

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Nate Hagens:** Good morning. today is Thursday, April 30th. And I had planned this week to do part three of how to think about the future. But alas, I had to take a knee. and I don't mean an artificial knee, I mean, take a knee as in take a break because reality caught up with me a bit this week, as it probably does to many of you at times.

[00:00:28] So I'm gonna put that analysis, to next week. the last few weeks, I've been in reflective mode, shedding my skin, perhaps shedding multiple skins. And part of this is I've been working too hard, four years, with twice weekly content, juggling a lot of commitments, always on, with meetings and presentations and paying attention to world events, which are, not minor at this point.

[00:01:05] But a big part of my pause this week, was because I had a conversation Monday morning that kind of reframed everything for me. bit of a, splash of cold water lightning strike, for me. A close friend of mine, actually my meditation coach lives in Beirut, Lebanon, and has been living through daily bombing periodically for years, but, definitely daily recently.

[00:01:42] She's hosting two families in her small apartment. She has lost friends in the last week to murder, her words. She lost her family farm, with like thousand year old olive trees, to occupation last year. So instead of doing our normal meditation routine this week, we just talked about what's happening in Lebanon and her thoughts and her experience.

[00:02:11] And I wanna get her on the podcast and she just won't, and I understand all the reasons why. so I'm just gonna share a little bit of, her story because I think in many ways it's a microcosm, for our times.

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[00:02:42] She described to me what it's actually like to hear the bombs come down in the distance and the way that the mind anticipates where the next bomb might fall, but having no way of knowing where. And so that means her body and the people staying with her and presumably everyone, are in constant fight or flight.

[00:03:09] But with respect to flight, they have nowhere to flee to and no one directly in proximity to, fight with. so she explained to me how that anxiety has been residing in her nervous system for years now, but especially the past month or so. She told me she can't sleep because every time she falls asleep, her dreams or nightmares, I guess, are extrapolations of the worst possible future for her and the people she loves.

[00:03:43] And yet, she is one of the most grounded, peaceful, serene, wise people I know, and she's a lot younger than me. She, started a weekly meditation for like 60 people in her community. That number is growing and incidentally it includes Lebanese Jews, which I found surprising, though I don't know much about the situation.

[00:04:13] But somehow that practice, of meditating, convening together, at least in her, I don't know any of the other people, results in this equanimity and spaciousness and I don't know how best to say it other than an aware, empathic detachment for the people in her community, for the world that's super empowering.

[00:04:42] And according to her, absolutely essential, which is why she thinks more people, should develop such a practice. She also shared that deep down, there's this inner peace that even if hell arrives, her words, the people in her village have each other's backs, no matter what. She trusts them, they trust her, and there's this unbroken, familial lineage that goes back over 500 years in her village, which is, this deep social capital that grounds her.

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[00:05:24] when she said that, it was like, it cracked open all sorts of things for me because that kind of trust, at a human level is a wealth that most of us in the global north and, west do not have. But, and one of the reasons for this platform is I expect we will have to build it, during some difficult times in the not too distant future.

[00:05:52] And ultimately, I felt in that moment, such social capital for a human is worth more than gold and oil and Bitcoin and all the things. A journalist she knew, Amal Falil was killed last week, and she told me that over 250 journalists have been killed, which is not something I've seen in the Western news I read, but my friend is not the exaggerating type, but this, Am- Amal Falil was known for her, stopping and helping animals during the bombings who were injured or displaced.

[00:06:40] I mean, think about that. The bombs are falling and this woman is out there looking out for cats and goats and dogs and injured creatures. That was who she was, under duress and chaos. I'd like to think that's how I would be, or something rhyming. So beneath the surface horrors of the ongoing attacks into Lebanon, my conversation with my friend and her presence and her actions and her love for humanity and equanimity, it all gave me this sadness but huge hope for the future, albeit in a roundabout way, because I felt her reality viscerally for a moment as I sat as I'm sitting right now in my comfortable chair in a fully stocked office, so it's not lost on me that a woman in Beirut is coaching a guy in Minnesota, which is a state in a country that arguably is not so indirectly responsible for the blood and disruption in her country and her life.

[00:08:02] So this was just a one conversation of many, but it was one of those metacognition moments of clarity and perspective in my life. All the work we do here about the more than human predicament, the planetary boundaries, the carbon pulse, thematic crisis, and what has kept coming back to me this week was the whole thing kind of boils down to three questions.

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[00:08:30] And these are not the questions that I'm at and asking for the last 20 years on what's happening and how does the human ecosystem work and what are the various future scenarios? They're simpler and deeper and probably much more personal, and each of us will have answers to them individually and collectively.

[00:08:53] First, who are we going to be? That's all the behaviors, the self-care, the striving towards ecological adulthood, the addictions and the habits that we need to shed, the showing up, or retreating, from community in, in times of need, and being a rock in the river for others or for other species. Who will we be when the comfort and convenience starts thinning out?

[00:09:25] Who are we going to be is perhaps a different question than who do we want to be? And the difference is in our resolve and our follow through and our commitment and how we show up and how we grow in these times. The second question, follows from the first, how are we going to live with a looming biophysical haircut on the horizon, at least for most of us, what would it actually look like for humans to live differently in different climates and different economic systems, different political structures?

[00:10:10] What social and physical arrangements will actually work for the long haul or the intermediate haul? And last but not least, what are we willing to fight for? What will we care about enough to draw a line in the sand and say, "Nope, not on my watch. This is not gonna happen." What are we willing to give some of our own life's energy to protect, not as an investment, but as a s- an expenditure of our life's energy?

[00:10:49] My friend in Lebanon knows the answer to that question. Most of us in the West have never yet been forced to ask it, but I suspect we're going to have to. For me, it's the biosphere and other species and other generations. the

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communities we're actually embedded in, the kids who are here today and the ones that are not yet born, but I don't want to evangelize that to others.

[00:11:21] Each of you are gonna have your own list of what you're willing to fight for. My main point here is for people to actually have one. so no one knows what's coming, but what I realized this week is many of our nervous systems know it or feel it. Many people watching this video feel facillies of, Lebanon in our daily lives watching what's happening unfold in the world.

[00:11:59] We're walking around in some version of fight or flight right now, or at least most of us. and this was a big metacognitive realization after my call with her. She is in Beirut with bombs falling and people she knows dying and no end in sight or exit. And in many ways, her nervous system, because of the practices she's developed, is calmer and more grounded than my own, sitting in my chair, watching the news, being on calls, I am creating internal fight or flight response to, from my vantage point, nothing is actually fight or flight, at least not yet.

[00:12:53] So I think whatever happens, a big part of our work is separating our internal responses to our external world, and on that we do have agency, we have choice, we have the ability to research and develop and create new practices in our lives. And I think one of the first steps, to paraphrase Bio Ocumalafe, the world is urgent.

[00:13:19] We have to slow down, pause, and widen the aperture of what we're seeing and how we're planning and how we respond because almost no good decisions get made when our bodies are telling us we're in a life or death situation, but we're really not.

[00:13:44] Whatever happens in the days and months and years, ahead with the war, with AI, with politics and all that, the effects of the carbon pulse won't pause and the planetary boundaries and the nieces and nephews and cousins that are

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the other 10 million species we share planet Earth with, they're not gonna get a ceasefire.

[00:14:10] So all that work is still gonna be here after our pause when we come back to it. So I don't have any pithy ending or recommendations or solutions to suggest. All I can say is, start a practice, go outside, breathe, maybe cry if that's pent up, put your hand on a tree, call someone you love, notice what's, emerging and budding in the fields and in the forest and spring right now.

[00:14:50] I saw a meadowlark this morning and I watched it sing for a few minutes, after I first identified it on Merlin because we haven't had meadowlarks here in a few years. These all sound like small things, but these small things are how our nervous systems remember that it's safe enough to think, and act clearly again.

[00:15:16] And it's only in that state, I think. Can we be of use to the rest of life and the future? So I am somewhat fluent in, as I refer to it, biophysical macro, and I do increasingly see that the next horizon for my curiosity and my work is biophysical micro. Who are we and who might we become individually and in groups as humans, knowing what we know, sitting at the precipice of a species level transition, and I'm learning about all this, but I am really a newbie.

[00:15:56] so, my plan is for you to learn along with me. Take a pause if you need to. It is okay. I'll see you next week, probably.