

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Bill Plotkin:** The most important thing for true societal change is that we have educational systems not only for children and teenagers but for adults to help people ecologically awaken because once we have a large enough percentage, everything will shift, we'll start embracing the world as all relatives and all intelligent.

[00:00:24] **Nate Hagens:** Today, I'm joined by Bill Plotkin for introduction to his work in eco depth psychology, human development, and the soul. Bill holds a PhD in psychology and research non ordinary states of consciousness. In 1979, on a solo winter ascent of an Andirondack Peek, Bill experienced a call to spiritual adventure, leading him to abandon academia in search of his true calling.

[00:00:53] He has since founded the Animus Valley Institute and has guided thousands of people on the journey of soul initiation and is the training director of the Soul Craft Apprenticeship and Initiation Program. This interview is a bit different from others on this channel that cover oil depletion, economic systems, ecological risks.

[00:01:14] Instead, I interview Bill in an attempt to get at the root of what underlies all of these issues, which is a shift in human development, consciousness, and values from our ancestral past. Bill begins our conversation by reading a poem that he and I believe will be helpful as you listen along. For me, it set the tone for the rest of this, unique episode.

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[00:01:58] With that, please welcome Bill Plotkin. Bill Plotkin, good morning. Welcome to The Great Simplification.

[00:02:06] **Bill Plotkin:** Thanks so much, Nate. Great to be here with you.

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[00:02:08] **Nate Hagens:** To be honest, well, I'm always honest. To be open and blunt, I hadn't heard your name until a year or two ago, and now I've heard it like a hundred times.

[00:02:19] We have many mutual colleagues, and somehow the winding road, has brought me to your work. and I recently read your book, Nature and the Human Soul, which we're going to talk about today. but you emailed me last night and said you would like to start by reciting a poem. So I'm handing the mic to you.

[00:02:42] **Bill Plotkin:** I like starting with poems often because, the material That is the essence of my work. It's something that's really totally off the map of the contemporary industrialized world, and so, I'm, in my work, I'm evoking possibilities, experiences, certain kinds of, dimensions of magic of the world that, that are, is, that are difficult for contemporary people to, Access through their everyday worldview.

[00:03:19] And one of the amazing and indispensable things about good poetry is that it, slips beneath the radar. you might say, a good poem, is connecting up some reality about what it is to be human in this world, especially those realities that are somewhat mysterious, and using language and rhythm to evoke our imagination.

[00:03:50] All right. innate human intuitions about, these mysterious aspects of, life. So, and good poetry, of course, shifts consciousness in a way that might be helpful at the start of our conversation, both for you and me and for our listeners. So this, poem is one of my favorites from one of my favorite poets.

[00:04:13] his name is David White. He's an Anglo American, contemporary poet. And this poem is called All the True Vows. I'll recite it and, I hope you and your listeners will forgive me that, I'll have kind of some commentary as I go along with this poem. But it won't be interpretation, because that's one thing we don't do in our work.

[00:04:35] We don't interpret dreams or we don't interpret poems, but we do amplify them and try to help, their effect be amplified. Let me say as, as a preface to this poem that the poet is speaking about two kinds of vows that he distinguishes, and he's also speaking of two kinds of truth, which are the kinds of

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truth we don't usually talk about every day in the contemporary world, and he's also talking about two kinds of promises.

[00:05:11] and I want to say a bit about those promises. there's one kind of promise that is rarely ever made in the contemporary world. David White calls it a promise that will kill you to break. And it's rarely ever made because, my understanding is that very, few contemporary people ever reached this stage of human development where you could make that kind of promise.

[00:05:37] and you'll get more of a sense from the poem about that promise. The second promise he speaks of is at the end of the poem is a promise that unfortunately almost everybody in the contemporary world makes as a child. And, and too rarely is that promise broken because that second promise has to be broken, in order to go to, to, access our deeper life in order to be someone who could ever make that first promise.

[00:06:12] Okay. I hope that's sufficiently mysterious, but here's the, poem, all the true vows. All the true vows are secret vows. The ones we speak out loud are the ones we break. All the true vows are secret vows. The ones we speak out loud are the ones we break. There's only one life you can call your own, and a thousand others you can call by any name you want.

[00:06:44] Hold to the truth you make every day with your own body. Don't turn your face away. Hold to the truth, hold to your own truth at the center of the image you were born with. Okay, I'm going to pause here in the poem and say those are two pretty interesting truths that we don't talk about in the contemporary world every day.

[00:07:10] That the idea that we are making a truth every day with our own body, well that's interesting. And the other one, each of us is born with an image. And there's a truth at the center of that image. And, you and I and our listeners can wonder, maybe that's, those two truths are the same truth. Maybe. The truth, I'll call it the deep soma truth and the deep image truth.

[00:07:41] Maybe they are the same truth. Okay, back to the poem. Hold to the truth you make every day with your own body. Don't turn your face away. Hold to your own truth at the center of the image you were born with. Those who do not

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understand their destiny will never understand the friends they have made, nor the work they have chosen, nor the one life that waits beyond all the rest.

[00:08:16] By the lake, in the wood, in the shadows, You can whisper that truth to the quiet reflection you see in the water. Remember, whatever you hear from the water, it wants you to carry the sound of its truth on your lips. I'm going to pause here again and say, That the poet is sort of inviting us to remember or actually to go to a solitary place in the wild world by the lake.

[00:09:06] in the wood, in the shadows. And, if we have some sense of that truth, the soma truth, deep soma truth, and the deep image truth, we can whisper that to the, our own reflection that we see in the water. And then he says, whatever we hear from the water, remember, it wants you to carry the sound of its truth on your lips.

[00:09:28] Remember, in this place, by the lake, in the wood, in the shadows. You can, no one can hear you, and out of the silence, you can make a promise, it will kill you to break. Quick commentary here, the promise you, that will kill you to break, the poet is implying, is that you will carry the sound of the truth of what you hear from the water on your lips.

[00:10:02] for the rest of your life. Out of the silence you can make a promise it will kill you to break. That way you will find what is real and what is not. I know what I'm saying. This is the poet speaking in the poem. I know what I'm saying. Time almost forsook me and I looked again. Seeing my reflection, I broke a promise and spoke for the first time after all these years in my own voice before it was too late to turn my face again.

[00:10:44] That's the end of the poem and I just, I'll just add here that that second promise that we have to break at some point is the one we make in childhood. Too often in the contemporary world, we make that promise that we, won't speak in our own voice or we won't sing in our own voice, that we trade our own authenticity for a certain kind of social safety.

[00:11:11] And so, The poet says, seeing my reflection, I broke a promise and spoke for the first time after all these years in my own voice before it was too late to turn my face again.

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[00:11:27] **Nate Hagens:** It's beautiful. I, as you know, I have a lot of questions I want to ask you, but I could probably ask you just enough questions just about this poem.

[00:11:37] But let me start with this. last night, a friend of mine who. went to one of your seminars, and I talked and she said, she went to like a three session thing and the first session she was like, it was so slow and there was poetry and I was kind of bored. I was wondering if I was in the wrong, had chosen the wrong session, but by the third session she realized that the poetry and the slowness and the discourse at the beginning was Purposefully to tone down the nervous system of the loud, Western civilization, industrialized mindset, and that you had to quiet the mind in order to get to, the deeper part of the feeling and, the conversation, I don't know if you've experienced that in your seminars, but that was her feedback.

[00:12:33] And I'm just wondering, starting off a podcast conversation, if it's the same sort of thing where the medium is the message in a certain sort of way that a poem, one that is deep and profound like that one allows us to quiet the reptilian fight or flight information processing system and allow us to get more into a parasympathetic world.

[00:12:57] Sympathetic state. do you have any thoughts on that?

[00:13:00] **Bill Plotkin:** Yeah, I think something like that is very true. good poetry like this, evokes, it comes from, it emerges from, and it evokes a certain kind of worldview. a view of, the world being a much more mysterious place than we usually think of it as, and having opportunities to, enter.

[00:13:30] Ever more deeply into the world. and discover our unique place in it. This is something we don't talk about in the everyday. I call, some people call the Industrial Growth Society or the Consumer Conformist Society. so, but all humans know this because we, have evolved for hundreds of thousands of years to be human.

[00:13:56] to be creatures like other creatures that can find our way, deeply into the world, and find our way of, our own unique way of, serving life. So, so yeah, We often start our five day and longer programs with, poetry and stories, but mostly,

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inviting people onto the land in a certain kind of way that, evokes, our more, what, ancient human intuition of what it is to be a human alive on this planet.

[00:14:38] **Nate Hagens:** So some of my viewers, might wonder why I'm highlighting, Bill Plotkin, and Samantha Sweetwater, and people of Joanna Macy's lineage, et cetera, when things like climate change and oil depletion and geopolitics and polarization from AI and all that are happening, And I think the answer is that this is at the root and that we actually need poetry and nature to, resuscitate and regenerate who we are capable of being to confront these crises.

[00:15:18] And without that art, without the, fusing of the limbic and cognitive, systems, we, we can't. respond, to today's challenges in a way that is commensurate with the stakes of our time. So I do think art and poetry and obviously nature, are, pretty, pretty important. I assume you agree.

[00:15:44] **Bill Plotkin:** I do agree.

[00:15:48] let me give you some background. I was originally trained as a psychologist many years ago. Sometimes I think of myself as recovering psychologist or a psychologist gone wild. And I became a developmental psychologist. I became a psychologist really interested in how is it, what are the processes or the stages that we go through, as we develop, as we mature, and what I've been noticing over the last 40 years or so is that, that the stages we go through in the contemporary world are not the ones that nature, you might say, has designed us to go through.

[00:16:32] That there's a, a very widespread form of arrested human development that, we find, I find, my colleagues and I and others find throughout the world in all, so called developed or industrialized cultures, which are most of them now. And, one thing that just becomes increasingly clear to me. all and more so every day, is that the root problem behind, beneath all of our crises, the meta crisis or the poly crisis, so on, of our time, which I know all your listeners are familiar with, the root cause is arrested human development.

[00:17:12] I, I also refer to it as systemic human development oppression. It's the kind of oppression we don't talk about in our contemporary world, but all the other

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oppressions, racial, sexual, class based and so forth are rooted in the systemic and systematic oppression of human development in contemporary, life.

[00:17:41] That our societies or our cultures will not regenerate in healthy ways until we do something about that very fundamental, problem. And that's what, at Adams Valley Institute, my colleagues and I, now we've been at it for about 44 years, that's our primary work. We actually say our mission is cultural regeneration, and our, dimension of regenerate, cultural regeneration that we work with is, stages of human development.

[00:18:12] And, and so what we've done, is we've mapped out, we've mapped human development onto nature's own templates of wholeness. And, and we ended up with, eight stages of human development that we call, the ecocentric or solocentric stages. And, Here's some of the, kind of bottom lines, Nate, that, will kind of drive home the main point, is that, it's become quite clear to me that more than 95 percent of contemporary people never make it to what true adulthood is.

[00:18:53] That's a big statement to make. It's kind of, it's kind of radical, and it might make things sound even more hopeless than our listeners always, already thought it was, but here's, the positive, angle on this, and that is, that, we are, each human being is evolved to grow through these more wholesome or optimal or soul centric stages and it doesn't take that much support to help someone who never had that kind of support, catch up in, you know, a matter of a few years, depending on the person, the kind of support they get.

[00:19:33] For me and my colleagues and many other, thinkers of a similar event in the world, One of the most important things to change is education systems, and the way we parent each other, and our relationship to the more than human world, and yes, to art, and poetry, and so on. Again, my colleagues and I, for over 40 years, have been developing ways to do that, but, you know, the practices and the programs, the experiential immersions that we've developed, that what we do in them, the actual practices are not that unusual.

[00:20:13] it's our maps, and our models, nature based models that change our entire understanding of what we're doing and why. and so I'll mention just real briefly, and maybe you'll want to go into some detail with some of these There's three major models that we've developed. One is, what do the eight stages of

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human development, two of childhood, two of adolescence, two of adulthood, two of elderhood, look like if we look through the lens of the natural world at what a human being is?

[00:20:47] the second map. is what are the, parts, or the dimensions, or the facets of a human psyche? What are the, especially, what are the resources of wholeness that each human is born with? And what are the kinds of, practices and guidance that humans can be offered in order to cultivate their natural human nature?

[00:21:10] wholeness and resources. And also, what are the kinds of inner protectors we have? Sometimes we call them sub personalities, the, like our inner critic, but there's lots of different kinds of inner protectors that, whose job, starting in Our childhood is to keep us safe enough so that we actually survive till we're, you know, 15 or 20 or older.

[00:21:34] So that's the second map, which has to do with, it's a structural map of the aspects or the parts of the human psyches. Both are, both the facets of wholeness and the varieties of inner protectors. And the third map, which is, guiding what we call the journey of soul initiation. which is, which takes place during the fourth of the eight stages, I call it the cocoon stage, and that corresponds to late adolescence, not the second half of our teen years, but a psychological stage that most contemporary people never reach, no matter how long they live, and the journey of soul initiation, is the journey in which we start by relinquishing our adolescent identity and story, you know, the really healthy, successful, adolescent way of belonging in the world, and wander deeper into what, in the contemporary world, we call the natural world, and deeper into the depths of our own psyche, in search of what you might call, like the poem that we were born to be, or the dance we were meant to do in this life, or, as the poet says, the, the truth at the center of the image we were born with.

[00:23:00] Find that image, and not just find it as information that we can then, like use as an answer, but it's when we, encounter that truth at the center of the image we were born with, or the poem that we were born to be, it starts to do a metamorphic, shapeshifting, dance with our psyche, our conscious self, our egos in particular, and, over some months or years we are shifted, shapeshifted into someone who is capable of, living that, that, image is a gift, a life serving gift to the world.

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[00:23:45] So,

[00:23:45] **Nate Hagens:** real briefly, what are, just label them, what are the eight stages that you talk about in this book?

[00:23:54] **Bill Plotkin:** We have two models of human development. One we call the ecocentric or solocentric wheel, which you've just asked about. But the other one is the egocentric wheel, which is an attempt to model the kind of stages most contemporary people do go through, and I'm mentioning that now to emphasize that the stages that I'm about to tell you about are relatively rare for most contemporary people to go through.

[00:24:19] Of the eight stages, contemporary people tend to get stuck in a not particularly healthy version of the third stage. okay, so the stages are, again, two of childhood, and the first one we call the Innocent in the Nest. And, to understand these stages, there's so many dimensions of them, but maybe the most important one for now is to say there are two developmental tasks for the individual in each stage.

[00:24:53] In a way, a person matures or progresses through a stage. The healthy stages is by applying themselves to or addressing, the developmental task of that stage. And one thing that's unique about, the first stage, the innocent in the nest, which is early childhood, is that the individual doesn't have any tasks, because they're an infant and a toddler.

[00:25:23] who does have the task on behalf of the child are the parents and the family. And so, The first stage of early childhood, the innocent in the nest, goes well only if the parents are in stage five, which is the first stage of adulthood, so that because of a, sometimes we call that an initiated adult, which is someone who knows what they were born to do in this life, they have accessed that poem that they were born as, that truth at the center of the image.

[00:26:04] and they have, found ways to deliver that to their people.

[00:26:11] **Nate Hagens:** I'm now understanding why you required me to read your book, before you agreed to be on my podcast. Because your work is like a

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horizontal and vertical fractal Russian doll. there's, it just, it, connects up and down and all over the place.

[00:26:28] But sorry to interrupt. Keep going. Yeah, that's such a, such an

[00:26:31] **Bill Plotkin:** important point, Nate, that to have a healthy early childhood, you need to, a fully healthy one, you need to live in a society where there are true elders, which are very rare in contemporary world, true adults, also very rare, and healthy family settings.

[00:26:54] and the way you get to that kind of culture is that you have people who go through these stages. So you can see there's kind of a catch 22. How can you go through these stages if you don't already, and create a culture like that if you don't already have one? And the answer is, you can do it, but, it's more challenging.

[00:27:13] than if you lived in a healthy culture and family with adults and elders, true elders.

[00:27:19] **Nate Hagens:** So since we're doing the Russian doll approach here, could you just label what the eight categories are briefly, and then we'll backfill from there. So give people the mental map of what the eight categories are.

[00:27:30] **Bill Plotkin:** So the first stage, early childhood, is the innocent in the nest.

[00:27:34] So I've used an earth archetype. and a human archetype to evoke the nature of each stage. The innocent being a human archetype, the nest being an earth archetype. Stage two, which is middle childhood, is the explorer in the garden. We're out of the family nest, we're getting a little bit out into the wild world, but only as far as the garden.

[00:28:00] And early adolescence, which of course starts at puberty, which is a psychosocial passage, not primarily a hormonal one, but there's that aspect too. Early adolescence I call the thespian at the oasis. Thespian because, you know, we're learning how to create. our own, how to shape our own social persona that's different in some ways from how we've learned to be as a child in our family.

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[00:28:32] The fourth stage, which is late adolescence, which is the one that most contemporary people never reach, I call the wanderer in the cocoon. That's the stage during which the journey of soul initiation happens and where we go and search in the depths of the world who we were born to be. The second half of the wheel, which is adulthood and adulthood begins with stage five, early adulthood.

[00:28:59] I call it the apprentice at the wellspring. And what we're apprenticing to is, a delivery system and also the wellspring, which is the, image for the way, the mysteries of life in general, and our particular life springs up out of the ground, into the world. Adulthood is The Artisan in the Wild Orchard.

[00:29:29] Artisan in the Wild Orchard, because in late adulthood we are discovering our unique way of, delivering our soul work, to our people, our, the earth community more generally. And so, like, you know, every, apple is a unique one. The Wild Orchard. And then, Elderhood starts with Stage 7, and the archetypes there are The Master, in the grove of elders, and true elders have a totally different kind of, task in the world than, true adults do.

[00:30:10] true elders are letting go of their primary focus in their soul work and become, one of the people who's, task in life is to care for the soul of the more than human community and in particular to make sure that the human village is operating in a way that keeps the rest of the earth community healthy.

[00:30:37] So just saying it that simply we all can see what happens in the world when we don't have true elders and the illustration of that is what in fact is happening in our world these days. The final stage eight, is late elderhood and the image there is the sage in the mountain cave. And this is a particularly mysterious stage for western people of, that the only person who was really able to explain it well to me was the person who was in that stage at the time I met him.

[00:31:10] I was Thomas Berry, the great, theologian, the man who wrote, The Dream of the Earth. And, he gave me some sense of what the Sage in the Mountain Cave does and how that anchors the entire human village in the depths of the world. So, there's a ridiculously fast run through these eight stages.

[00:31:33] Nate, where would you like to go?

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[00:31:36] **Nate Hagens:** Well, as people have been telling me, I am often saying these days, I have so many questions. Bill, let me start with a couple of them. first of all, presumably humans go through childhood, adolescent, adulthood, elderhood, but that's in chronological years. And what you're saying is that someone lives to be 85 years old and then they pass on, that they went through elderhood in the human.

[00:32:06] framing, but in, in the eco psychology, eco depth psychology framing that you just outlined, they may have never met, made it to adulthood even. so are there cultures historically or, today? Perhaps some uncontacted Amazon or, Papua New Guinea tribe where you would hypothesize or have evidence, that the inhabitants of that tribe actually do naturally go through these eight stages because it's a healthy, interconnected, vertically and horizontally cultural transmission connected to the earth.

[00:32:48] **Bill Plotkin:** Yeah, such an important question, because people might say, Hey, great model, Bill, but what's the evidence that it ever happens that way? in some ways, the natural world's own template of wholeness, tells us that it happens that way. But in terms of, can I point to cultures in the world where it works this way, There's so many dimensions to that answer.

[00:33:17] One is that if I actually knew about contemporary cultures that work that way, I would not name them because, if they're still, functioning in a healthy, ecocentric way, They won't be once they're, they have too much, contact with the contemporary world. You know, what Rianne Eisler calls the Dominator Societies, which have been, destroying, the healthier, which she calls the Partnership Societies for, many years, for millennia, actually.

[00:34:00] And it's something that was done to our own cultures. for us, people who are derived from Western European cultures, we might have to go back a few thousand years to our indigenous ancestors, but we all humans have them, indigenous ancestors. so, So that was the first part of the answer, Nate.

[00:34:21] second one is to say that there are, a few, writers, authors, who have written about their cultures, and if we take a look at what they say, it does, it is consistent with, the soul centric developmental wheel that we've developed at Animus. So one example is Melodoma Somme, who's from the Dagora people.

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[00:34:49] He's passed on, but he was from the Dagora people of West Africa, and he wrote a number of books about his people and about their initiation rites. He wrote about the initiation rites for boys, and it very much corresponds to what we're that we have in our Animus Valley Institute maps, all through all of the stages.

[00:35:16] Another example would be Martin Prechtel, who wrote about, the culture he was adopted into, the Tutu Hiel Mayan people of contemporary Guatemala, whose culture may pretty much have been, undermined by now, by the contemporary world, the dominator world. also there's a, Native American educator, Greg Cajete from New Mexico, who's written a number of books, including one called Look to the Mountains.

[00:35:51] And, when I look through his books, I see, yeah, he is, describing, cultural ways, many which have been lost or diminished, but, in Native, in North America, that very much correspond to, these eight stages.

[00:36:09] **Nate Hagens:** It's both really rewarding and frustrating to interview on Zoom or Riverside, in this case, someone like you that is so deep and wide in your answers, it feels like a proper podcast with you would be like sitting in a cabin somewhere, You know, in the same space and having multiple hours because these are not soundbite answers.

[00:36:34] Actually, a podcast in 75 or 90 minutes is itself not an example of adulthood or elderhood in its communication vectors. Would you agree?

[00:36:48] **Bill Plotkin:** Yeah, totally agree. My colleagues and I, we have about 20 guides, by the way, and we are offering experiential immersions all around the world, maybe 15 or 20 different countries.

[00:37:03] We have two training programs, one with 100 trainees and other one with about 25. Joining us for a first five day immersion is really just an introduction to the kind of work we do. And sometimes we say, you know, the real thing we're doing. The primary central thing we're doing in our immersions is inviting people into a worldview that they're not familiar with and in some ways is opposed to the contemporary worldview.

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[00:37:37] And it's not something you can just tell people about or talk about. It's, we use ceremonies and practices and poetry and so on, to open the gates. to what we consider to be the real world. Some people might call it the animate world or the, the, world of, of depths of the psyche's depth. And it takes a while to get through that door.

[00:38:07] but once you do, it's kind of a one way, portal that you would never want to go back and, maybe you

[00:38:13] **Nate Hagens:** even can't. Increasingly, In conversations like this and in my work, I've come to distinguish, a difference between knowing something and knowing about something. And the, difference is, that when you know about something, you can recite the facts and tell the stories, but when you know it, there's an embodied sense, like, yes, that is true.

[00:38:39] I feel the reality and, gravity, of that thing. And I think that's what you're talking about. What you experience in person over five days is there's an embodied sense of knowing certain things, which is different than knowing about them.

[00:38:57] **Bill Plotkin:** Yes. Yeah. Well said. So true. And here's, probably the best example of that.

[00:39:04] There's a, an experience. This one, maybe, ah, Jim, I'm just making guesses at numbers or percentages that maybe 20 25 percent or so of generally people have had. That means a lot have not had it, and we call it ecological awakening, or eco awakening. The ecological awakening is the first time in life when we, at least since early childhood, when we experience ourselves as a full member of the more than human world, more than human being, meaning not just human, which is to say the earth community, that the experience of being related on a kinship basis with everything, other animals and habitats and vegetation, rivers, mountains, everything, that these are our relatives.

[00:40:03] And it's the, that experience when, the way some people say it is that before I had that experience of that kind of eco awakening, it was as if there had been an invisible wall between me and the rest of the world. And like I wasn't even aware of the aliveness and the magnificence of all the other others.

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[00:40:34] And I didn't really, experience myself at being at home deeply in the world. and during this experience, it's as if that invisible wall just shatters. And, and then we feel, we, feel like we've just been welcomed home by the rest of the world and there's often a lot of grief that comes up for people that moment because side by side with the joy of being welcome.

[00:41:05] Finding oneself at home, finally, for the first time in your life, is also the grief that you've lived your life up to that point without even knowing it or experiencing it, and that you realize that so many other of your fellow human creatures might never know this the rest of, for their entire lives, and so there's quite a bit of grief about that, but The actual experience of ecological awakening is completely different than taking a class in ecology and maybe having a college professor explain all these things to you.

[00:41:44] You might cognitively, intellectually understand it, but you might still never have had the experience. and that, that experience of ecological awakening is when we, a human, a contemporary human shifts from an egocentric version of early adolescence to an ecocentric version of early adolescence. and that, and then you can complete early adolescence in a healthy way.

[00:42:17] and then once you've addressed the tasks of early adolescence enough, then the way I like to say is mystery will then toss you into the next stage, the cocoon stage. but here's something I just want to underline, and that is, if you, For humans growing up in a healthy, ecocentric culture, there's no such thing as ecological awakening because, ecological, sleep never happens.

[00:42:46] In other words, every human child is born, experiencing the whole world as relatives, as kin.

[00:42:56] **Nate Hagens:** We're not going to keep this to 75 minutes, Bill, because I do have so many questions, relative just to your last comment, I studied business and Chinese in undergrad, and I got a master's in finance, and I got a PhD in natural resources, but all throughout my favorite subject was economics.

[00:43:18] Human psychology. But human psychology doesn't have an ECO in it. I mean, how can we teach psychology to the 250 million college students around the world without the relationship between humans and nature being a core part of it?

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[00:43:36] **Bill Plotkin:** well, you won't be surprised that I totally agree. Like, what we call psychology, again, I'm trained as a psychologist, but what we call psychology in the Western world is really, in my view and others, just a little fragment of what psychology actually is.

[00:43:55] and so many of us, eco psychologists and depth psychologists, are bringing in these other dimensions of the human psyche or the human relationship to the world. One is our embeddedness and entanglement in this much wider, magical, mysterious world that's multi speciated and multi habitated and so on.

[00:44:22] And also, the depth psychologists, are reminding us of there's so much to our psyche other than the ego, is the ego is one of the things that makes us magnificently human and we wouldn't be human without our, the kind of consciousness we have, self reflexive consciousness. Ego is a great thing in the way I use the word.

[00:44:44] That's a very small part of our, psyche. and, so I, at Animus, we call the kind of psychology we do echo depth psychology because it, both has the wider, foundation of the more than human world is that, we emerge from as humans and we are part of and, our processes reflected the natural processes and, the head takes in the depth of the human psyche that, that the 95 percent or more of our human psyche that, is, we're not conscious of.

[00:45:23] so we use the term echo depth psychology, but I believe in some future generations, what we now call echo depth psychology will just be called psychology. And maybe we'll even understand that psychology is a branch of ecology, which maybe we'll get to later. Or maybe you want to go there next, but has to do with what I understand the word soul means.

[00:45:47] It's. It's not even a psychology concept. It's an ecology concept.

[00:45:53] **Nate Hagens:** Well, why don't we go there? you write about, soul centric, and use the word soul a lot in your book. And I know they're like a whole chapter on defining it. How do you find soul, define the word soul, in this work?

[00:46:08] **Bill Plotkin:** I do define it differently than almost anyone else I've ever read.

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[00:46:14] I did find an almost definition finally in the work of Stephen Harrod Buhner. For those of you who are listeners who are familiar with him, he refers to the soul, well, he refers to each creature, human and otherwise, as a unique ecological communication. That's really interesting to me, a unique ecological communication.

[00:46:40] But back to the word soul more generally, some of my colleagues say one of the big mistakes I made in terminology is using the word soul to mean what I'm about to tell you. And other colleagues say it was the greatest move to make, because it shifts the conversation about soul. because in the, contemporary world, the word soul, it has a religious connotation of, like, you know, the spark of life.

[00:47:08] And it's something that comes into the body, maybe at conception or sometime after, and it leaves the body afterwards. It's like a metaphysical thing. That's not at all what I mean. I'm not saying that's. and non valid use of the word soul, just, I'm using the word very differently. And other people use the word soul to mean things that, that, that have meaning, or depth, or heart, which is another valid way to use the term, but I'm, again, using it differently.

[00:47:41] So, But my definition is founded in the idea that one of the ways that people just in ordinary conversation use the word soul is to mean, what I've just alluded to, that it has to do with, what's really meaningful in our life and which, gives us our, deepest purpose, and, but what occurred to me is that's not something new.

[00:48:08] In our psyche, it, it has to do with who we were born to be. and so for me, very brief, the definition of soul that I use is a creature's unique ecological niche. So when we talk about niches, we usually are talking about, Species, like every species has its own niche. And, in the contemporary world where it's all about, you know, the usefulness of things, we talk about, what are we talking about?

[00:48:47] Ecological services that every species provides. but, And every species does. Every species has its unique way of enhancing life. That's one of the ecological principles that we work with at Animus, which is that, life serves life, that, life helps the rest of life, be, more successful.

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[00:49:15] Every kind of life does, and to help further diversify, and complexify. so every species has its unique, gift to the world. We humans are not doing a great job over the last few thousand years. We're, as everyone knows, we're, we have been destroying life in the last couple hundred years.

[00:49:40] We've gotten really, good, unfortunately, at destroying, life, at, eliminating species and habitats and so on. but we're, I don't believe we're an exception, that we actually are. evolves by Earth to enhance life in the way no other creatures can, but we're going through this major transitional ordeal of a few thousand years or more.

[00:50:09] but okay, that's about species. But now take the next step and say, not only does every species have its unique ecological niche, but every individual of every species does as well. And this is what we hear from, the intact indigenous traditions around the world, including some of our own Western derived ones that we still have access to.

[00:50:32] after early adolescence, which is to say, after we have consciously crafted our own, social way of being in the world that works, which is to say, we're socially accepted by at least one peer group, and we're being authentic, we're being real. That once we've, done that, mystery tosses us into this next stage of the cocoon, where, the task is to, is to shed that, that first, self created identity, and to wander into the world as almost like a generic person, but you know, a wanderer, and in search of this deeper understanding of who we are.

[00:51:19] In some indigenous traditions, we use the, a phrase that's been translated into English as our original instructions, that each one of us is born with the knowledge to, shapeshift into a form in which we can provide the greatest gift that we can as an individual to the world. And we do that by, inhabiting our unique ecological niche.

[00:51:52] But here's, one of the main points, Nate, is that our unique ecological niche can never be defined in terms of a social role, or a job or a career or a creative art project, we can only, articulate or point to our soul or our soul work, with metaphors like poems. And the phrase we use at Animus is our mythopoetic identity.

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[00:52:30] and then we have to learn, you know, what kind of social roles and vocations might be good delivery systems for that. So real briefly, in my case, my first encounter with soul, the poem that I was shown and was actually from a butterfly after four days of fasting and in a wild place, was the image of, a, the weaving of a cocoon.

[00:53:01] I actually heard the words cocoon weaver when a butterfly flew by. It points to the poem that I am that, that I became clear. It was a real experientially deep knowing that came with lots of tears to recognize, okay, that is what I am to do in the world. And I have absolutely no idea what it means or how to do it, but I recognized it because it was that was the truth at the center of the image I was born with.

[00:53:31] And then it was up to my conscious self, my ego, to, after a while to begin to learn what delivery systems would be ways for me to weave cocoons for, Humans who reach the late adolescence stage, because we need new contemporary ways of doing that. That one thing that's absolutely been clear from, to me from the beginning, that the journey of soul initiation is all about authenticity in a very deep way.

[00:54:04] And we can't do that if we copy, The ways of other peoples, especially indigenous, intact indigenous traditions. And so I did my best from the beginning is that we're not going to do it in any other people's way. We're going to find our own contemporary Western way to do it. And so far we've been at it for over 40 years and we're still learning how to do that.

[00:54:27] **Nate Hagens:** You're saying that the soul, is potentially at the individual level and ecological niche, but for most animals in history, when they were born, the worlds and the biosphere was pretty much stable during their lifetimes. When we're born, you and I, in the, You know, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s. I don't know how old you are exactly, but, you've got this progression of the two stages of early childhood, the two stages of, adolescence, the two stages of adulthood and the two stages, of elderhood.

[00:55:10] but this is all happening during the carbon pulse. And chronologically, many of us are born in the upslope of the carbon pulse. And now we're at the Peak where it's cresting and now there's gonna be the down slope of the carbon pulse. So

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does one's soul or one's calling or whatever, change based on economic, cultural and environmental circumstances?

[00:55:36] Or is it unique to them when they were born on, this earth?

[00:55:42] **Bill Plotkin:** yeah, good question. I, I do believe it's unique to us and it's for our, whole lifetime. Changes is how we deliver it. The social role, or the career or the creative projects can change during our lifetime to be more effective delivery systems given the changes in, culture, environment, climate, and so on.

[00:56:13] but there's, as William Stafford says, there's a thread that you follow and the thread is that mythopoetic essence and how you deliver it can change.

[00:56:24] **Nate Hagens:** So, as defined by you, everyone has a soul, which is their, their unique ecological niche in the community of life. But how many people are tethered to that soul, are aware of it, embrace it, follow it, and how many people are unaware and or completely disconnected from their quote unquote soul?

[00:56:48] **Bill Plotkin:** Yeah, I'd say more than 95 percent are disconnected consciously from their soul. it's, there's still a connection, obviously, beneath the level of consciousness. but yeah, more than 95 percent never make it to adulthood and not many more make it to late adolescence. but it's there. here's one way I say it, that in the first half of the wheel, which if, you know, if you, Birth is in the east, and you go around sun wise, which is clockwise, in the northern hemisphere.

[00:57:31] Then it's the bottom of the wheel, which is childhood and adolescence, and the top is adulthood and elderhood. Well, in the bottom half of the wheel, childhood and adolescence. the soul is in service to the ego and that means, the soul or you might say earth life, but generally mystery is serving, is trying to, serving the ego and trying to provide the ego with experiences, that enable it to grow, in the contemporary world despite all the cultural systems that make that more difficult.

[00:58:12] but it's in us to develop that way, and it doesn't take that much, as I mentioned before, guidance or support to allow the natural, process of maturation or individuation to happen.

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[00:58:26] **Nate Hagens:** You said, you said you didn't have, you didn't have data for this per se, but you, expect roughly 20 or 25 percent of humans have had a, an awakening.

[00:58:39] in the community of life where they realize that everything is connected. And it was like a shattering of glass when that happened. I don't know when that happened for me, but it's clearly happened because I have that feeling almost every day, when I'm out in the woods or with nature, I can access that readily.

[00:58:59] Now, and it comes with both, a feeling of overwhelming beauty and awe, and also an overwhelming sadness because I anticipate, the, backside cost of, capitalism and, the superorganism on what the future holds. They're going to do to nature and coming decades, but I can, get to that point, but it's unlike, when you do mushrooms or some peak experience where you can only do that when you're under, the influence of, some external stimuli in this case, it seems to me that when you.

[00:59:38] When you have that breakthrough or you experience it once or twice or three times, you can't go back to the way it was before. is that your experience that once people go through this, that it's there and available to them? And then I have a followup question.

[00:59:55] **Bill Plotkin:** Yes, that is my experience. Once we go through Ecological Awakening, it's, we don't go back to sleep.

[01:00:02] I mean, we can slide off that, understanding after a while, if our, we get no support from it in our contemporary world, but it's much more easily, Accessed again. And then our life changes because, we, because again, the ecological awakening is moving from an ego-centric worldview to an ego-centric worldview.

[01:00:29] And the ego-centric, it's all about the ego. It's all about me and what can I do and what can I accomplish? And what kind of like even, The Contemporary World Understanding of the Hero's Journey, which Joseph Campbell wrote about brilliantly, but still, his understanding of the hero is an early adolescent one, and it's very different from the mature hero journey.

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[01:00:54] **Nate Hagens:** Well, I have two follow ups now. My next follow up is, given what we face, potentially three degrees Celsius, hopefully less, biodiversity loss, geopolitical conflict, energy depletion, financial overshoot, all the, nodes of the metacrisis, Don't you think that a large, much larger than currently, percentage of humanity would have to go through this awakening, this shattering of glass and recognition of an earth centered rather than a human centered worldview, and that those people then engaging with the work of the bend not break metacrisis framing That is a necessity that if we just have people working on the metacrisis that don't have this broader ecological wide boundary worldview, we're just going to knock our heads against different walls that rhyme with how we got here.

[01:02:06] **Bill Plotkin:** Yeah. Okay. There's a couple of things here. One is, the deep time view. It's part of the ecocentric perspective that, you know, Anything worth doing has to be done in my lifetime, you know, in our, in any given individual's lifetime, and ideally, in no more than a year or two, and even better, in 15 minutes, and so we're, we often are looking for solutions that can be really quick, but in a deep time view, It's taken a few thousand years at least to get to this crisis point.

[01:02:44] It started a long, time ago, and I could, point the listeners to some books about people who've written about how this has started a long time ago. it's not going to Ishmael

[01:02:57] **Nate Hagens:** by Daniel Quinn.

[01:02:58] **Bill Plotkin:** That would be a good one, yes. another one is The Parable of the Tribes by Andrew Schmuckler, and another one would be any of the books by, Paula Shepard.

[01:03:12] and of course there are others. so it's gonna take a while, and to me, getting from where we are now, which I call pathological adolescent societies, or patho adolescent egocentric societies, to A life sustaining society or societies, diverse societies, that's going to take a while, but to get from there to life sustaining societies, truly healthy, mature societies, which are not merely life sustaining, but life enhancing, that's going to take quite a number of generations to get there.

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[01:03:57] but let me just, I want to look at those. These two steps in, a little bit more detail. The first one, a life sustaining society would require a large percentage, I don't even know if it would be 50%, because of tipping points, but positive tipping points, but a large percentage of humans in any given contemporary society would have to be ecologically awakened.

[01:04:24] And that's relatively easy compared to becoming a true adult, which is a whole lot more, And so our, and we have a movement happening now, and, that's, some call it nature connection movement, and it's, it's, changing, more and more the way we do education now in the contemporary world.

[01:04:48] And so we're, we have generations being raised now who might not have gone to sleep ecologically, or at least are being ecologically awakened, and are, learning about life in an ecological context. this is something that to me is so urgent and might be the most important thing for true societal change.

[01:05:12] This first half of it to a life sustaining society is that, we have, educational systems, not only for children and teenagers, but for adults. I mean, people in adult bodies, to help. people ecologically awakened because once we have a, a large enough percentage, everything will shift. We'll stopped.

[01:05:35] We'll stop treating the world like, like a, landfill or, just a set of resources for us. But we'll, if we will start, embracing the world as, as all relatives and all intelligent. so that's the first step and that, that could be done maybe in a generation or two. and because there's a lot of really creative visionary people who are leaning in that direction and seeing how fundamental it is.

[01:06:12] But the second half of it, which is getting to a truly mature life enhancing society, that's going to require societies where, you know, 20 percent or so, of people are true elders and 20 25 percent of humans are actually true initiated adults. That's gonna, that's gonna take a while and so we have to have this deep time perspective of seven generations or so.

[01:06:43] What do, what foundations can we put in place now to Increase the chance. Human societies that survive this century, I don't know how many will, we can't even guarantee any will, but those who do survive, how can they begin growing a true elder which starts at birth? and, That's one of the things we think

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about all the time at Animus is what are the foundations we want to put in place and we're doing our version with coming up with new formats for guiding the journey of soul initiation and we have colleagues in education and in the world of parenting that are developing formats, structures to support parents and, their children to have a greater chance of reaching, that cocoon stage and the initiatory journey.

[01:07:50] **Nate Hagens:** So what does it mean, to truly be an adult, in, this culture, based on your framing? You said that the ecological awareness or the awakening is necessary, but only a first step on the way to truly being adult. You're like the fourth or fifth. intellectual that I've come across in the last few weeks that has pointed out that we basically need to grow up and be adults.

[01:08:18] And once we do that, there are implications and things to do, but most of us aren't. So from your framing, what does that mean to be an adult, in our culture or as a human generally?

[01:08:31] **Bill Plotkin:** First, I don't mean what we mean in the contemporary world. like if we look at the concept of maturity, We have generally agreed upon

[01:08:45] intuition of what it is to be a mature human, and it's a very different continuum than what we find in the Soul Centered Development of Will, but the other day I wrote down some words that seem to correspond to what we mean as to maturity, what we mean by that word in the contemporary world.

[01:09:16] And it's things like being responsible, dependable, kind, compassionate, able to think for yourself,

[01:09:30] able to contribute to family and community, able to both lead and follow, to be generous. Good sense of humor, able to hold down a job, be self sufficient if sufficiently able bodied, and so on. but in terms of the, soul centric wheel of development, we'd say any 15 year old would be capable with flying colors of all those things.

[01:10:00] Doesn't, we don't have to, it's not what, a definition of an adult. Okay, but, so, but to answer your question directly, Nate, I actually have a few definitions of an adult. Here's one of them. It has three parts to it. An adult human is someone

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who experiences their membership in the larger earth community as their primary membership.

[01:10:29] That primary, it's like, it's, that's where they're most deeply rooted. not in nation or ethnicity or religion or even family, that those things like family and culture, religion, spirituality, and so on, adds, immeasurably to the color and flavor and style of our lives. It's some of the most beautiful parts of who we are.

[01:11:01] But for us, A true adult, their first and foremost membership is in the larger earth community. That's how they primarily identify. That's part one. Part two is that they, a true adult, has had one or more experiences that in the western world we'd consider a mystical experience of their place in that larger earth community.

[01:11:26] And that there I'm again alluding to unique ecological niche. And, that mystical experience is what at Animus we call an encounter with soul. And part three is that a true adult has cultivated one or more delivery systems for, offering or embodying their unique ecological niche as a gift to others.

[01:11:56] So, Interestingly to me, after I came up with that definition, I realized that the first part of the definition is key to what it is to be a healthy early adolescent, namely someone who experiences their membership in the larger earth community as their primary way of belonging. That's early adolescence in a healthy society.

[01:12:20] And the second part has had one or more soul encounters. of their, which tells them, which reveals their unique place in that earth community. That's what happens in late adolescence. And what happens in early adulthood is we cultivate delivery systems, often through apprenticing to, either an artisan who's a late adult or a master who is in early elderhood to learn a delivery system to bring that gift into the world.

[01:12:54] **Nate Hagens:** So in your opinion, what does the future hold if our society never grows up, and has some meaningful percentage of its, members as adults, as you say, and just more generally, how do you stay positive when you look around and see so many of our societies around the world? that are so underdeveloped in, in your framework, because what you're saying makes sense to me.

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[01:13:22] so what, is your prediction and thoughts on that?

[01:13:27] **Bill Plotkin:** I think it's important and useful to say this as bluntly and directly as possible. At least my opinion, others have the same opinion and that is our society is never going to grow up. It's, really a terminal situation. It is, so decayed psychospiritually, no matter how advanced technologically it is, or how beautiful the arts and, how well developed the sciences are, it's psychospiritually, the structures are so, inadequate that we can't grow up our society.

[01:14:06] And so I'm thinking of people like, one of your guests earlier this year, Vanessa Andriotti, who wrote that incredible book, called Hospicing Modernity, and right there that the title suggests that, that we, that with modern societies, that we have an opportunity to help them die, because there's no way to salvage them.

[01:14:37] there's no way to, to fix them. So what does that leave us? That, leaves us the task of, creating small communities. I know this is happening in places around the world. small communities that are beginning to, that are, even have been, raising children and educating young people in a way to enhance the chance that they would, get to true adulthood, And so that, I think, is our future, small communities, our future that has the, potential to, to be, to grow, or to be seeds for, future healthy societies, because it takes many generations to get from where we are to a healthy society.

[01:15:31] But meanwhile, there's something we can do with our contemporary societies, and have to do, and I've spoken about it earlier, but let me just connect the dots, and that is, support ecological awakening, and so that we can, have the chance of growing our contemporary societies, growing to be more eco literate, and more, capable of actually sustaining life.

[01:15:59] That's urgent. that's the most urgent thing. it won't create a mature society by itself, but It, it might support us to, to, contribute to what Joanna Macy calls the first dimension of the great turning, which is to save as much life as possible now. While modernity is collapsing, we have the opportunity, the blessing, we might say, to do everything we can to save as many species and habitats as we can.

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[01:16:36] **Nate Hagens:** Way before I heard of you or Joanna Macy or this work, I wrote a book with the, co founder of Greenpeace, and we called it Bottlenecks of the 21st Century, which the main goal was to propel as many things of value through the end of modernity, and focus on ecosystems and species, so I came at that from an intellectual role.

[01:17:00] you know, Vantage, and now I'm feeling it from a eco depth psychology, and now my dad is going to be watching this and he's going to definitely call me an, environmental wacko, but that's okay. he, says it with love. So, Here's what we're going to do because we're, running out of time.

[01:17:23] we didn't even get to your eight stages, let alone the first four. I'm going to treat this as an introduction to your work, and I'm going to have you back to unpack. There's just no way that we can do justice to this topic in a, short form. Conversation. So, You can't, and your team can't, personally guide, everyone in the world, all our listeners through this process, though, certainly you can with some.

[01:17:52] So, so what would be your advice to people wanting to have, for instance, either that first ecological awareness, glass shattering, experience where they feel, connected to everything in the community of life, and or to undergo some soul centric, development, either as an initiation or a soul quest.

[01:18:19] How can they find support or a qualified guide? How can they do it on their own? Do you have any suggestions to the viewers?

[01:18:27] **Bill Plotkin:** When it comes to ecological awakening, nature based, full spectrum human development, as I sometimes call it, you can for sure get an introduction to that through my books. So my book, Wild Mind, which is the book I wrote after Soulcraft, Wild Mind, outlines the, the structural view or model of the human psyche with the facets of wholeness and the, inner protectors.

[01:19:02] and there's a lot of experiential exercises in that book. we also, have been training guides to do that kind of work and you can find some of those guides on our website, which is animus. org. That's it. Animas, A N I M A S. org, that's animus, is the Spanish word for souls, and the, the Soul Centered Developmental Wheel, you'll find in my third book, which is Nature and the Human Soul.

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[01:19:40] And that goes into the eight stages and details, lots of stories from individuals. It also includes the egocentric wheel so you can see what a contrast healthy human development is with what we actually have in the contemporary world for the most part. And my fourth book is The Journey of Soul Initiation, which goes into great detail about what happens in the cocoon.

[01:20:05] But back to Ecological Awakening, there's lots of guides in the world now who do some form of what is generally called nature connection work, and that is of great support. But, that said, Time outside of four, the four walls of our villages and in wild or semi wild places, often I would recommend that people go alone, without, you know, their, at least turn their phones off, and, open up to these, these animate others who are there.

[01:20:48] You see, it's easier said than done that it's, most helpful if you have a guide to help you through the, some of the initial barriers that we have.

[01:21:00] **Nate Hagens:** So you also are, in addition to the work at Animus, and your books and, doing guide, guiding on this, experience, you, also understand. the metacrisis and all that it entails.

[01:21:17] Do you have any personal advice, at this time of global ecological economic upheaval and anxiety, for our viewers, for what we might call the polycrisis, metacrisis, et cetera?

[01:21:31] **Bill Plotkin:** Yeah, I borrowed this advice from my friend and teacher, Joanna Macy, one of our great earth elders, who's in her mid nineties now, and she talks about the great turning and that the great unraveling, which the collapse that we're witnessing in, all our systems is part of the story of the great turning, that the collapse and the disruption of the is a necessary part of the story.

[01:22:05] And she reminds us that business as usual is what drives the great unraveling. So business as usual is also part of the, great turning story. But she says there's three dimensions of the great turning. And so my advice to people is, Do something that supports the Great Turning. don't just, I mean, in addition to feeling all your emotions about it and, that the three dimensions of the Great Turning give us something to do.

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[01:22:37] The first dimension is to save as much life as possible. And, we all know there's all kinds of, organizations out there, environmentally oriented organizations, political, groups and so forth who are, doing what they can to save as much life as possible. Get involved with that. it's, even better than therapy.

[01:23:02] I mean, the one, that's one of the things James Hillman, a depth psychologist, told us that in title of one of his books, we've had a hundred years of psychotherapy and the world's getting worse. That doesn't mean psychotherapy is not of value. but one of the things he said was, get involved in helping the world be a better place.

[01:23:22] That's even better than therapy. But doesn't fully substitute for it. Okay, so that's the first dimension. The second is, dimension of the Great Turning, is creating the foundations and the systems for healthier societies. and there's all kinds of individuals and organizations doing that, who, are developing new ways to approach growing food, energy, governance, and on and on and so even while modernity is collapsing around us.

[01:24:08] There's all these very creative visionaries and groups around the world who are developing the foundations for something healthier. And the third dimension has to do with, a change in, values and consciousness. And for me, the way I relate to that is, Is, things like ecological awakening and the soul centric developmental wheel and, recognizing, that we each, that we humans are a part of a much larger multi species animate And, supporting organizations that are changing the story.

[01:24:56] They're telling a new story, a Earth community story of not separation, but entanglement that we're how we're all, in this entangled with, the other species and they're all as intelligent as we are just different intelligences. so there's some ideas.

[01:25:17] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you. those make sense, intuitively and in an embodied way.

[01:25:24] I feel that those are directionally correct. How would you change that advice, to someone who is chronologically in, late childhood, early adolescence or young adulthood? someone in their late teens or early twenties listening to this

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show that Isn't far from when they were a young child having wallpaper on, their room.

[01:25:50] That was not Walmart, Microsoft Intel, but it was giraffes and orangutans, and fish. what recommendations do you have for young people that kind of feel the truth of what you're saying today?

[01:26:05] **Bill Plotkin:** I mean, this is for people in any stage. is to address the task, the developmental task of your stage.

[01:26:12] And the only way to get to a next stage, which by the way, the later stages are not in any way better than earlier stages. A healthy culture has people in every stage, and every stage has a unique gift for the human community and the more than human community. The way to inhabit whatever stage of life we're in is to address the tasks of that stage.

[01:26:36] So, people in their teens, the task there is to develop a version of your social version of yourself that is both real, it's authentic, it's true to your actual styles and interests and emotions and needs, so on. and it's also socially acceptable, developing versions of yourself that, that allow you to feel like you belong, in your social group.

[01:27:09] But there's the ecological side too, of spending time, or maybe getting guidance to be in the natural world in a way that you, you begin to get a sense of, the magnificence of this multi specied, more than human world. and, so that's the first part, is to, address the task of your stage, and also lend yourself to the Great Turning, if you're able to, in any of those three dimensions I mentioned earlier.

[01:27:43] The next thing is to say, you're likely to have unfinished business from two earlier stages, which are the two stages of childhood, because everybody does. And, Nature and the Human Soul, my book of that title, will, help you understand what the stages, sorry, the tasks of those first two stages are.

[01:28:10] and one of them, just to give one example, there's, you know, two tasks of each stage, so there's four tasks of childhood. and the, what I call the nature task of middle childhood is learning the enchantment of the more than human world. and that also relates to ecological awakening, but there's also the culture task that

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includes things like, learning how to make things with your hands, learning what the herbs are that, that are, support our human health and learning how to, find them and identify them and prepare them.

[01:28:54] that's just an example about the kinds of things that humans have always done to be part of their world, and almost no contemporary humans do that anymore, and that's one of the reasons we get stuck in early adolescence, because what's left over or unfinished from the first two stages is, I'll give an example from the first stage, again, Little humans in early childhood don't have their own tasks.

[01:29:20] Their family has tasks on their behalf. And one is to mirror them, is to show them who, they are and what they're, feeling when they're feeling and to say, help them, help a small child feel totally welcomed in this world because and by the fact that they are seen and accepted for who they are.

[01:29:47] That's a real gift capacity of parenting and of being a family member more generally. with little kids in it. and very few contemporary people have been mirrored deeply and beautifully, when they were in early childhood. And that just starts things off in the wrong foot. But once we're in our teen years, there's two kinds of things we can do to support, to address that task that comes from early childhood of mirroring.

[01:30:17] And one is, to find mentors who can really see us. and and to hang out with them. But the second thing is to learn how to mirror yourself. That's something we can do in early adolescence that we couldn't have done in early childhood. and it's not that hard to learn how to do that, to be able to see yourself.

[01:30:44] and, and including the parts of you that are still emotionally very young and fragile and to be able to, hold and love these, we just call them our wounded parts, wounded children or outcasts. That's a form of mirroring and to, and to be able to embrace them. That's something we can learn to do.

[01:31:07] It's not that hard. and it addresses that first task of, the task of early childhood.

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[01:31:15] **Nate Hagens:** Do you know Dick Schwartz and internal family systems? Cause that sounds like a really real big overlap with, that philosophy.

[01:31:22] **Bill Plotkin:** I do. Yeah. I met Dick Schwartz many years ago. I was offering a workshop at Naropa and he was one of the participants and, got to know him a little bit after that as well.

[01:31:35] So I'm familiar with his internal family systems, which very much resonate with the kind of work we do, what we call the wild mind work. I humbly would say that our map is more complete than his, and it's not because I or my colleagues are more brilliant or anything like that, but that we very consciously used nature's templates to map out the parts of the psyche, and if you don't have a template of wholeness that does nature's own, then you're likely to miss certain pieces.

[01:32:08] And I think internal family systems is missing some pieces and relationships between them, but it's very much in the same spirit of, of looking at how do we cultivate our wholeness and how do we stay in very loving relationships with our inner protectors who are not enemies? and we can't make them go away.

[01:32:31] We can only learn how to learn. Thank them and love them better. And that changes everything for us. Again, this is what we call the wild mind work. but yes, thank you for bringing up Dick Schwartz, very much a companion, in a, similar, trajectory.

[01:32:49] **Nate Hagens:** If you could wave a magic wand, Bill, and there was no recourse to your decisions, to your reputation or safety or anything, what is one thing that you would do to improve, human and planetary futures for the Earth community?

[01:33:05] **Bill Plotkin:** Wow. You're limiting me to one. There's so many things I do. I guess I would do, what I would do, given the urgency of, widespread ecological awakening. So I would wave my magic wand and have every, primary educational system be nature based. And many of them would be like forest, what we're calling forest schools, that everything that's worth learning in childhood is, you know, somehow connected to the natural world and its processes and systems.

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[01:33:45] So that's what I would do with the magic wand. It is A large number, but still a small percentage of educational systems that are very much nature based, ecologically minded these days, but I would, have all of them be that way. And even just 20 or 30 years from now, everything would be different because of that.

[01:34:07] **Nate Hagens:** That I believe. this has been great. I think you feel as well as I do that we just scratched the surface of, this topic and your work. Do you have any closing, thoughts on this round one of our conversation to share with viewers? and or would you like to outline, where you'd next like to go on a deep dive if we have another conversation?

[01:34:33] **Bill Plotkin:** Well, I would just say that, there's two halves of my message, I'm aware of that. One is, It's even more bleak than you thought, folks, because if the core of our problem is widespread arrested human development or systemic human development oppression, that's a really big problem. but the other message is that we all are the humans that we have evolved to be, and we all have indigenous ancestry if we go far back far enough.

[01:35:07] And it's in our, not only our DNA, but our psyches. to grow the way nature enables us to grow. And with a little bit of support, doesn't really take that much, and a little bit of focus and decision, okay, I'm really going to do this, we can grow and blossom pretty quickly. It's not that hard, really. so, yeah, I'd just like to leave our listeners with, it's worse than you think, and the solution is closer at hand and easier than you might have feared.

[01:35:45] **Nate Hagens:** Thank you so much, Bill Plotkin, for your time today and for all your work over the decades to be continued.

[01:35:53] **Bill Plotkin:** My pleasure. Thank you, Nate.

[01:35:55] **Nate Hagens:** 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](https://thegreatsimplification.com).

[01:36:06] com for references and show notes from today's conversation. And to connect with fellow listeners of this podcast, check out our Discord channel. This

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