976 didn't happen because we, as the older generation, said to the young people, you do this. They, having been liberated, self liberated, decided that to be given an education which is intended to keep them inferior, was a violation of who they were as people. So they just stood up and said, "No more. Thus far and no more."

[00:27:15] And of course, we know they were mowed down, many were killed, many went into exile. And so the Black Consciousness Movement had permeated society. But the response of the apartheid government to this, it wasn't an anti-apartheid movement. Ours was not that. Ours was a liberation movement because it was the liberation of the person so that the personal, the professional, the political were all driven by the same value system of a free people.

[00:27:59] **Nate Hagens:** How important were labels to the liberation of the mind in South Africa? And are there any corollaries to our current ecological predicament where we call ourselves consumers and fossil fuels? I mean, they're not really fossil fuels. They're hydrocarbons and we call them fuel.

[00:28:22] How important were labels back then? And are they relevant today?

[00:28:26] **Mamphela Ramphela:** Labels and language is always important. Who you say you are shapes who you are. If you're a consumer you'll be looking for what can I buy today. But where does that come from? Because we, as Africans, have to reconnect to our ancestral heritage of the very first human civilization which was on this continent.

[00:28:59] The very first scientists were here. How else do you build pyramids if you don't understand trigonometry and geometry and mathematics? And how do you build the pyramids in a way that follow the configurations of the stars unless you understand and you study cosmology? And they didn't study in university.

[00:29:23] The whole world, their world, was intertwined. The spiritual, the intellectual, the day to day life were all governed by the same values because they understood that everything is connected to everything else. So this quantum science that is only now in vogue, excuse me, they understood it because they could see that the rise and fall of the Nile River, ebbs and flows, corresponded with the celestial bodies.

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[00:30:01] So they could see the universe is governed by something that keeps coherence. And so going back to my grandchildren, my grandson is at Bishops in here in Cape Town as a weekly boarder. I'm afraid our history in South Africa has not changed significantly from the history we were taught.

[00:30:33] They are taught about the Second World War, but they know nothing about how Ethiopia escaped being colonized. They know nothing about the history of the pyramids. They know nothing about the history of science and the culture of their continent. And yes, language is important, terminology is important, but even more important is that language carries culture.

[00:31:06] You go to our parliaments here in South Africa, people who cannot express themselves in English are speaking in English. Why? We have 11 official languages, but we don't use them because we still have the mindset that parliament, you have to speak the Queen's language. So the colonization that we were talking about of the mind still reigns supreme in South Africa.

[00:31:32] And the reason is simple. That the African National Congress, when those young people who were members of the Black Consciousness Movement got to exile, they were turned into saying that, "No, the ANC mobilized us and so we are now comrades in the ANC struggle for liberation." That denial of history has cost my country an enormous amount.

[00:32:03] 30 years after the end of the colonial process, officially, we are still, in fact, I could, let me put it even stronger. Our education, our health care, our human settlements, the infrastructure that affects the poorest, most social infrastructure, fiscal, is worse than it was in 1994. Because the focus of those in government, minus the first cabinet of Mandela, they were really wrestling with, "How do we turn this freedom into reality of ordinary people?"

[00:32:50] But not everybody in that cabinet was interested in that. Mandela pushed, but he was an old man. But more importantly, they didn't listen to Mandela's advice. Mandela's advice as they entered the negotiations was to say to them, "We have come back to a country, we spent 27 years in jail.

[00:33:13] You guys spent X number of years in exile. We need to listen to those who are activists inside the country." Academics who are sympathetic to the

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liberation struggle. Nope, they said they have their own people. They brought people from New Zealand, from the Netherlands, from Canada, to advise them about how to transform a society they know nothing about.

[00:33:40] That is why we failed to match the fantastic constitutional dispensation that was negotiated. We failed to mesh that with a fundamental socioeconomic transformation. And so yes, we have the same challenges that we see globally in terms of ecological damage and planetary crisis. We have them here.

[00:34:18] We have had, this winter, we have had flooding like we have never seen. At the same time, in my native province of Limpopo, there's not enough food because of the droughts. We have to pay attention to language, to terminology, and to the understanding that everything is connected to everything else.

[00:34:46] You cannot have political freedom without socioeconomic freedom that matches that. Otherwise, that political freedom has no content. And that is why a lot of young people in South Africa, with unemployment rates in some areas 70 percent, and outcomes of education where if you were to really use standards, even for during my time as a student, we only have a throughput rate from our school system of less than a third of the one comma something million young people who start school 12 years later. Less than a third actually qualify to face the world with an education and understanding of life that is adequate to the task.

[00:35:48] So my grandchildren are fortunate In that they have an in house storyteller with a beady eye on making sure that when we talk about something they understand what we're talking about. And my grandson says, "Kulu, but they still teach us." I said, "Yeah, you should learn." He's actually named after his grandfather, he is Lutando Bantu Biko.

[00:36:19] I said you should carry your name with pride. And that includes making sure you understand your granddad's philosophical orientation, his values, and why he died for this freedom, and how you must now use that knowledge to shape the future you want for yours and your generation.

[00:36:44] **Nate Hagens:** His granddad being Stephen Biko.

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[00:36:46] **Mamphela Ramphele:** Yes. His granddad being Stephen Biko and he's named after him.

[00:36:51] **Nate Hagens:** So you also just mentioned using language. You didn't say tutor. You said storyteller. Did you choose that consciously?

[00:36:59] **Mamphela Ramphele:** Absolutely. Because I was brought up by my father's grandmother, his mother's mother, who was totally illiterate. And she used to

[00:37:13] tell us stories after supper, which we laughed about because he did it in such a jocular way. It's only later you realize that actually those were lectures, philosophical lectures, values lectures about, for example, the hare and the tortoise. Who is wiser? The slow one or the one who runs ahead of the pack, right?

[00:37:46] And yes, I believe that young people learn best through stories. Stories that have meaning for them. So if you were to give him a book to read about his granddad, makes no sense. But if we talk about something, you say, do you know what your granddad would say about something like that? And then we'll go and talk it through.

[00:38:09] Why? Right? That's how it is.

[00:38:14] **Nate Hagens:** So if you could today go back to your 19 year old self at the beginning of this movement, given what you know now, after having been the president of the Club of Rome and a lifetime experience, could you give some pieces of advice and what would they be? And would they be the same advice to other 19 year olds alive today?

[00:38:36] **Mamphela Ramphele:** The 19 year olds of today are in a far better position than we were. They have access to technology, which we didn't have. They have access to the world, which we didn't have, through television and other media. And they have access to the virtual world, right? And if we had that in addition to this awakening, we would have put the whole place on fire.

[00:39:09] Fire in a good sense, not burn. But what I say to them is that we did what we could with very limited resources. One thing I'm proud about, I tell them, is

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that process of liberation that happened in 1968 has never, ever left my being. Everything I do is still in harmony with that reawakening moment.

[00:39:44] And so each time I do something, I have to make sure that there is values coherence. So at the Club of Rome, for example, the language, going back to language, to talk about the Global North and the Global South, okay, where is Morocco, right, and developed, developing, okay, where are we developing to? Is the U.S. a real developed country? If it is, I don't want to get there, etc. This ability to ask difficult questions of yourself in the first place and of everything else around you is really what's, in my book, is more important than teaching kids the facts of this, whether it's history, whether it's math, whether it's physics, whether... If you help young people to learn how to learn, first by liberating themselves, and I'm glad to tell you that there is a school system in this country called the LEAPS school system, which has graduated now close to 3,500 young people.

[00:41:00] On this basis, on the basis, these are kids from the poorest areas, like Alexander Township, Diepsloot, Langa here in Cape Town. When they get to this school, the first period of every day is what is called life orientation. In that life orientation, you start by saying who you are, what is your clan name, and of course, we have all been given slave names.

[00:41:32] Okay, you are Derrick, or you are Happiness, or you are Pretty, what is the name that your grandmother gave you? Then they start understanding that there is a dynamic here. This name is not just a name. Names carry huge heritage. They connect you to ancestors and to those before. They will connect you to those born later.

[00:42:03] And like, for example, my grandson will forever carry his grandfather's name and he will give it in turn to his grandchildren one day. And so it's really important that we embed this self liberation in everything we do, not only at school level, in professional development programs. I deal with a lot of young people, young leaders who say, "But you know, we really are frustrated."

[00:42:38] We are forced to check out our values at the doorstep of businesses that we work at.". I said to them, "No one will get you to check out your culture at the gates unless you willingly do so, right?" But you don't have to be rude. You just have to say, "No, I would like to be called..." Because there's this thing in South

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Africa that with this English monolingual culture that when I say I'm Mamphela, "Oh, what can we call you?"

[00:43:18] You call me Mamphela, right? And I hear young people say, "Oh, but you know, they can't call me... I said, "They can call La Bouscagne, they can call Francois, they can call your name, if you insist." This self liberation is an ongoing process, and it is also relevant to this issue of planetary emergencies and climate change.

[00:43:45] The point you were making about fossil fuel and all of this. We're now, in the name of a just transition or a green transition, are doing exactly the same thing. It is not a question of green energy versus fossil fuel. It's a question of a reimagining the relationship we have with energy, the relationships we have with biodiversity, the relationships we have with water, the relationships we have with other people.

[00:44:24] Because if we don't question those relationships, we will continue to consume more than is possible. We are consuming the equivalent of seven planets. We can't sustain that. And it's really important to get these conversations, not only in activist circles, but right at the center, in the parliaments of our countries, in the intercontinental bodies, in the multilateral institutions.

[00:45:02] You know, our multilateral institutions are products of the victors of the Second World War. Completely unsuitable for the challenges of the 21st century. We talk about, "There must be reform." There'll never be reform unless there is reform of our relationship to power. For as long as those victors of the Second World War believe that they have a right to be the leaders of the world, a right to dominate.

[00:45:41] We will not make progress.

[00:45:43] **Nate Hagens:** I'm a podcast host here, and I have a lot of opinions and knowledge about the interconnections of the world. But I continue to learn from other humans like you. A couple weeks ago, I did a podcast with Casey Camp Horinek, who was also at the conference I met you at, where how Early Americans treated Native Americans and the genocide and continued ill treatment of Native Americans is kind of a microcosm of how humans are treating the planet.

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[00:46:21] And now today, I am getting the feeling that the Black Consciousness Movement is also a microcosm of what we face on the broader sense. You said earlier that it was about how it's not about the self, it's how we're connected to everyone. And you said about you're black and you're a woman, but you are, you know, your own person.

[00:46:47] Can we extend the boundaries to the non human in the 10 million other species we share the planet with? I'm just suddenly having insights that connect all this. So what are your thoughts on that?

[00:47:01] **Mamphela Ramphela:** Absolutely. That's why I talk about the essence of being human is to be interconnected, interdependent, within the web of life.

[00:47:16] We haven't been given dominion as kind of conservative Christians tell us. We are simply part of creation and the least capable part of creation. If you look at indigenous communities all over the world, they are a tiny minority now because of the genocides in the Americas, the genocides here, in Namibia, there were genocides everywhere.

[00:47:53] There were genocides. In China,, the Brits used drugs ,

[00:48:03] to dominate people so that they do not have the power to say yay or nay. And so those indigenous communities, and I'm fortunate in that I was brought up by an indigenous woman who was my great grandmother, who had that wisdom. You could never, where I grew up, you could never cut a tree without conversations as a community about that tree.

[00:48:38] Why should it be cut or not? And it's only under very difficult or under special conditions that it will be cut. So every part of the web of life is important. The trees, the rivers, the grass, and the unseen life within the soils and within the rivers and within the mountains. And so the first settlers, the Dutch who arrived here with scurvy, were saved by the indigenous people of this part of the world in the Cape.

[00:49:26] And they were saved by water from the Table Mountain Springs, where the indigenous people will first give thanks to the water, to the spring, for giving water, and then promise not to waste it, and treat it with reverence. And guess

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what? After they had saved those settlers, they were playing with this water and throwing it around, sacrilege.

[00:50:00] I've just had a conversation this morning with a few indigenous people because I'm also a commissioner on the Global Commission on the Economics of Water and their issue is the starting point of the conversation on water should not be whether there is more or there is less, it should be what is water?

[00:50:27] It is the lifeblood of all of us, of our planet, of our Earth. And if we approach it in that way, we cannot talk, in a sense, about the economics of water. Because it's violating the sacredness of water. And as we know, in New Zealand, the Maoris have managed to get the recognition of the personhood of rivers, of the elements within the web of life.

[00:51:03] And my view is we, as a global community, have much to learn from the 6 percent of the population out of the 8 billion people that we are, who are looking after more than 85 percent of sensitive ecosystems and biodiversity. What stops us from learning? Because it's inconvenient to learn. If we learn from that 6%, we then cannot continue to talk about, you know, the consumer price index as a measure of progress.

[00:51:41] We couldn't talk about brent crude as a measure of the flow of energy levels. We wouldn't talk about green hydrogen or green this because everything is green.

[00:51:56] **Nate Hagens:** So 6 percent of the global population controls 85 percent of what?

[00:52:03] **Mamphela Ramphela:** No, it doesn't control. It is the 6 percent of the global population which comprises indigenous communities.

[00:52:16] They look after, they are guardians of more than 85 percent of the essential ecosystems of this Mother Earth of ours. And they do so at great cost to themselves. You know, in the Amazons, they get killed and they are forever under threat because of consumerism where they are cutting down the Amazon forest in order to plant soya and palm oil and other things for export so they can get beef, they can get this, they can get that. So we have a massive problem, but that

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problem has a solution, and the solution is liberating ourselves from this addiction to an extractive, consumerist approach to life.

[00:53:20] **Nate Hagens:** And do you have a pathway and a recommendation on how we get rid of that addiction as individuals or as a culture?

[00:53:30] **Mamphela Ramphela:** Well, we know that addictions are very difficult to get rid of, even at the personal level, whether it's alcohol or cigarettes or drugs. But the starting point is acknowledgement. For as long as we have normalized GDP growth as a measure of progress, we cannot get rid of the addiction. For as long as we get our eyes glued on the market as if it's some kind of holy cow,

[00:54:06] we can't. We have to be willing to redefine our relationships with all of these things and understand that what matters in life is life itself. And if that's the beginning, then everything else must be life supporting. Extraction is not life supporting. Consumerism is not life supporting. So it is about acknowledgement.

[00:54:41] That's a starting point. If we don't acknowledge that we have a problem of addiction to consumerism, addiction to valuing things which are valueless compared to life, and addiction to norms and standards that do not support life. And so once we get to acknowledge that, we can then work together across generations to unlearn, redefine our relationship to energy.

[00:55:18] We can do with less energy. My ancestors used to use very little energy because they built their homes as round homes with thatched roof, cool in summer and warm in winter. Is that difficult? That basic technology has been known for millennia.

[00:55:46] **Nate Hagens:** So let me ask you this. When you started this movement and through most of your efforts, we didn't have these.

[00:55:55] And are these, when you talk about the self liberation of young people today, are cell phones and the internet and social media, is that a help or is it a hindrance? Because it may cause self discipline and an addiction that are bumps on the way to self liberation. What are your thoughts on social movements and the self liberation of young people with technology like this?

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[00:56:27] **Mamphela Ramphele:** Technology is a double edged sword. It is a help. Yes, absolutely. I mean, here we are. We couldn't have had this podcast without technology. So we can't but thank the universe for having inspired some people to get us to where we get to. But like everything else, you have to be disciplined. You can't be looking at your cell phone as many young people do from morning until evening.

[00:57:03] It destroys your eyesight, it destroys your ability to concentrate, and it narrows your horizons. You're forever wanting to be like this model or that model. Listening to music that makes no sense, but you want to be with it. No, don't be with it. Be yourself. Travel inside yourself to become the person that you want to be.

[00:57:30] And that is what will make you really the great leader that each one of us is capable of becoming. And yes, I'm all for technology, but it must be used in a disciplined manner and in moderation so that you can lift up your eyes. If you are not raising your eyes and broadening your horizons, you are going to be a very narrow, highly strung young person.

[00:58:09] **Nate Hagens:** So when you were 15, did you still have this determination and drive that you are evidencing today in your seventies? Or was it through this self liberation as a 19 year old and in the early years of the Black Consciousness Movement, that changed, or was this who you've been all your life?

[00:58:30] **Mamphela Ramphele:** I'm afraid when I look at my granddaughter now, I know that I've been like that.

[00:58:36] You know, I was the kind of child, I was told I was, I'm one of seven and I'm number three. So I'm in the middle and I was the tiniest, the least able to do anything with my body, like athletics and I can't sing. My eldest sister can sing like a canary. But I had a brain that was alive. And they used to call me Mabouchajani.

[00:59:15] That's what they would say about me, it means "the clever one." Because I would ask "Why this? No, why?" So I'm sorry, that is in me. I was designed to be who I am and encouraged by my father who said to me, "Stop competing with other people. Compete with yourself. Make sure that if you do well in this, do better next time."

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[00:59:39] And because I was bored half my life so he said, " No, just don't wait for others when you want to read, and so on." That's who I am. So the self liberation just gave, it's like the real punch that got me. The takeoff, the liftoff.

[01:00:03] **Nate Hagens:** That's great. So what do we do? How do you integrate what you've learned towards the global crisis that we have now?

[01:00:11] What are some markers or guideposts of deeper, longer term social and cultural real change? What's the bottom line? What do you think the path ahead is either in South Africa or globally or with respect to climate and resource depletion? What are some umbrella thoughts?

[01:00:31] **Mamphela Ramphela:** I believe, and I'm a member of the Planetary Guardians very recently, each one of us, when we wake up in the morning, must give thanks for life, the joy of life, the universe, the Sun, the rain, whatever. And we must commit to being the best guardian for that day, every day.

[01:01:01] Second, my generation must commit to intergenerational conversations. Young people know a lot. They are desperate to see changes so that their futures can be more secure. We must engage with them, not thinking that we are going to teach them, we must also listen to them. But more importantly, is to share experiences, share stories.

[01:01:33] What worked during our time might not work today, but what are the lessons? Third, we must never, ever give up. I'm 76. It is not responsible to say, "I'm too old to do anything." I'm sorry, as long as you are alive, you are not too old to do anything. Where you are, you can be the change you want to see and inspire change, support those with the energy to change.

[01:02:12] Also, those of us with a voice at the national, at the continental, at the global, must never keep that voice quiet. I'm a member of the Club of Rome. I will continue in that role to raise these questions to challenge the language that continues to lull us into complacency. To get us to acknowledge these addictions we have, and to make ways.

[01:02:58] And I believe also, having my academic background, that the UN Declaration of the Decade of Sciences, which was made last year of August, is an

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opportunity for those in academia to look anew at what are we doing, teaching young people industrial revolution number one type of education. We've got to change the epistemology, the ontology of what is taught, how it is taught. We cannot continue to teach in this kind of anti versal approach, this authoritarian, top down approach. We have to have different ways of learning in a collaborative way and inspiring young people to be the learners, the teachers of themselves and their peers.

[01:04:06] **Nate Hagens:** So you mentioned earlier about the LEAPS school where there's 3, 500 graduates or whatever, and the slave names and talking about your name that your grandmother gave you. What are some other things they teach at that school or the method of instruction and chaperoning of young humans?

[01:04:24] **Mamphela Ramphela:** Values based education. So they look at history, even science. Their schools don't have laboratories. They go out into the garden. They have vertical gardens. They, so every thing can be done if we are prepared to rethink education. Education or science doesn't only happen in the laboratory. The world is a laboratory.

[01:04:55] The earth is a laboratory. As I said earlier on, our ancestors learned by observing the Nile River and observing the celestial bodies. So young people in the LEAP schools learn that way. You'll be pleased to know that a lot of those graduates that I refer to, some of them have learned to be teachers. They become teachers within the school.

[01:05:20] So we've got a generation of the graduates becoming themselves teachers within these schools. And so it is a life changing experience. And the school is governed by a set of values, honesty, openness, acknowledgement of failures and mistakes and learning from mistakes. Failure is not a condemnation.

[01:05:50] It is a wake up call to there is a different way of doing things, and that's where you become better and better, by acknowledging your mistakes and learning from them.

[01:06:04] **Nate Hagens:** I agree with you that education is central and paramount, which is why I continue to do this work. But one of the challenges you mentioned earlier the fable, the parable of the tortoise and the hare, the challenge is that

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midway through the race, the hare is writing the history books and still making the laws and the rules.

[01:06:25] So while we're still in the middle of the race, the hare is exerting enormous power to keep those value systems and some of the other things that you described in check. What are your thoughts on that?

[01:06:41] **Mamphela Ramphele:** The reason why the LEAP School is pushing hard on those who benefited from a self liberating education becoming the teachers is the way to start doing that.

[01:06:53] And guess what's happening? People who have seen the superior results, even from an academic point of view, of the LEAP school system are now asking LEAP to set up schools in other parts of South Africa. There is a school that they were invited to set up in Kuruman in Northwest. There's a school there, or schools, that they've been asked to revitalize in the Eastern Cape.

[01:07:25] It's like a yeast, you know? In the same way that we in the Black Consciousness Movement, we started as something like 15 young people. We ended up with the whole country having a mass movement that's conscientized. The same thing with education. For as long as we can influence outliers, people who are backing the system, within the education setup, those nodes of transformation will coalesce into a movement. And the same thing in terms of environmental and ecological movements. It starts with us learning from that 6 percent of indigenous people, and then inspiring other indigenous people and other people on this continent whose lands were taken away and there's been such a disruption of their indigenous lives, but they heal, actually, once you speak to them about deep down, you still have that knowledge which has been digitally ingrained in you. And when that happens, which is why people go and have this ancestral calling. What is this ancestral calling? It's a calling back to the beginning. And once they get through that, they get the rhythm, that's it. They're healed and they become healers.

[01:09:04] **Nate Hagens:** Your term as president of the Club of Rome ended last year but I know you are so busy with so many things going on.

[01:09:13] Can you share just a few highlights of what you're focused on and passionate about and spending your time on now?

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[01:09:22] **Mamphela Ramphele:** I was the co-president of the Club of Rome with Sandrine Dixson-Declève from 2018 to last year. And now I remain a member of the Club of Rome and through that we are reimagining the relationship between and Europe. The European Union has got a program, a high level panel program of aspiring to a partnership between Europe and Africa, a partnership of equals. You can't have a partnership of equals with the old frame. So we are saying we need a mutual metamorphosis, mindset shift on both sides of the Mediterranean.

[01:10:12] So that's a big chunk of what I do. I'm also the chair of a global compassion coalition, which compassion is an aspect of Ubuntu. When we grew up with the values that said a human being is interconnected, interdependent within the web of life. And therefore when you have a visitor coming, a stranger is just a friend.

[01:10:40] You do not know. It's a relative. You do not know. And this whole idea of different races is a nonsense scientifically. It's a nonsense philosophically. We are all one human family. There's only one race, the human race. And so that's the kind of contribution I bring because most of the people on the Global Compassion Coalition are psychologists, are mindfulness people.

[01:11:09] Yeah, fantastic. But let's go back to the beginning. Where does this come from? Where did we lose it? I don't have to be mindful because that's how I was brought up. So how do we make sure that this Ubuntu, this interconnectedness is the way we lead as whatever our profession is. I, as I said earlier on, I'm also a member of the Planetary Guardians.

[01:11:39] And my view is, at 76, I'll be crazy to think that I can be a real effective guardian. No, I said, we have to have intergenerational conversation. The young people must be the drivers of making sure that every human being on this planet is a guardian. They have the energy. It's their future that they want to shape.

[01:12:05] Our job is to inspire and support from behind. And so I see myself as a bridge between a generation that fought for freedom but did not complete the job of the transformation of the civilization so that it is a civilization that is in harmony with the nature of life. Interconnected, interdependent, and entangled.

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[01:12:35] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you for all of your work and continued work. And you're a grandmother and have a family and everything else on top of that. What is an action, you've mentioned inner strength and awareness especially for young people, but what is an action a listener to this program could take today,

[01:12:56] or this week, to work towards some of these goals themselves, like a concrete, what could they do? Do you have any advice?

[01:13:05] **Mamphela Ramphela:** Yes. Step number one, just look at what you have versus what you need. To be human is to be, not to have. Consumerism has made us believe that we are known for what we have. We should be known for who we are, for our beingness.

[01:13:36] And therefore, look at reducing what you have. Giving away what you do. I mean, I'm also, when I was still actively a professional, I've got lots and lots of clothes that I never will wear. But we don't have the sense that if we were to share that, what we don't need, we reduce the need for people to go and buy.

[01:14:04] Therefore, we reduce the consumption rate. Second, be mindful of not damaging a planet which is already damaged. What we do with water, which is a scarce lifeblood? How do you become a better guardian of the essentials of life? Water, the environment, how we dispose of waste, but also I believe we have to commit to being active citizens.

[01:14:48] You cannot vote for someone who so clearly indicates that they're going to destroy this, they're going to dominate this, they're going to continue to pump oil or continue to expand the consumer process that is killing us. So I believe the most important action each one of us can take is to be conscious of the fact that our personal, our professional, and our political in the broader sense, lives have to be governed by a value system that promotes being good

[01:15:34] guardians of this beautiful planet we've been given. It's the only one where human life can thrive.

[01:15:45] **Nate Hagens:** What do you care most about in the world?

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[01:15:48] **Mamphela Ramphela:** I care about people. I care about the dignity that human beings are entitled to, but many live without. I care about the damage we are doing to our planet when I look at my grandchildren and those yet to be born.

[01:16:17] I care about intergenerational responsibilities. I care also about the beauty of life. I love life. And I give thanks for life every day.

[01:16:37] Boy,

[01:16:38] **Nate Hagens:** we have wildly different backgrounds, and I agree with every word that you just said on that. If you could wave a magic wand, what is one thing you would do to improve human and planetary futures?

[01:16:53] **Mamphela Ramphela:** I would affect a generational shift in the leadership of countries, continents, multilateral institutions, so we can have a generation whose interests are not yesterday's, but are

[01:17:20] in the now and the future. I care about the young women whose incredible energy, whose pride in their femininity, I would love to see them lead together with my sons and grandsons all over the world. Because I know, and I watch them in action, when they lead, stuff happens. Good things happen.

[01:18:02] **Nate Hagens:** So we need younger leaders and politicians and more women in leaders and political positions.

[01:18:10] **Mamphela Ramphela:** The feminine, even in men, must come forth. Because we all have a little bit of, in my case, masculinity, and oodles of femininity. You have some femininity, but you suppress it because men don't do X, Y, Z. Men are people. And we all have these wonderful gifts of feminine and the masculine in service of humanity and of the planet.

[01:18:48] **Nate Hagens:** So to put you on the spot, you mentioned earlier a language, you said clever one in, I think, Bantu or some language.

[01:18:58] **Mamphela Ramphela:** In Sepedi.

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[01:19:03] **Nate Hagens:** Could you maybe give some comment or blessing about the world and the future in your native language, just so I can hear what it sounds like.

[01:19:13] **Mamphela Ramphela:** Kitlari pula. Now, pula is rain, so when I say pula, I'm wishing you the very best, because as you know, we get water from the rain, and so the blessings will just flow over you.

[01:19:37] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you. This was a very great conversation. Thank you for sharing of your time and wisdom today and for your lifetime of activism and helping others.

[01:19:48] Do you have any closing words for our listeners?

[01:19:51] **Mamphela Ramphela:** All I wish for is to see my sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters leading the charge to transform this beautiful world into what the Creator wanted it to be. And I know you have the power, the energy, and the wisdom of your ancestors to do it.

[01:20:19] Just do it.

[01:20:21] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you so much. If you enjoyed or learned from this episode of The Great Simplification, please follow us on your favorite podcast platform. You can also visit thegreatsimplification.com for references, And to connect with fellow listeners of this podcast, check out our discord channel.

[01:20:45] This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens, edited by No Troublemakers Media, and produced by Misty Stinnett, Leslie Batt-lutz, Brady Heyen, and Lizzy Sirianni.