

BUILDING PARTNERSHIP SOCIETIES

c David Woolfson, 1997

The approach of a new Century and a new Millennium presents a unique opportunity to widely reflect on key societal issues and challenges now before us. The framing of broad questions is an effective way of eliciting this type of reflection. One such vital "millennial" question is; "Which goals and values, ascertainable today, will be foremost in ensuring the long-term success of Humankind?"

Each of us will have our own answer to this question but perhaps there are certain larger goals and values that the majority could agree upon. In a real sense, we would be agreeing upon the "collective wisdom" of humankind at the end of the Millennium. For the first time in history such a global consensus may be capable of being formed.

In terms of an overriding societal goal for humankind in the 21st Century, I would submit that this goal be the building of "partnership societies" in every community and nation of the world. This would mean "partnership" at every level of society; between men and women, between all cultures, between all sectors and classes and between Humankind and the Earth itself.

A true Partnership Society can underpin the solutions to our existing and future societal challenges. This is not a utopian goal but a realistic one as "partnership", in various forms, is clearly a major societal trend today. And, it is also a goal that models human society on the society of nature with its universal principles.

Further, it would probably not be the first time that partnership societies have existed in our history. A number of scholars have recently claimed solid evidence for the existence of partnership societies for thousands of years prior to the rise of the first ancient civilization (about 5000 BC). Accordingly, this would be a return to partnership societies after 7,000 years of human history in which one gender dominated the other.

Today, the building of partnership societies will depend, to a great extent, on the widespread acceptance of a number of core values and goals. In this regard, I submit these five fundamental values and goals as priorities for the new Millennium to ensure our long-term success: Truth, Faith, Balance, Harmony and Partnership.

In addition to being values and goals, Balance and Harmony are also two fundamental principles of nature. If the majority could agree to view these core concepts as our essential shared values and goals for the Millennium then everything else may well flow from them. They would then truly become the "Five Pillars for the Future".

The First Pillar is Truth. To think and act truthfully even when knowing that doing so may harm your individual or group self-interest in the short-term. We are all aware when we are being untrue with ourselves and others. We have learnt from much personal and collective past experience that we can not succeed in the long-run by being

untruthful. In nature, truth is expressed in the beauty of a flower or the harmony of an eco-system, etc. Truth is also the essential bedrock for the future of humankind.

The Second Pillar is Faith. Faith in ourselves, faith in each other, faith in the Universe and our place in it. Finding faith is a key for each of us individually and our societies collectively. Out of faith comes hope. Without faith and hope there can truly be no meaningful life. The beauty of nature itself should suffice to inspire us to both faith and hope. Simply that such beauty and truth exists in our world should be enough to sustain us.

The Third Pillar is Balance. Balancing just about everything: the earth and humankind, self-interest and community interest, competition and cooperation, the public interest and private interests, short-term and long-term, men and women, etc. There are always two or more interests represented in every decision. These interests must be balanced. If we promote one interest to the exclusion or marginalization of the other there will be a long-term price to pay - just ask the Earth. Balance is a concept that defines the very essence of nature for without such innate balance life itself would never have evolved. Balance is dynamic, ever in motion, constantly adjusting and readjusting to maintain equilibrium. Balance thus leads to stability and longevity. In the future the "balance of nature" should be emulated by all.

The Fourth Pillar is Harmony. Harmony represents the diverse parts of a whole acting together in concert as one. Synergy (the sum of the parts being greater than the whole) and accord (agreement and union) result from harmony both in nature and for humanity. In nature, harmony is an eco-system with every single organism and species playing an important role in the greater whole. In the human realm, it is our community or society where this principle should always hold true with each member of the society being a unique component and contributing his or her distinctive skills and abilities synergistically to the greater whole. In an eco-system the diverse species of flora and fauna are in a natural balance working together in concert to enhance the continued survival and flourishing of the others. If our societies could achieve this harmony of "unity in diversity" we would also enhance our prospects for thriving into the long-term future. In nature this ecological harmony is genetic and unconscious. Human beings, however, can consciously choose harmony and the social structures necessary to create and sustain it.

The Fifth and final Pillar is Partnership. Partnership is the equitable sharing of both the benefits and risks in a collective endeavour. It is also mutual respect for the rights and interests of all the partners and the mutual acceptance of specific responsibilities and obligations to each other. There are numerous examples of partnerships in society today. Many are traditional ones such as business partnerships and corporations, and more recently, joint ventures, alliances, public-private partnerships, etc. Lately, leading-edge business organizations worldwide have begun to embrace the partnership models

provided by natural systems. New terms such as "business eco-system", "co-opetition" and "business evolution" are now entering our vocabulary reflecting these current trends. Accordingly, certain sectors of society are moving toward the partnership model.

What is needed, however, are greatly expanded partnerships that go well beyond these current applications. Broad Societal Partnerships should be our goal - between men and women, between cultures, sectors and interests in society, between nations, between present and future generations and between human beings and the Earth.

The building of such broad Societal Partnerships in many nations around the world will result in the creation of the true Partnership Society at the global level. Accordingly, an over-all "win-win" societal model would be in effect over the "win-lose" model we currently have based on an earlier and incomplete understanding of the natural world. We now know that nature utilizes both competition and cooperation as evolutionary tools. Competition usually occurs at the individual level within species. At the collective level, species generally cooperate amongst themselves, with other species and within their eco-system environments to ensure balance, harmony and stability. This greatly enhances the prospects of a species ultimate survival and success. This natural system has worked well for billions of years. It is one that can now be followed at every level of our societies. The key to our success, then, is to finely balance the elements of competition and cooperation in society as it is balanced in nature.

We unfortunately know very little about our distant past and how human societies were organized throughout our evolutionary history. It is apparent to many, however, that we are now approaching a significant crossroads in our evolutionary journey. We have reached the point where we can no longer rely on chance alone for our continued survival and success. The right decisions must soon be made regarding how we should live together and what is truly important for our future, if we hope to overcome the major social and environmental challenges before us.

The building of Partnership societies, based on the Five Pillars for the Future, can move us in a preferable direction and enhance our long-term prospects for ultimate success. This can begin in one community, in one nation and spread throughout the world in the 21st Century. A culture of partnership over a culture of conflict - Partnership Society for the Global Community!

Be True
Find Faith
Seek Balance
Achieve Harmony
Embrace Partnership!