

The House is on Fire

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You can feel it in your gut, right? Something is wrong. The world has become dark, uncertain, dangerous. Things have become complicated, and not for the better. It seems like all our communities are dead or dying. Fewer and fewer things happen in real life, among real people. The world is becoming artificial. Those who saw the world before all these changes know that things can be different. Those who only saw the world after all these changes long for something that's gone.

So you spend another day doomscrolling on social media. Another day going into work, feeling unfulfilled and scared of losing your job. The price of everything is going up, but your wage isn't. Another day numbing the pain with some kind of distraction. More easy dopamine, less pleasure. Your attention span gets shorter and shorter. Your interest in difficult tasks shrinks. Yet you know that everything in your life relies on cultivating that interest. It's miserable and lonely.

Worse, sometimes you get locked into your screen not because it gives you pleasure, but because it makes you angry. The technology that was supposed to set us free is pushing us further and further away from each other. Every day we are barraged by a flood of distressing information and pitted against one another. War, famine, plague, genocide. Our feeds are terrifying and infuriating and confusing. All that anger and distress builds up like a pressure cooker.

Politicians, tech billionaires, oligarchs, they all want us angry at each other. And it's working. If you're like most people, you hate some other group of poor people more than you hate the rich. The powerful love that. It keeps them in power. It protects corruption. Every single day they are working to become more powerful, to keep you distracted and weak and angry.

So it's back to doomscrolling. Videos of dismembered bodies. Another war. Dust and blood covering the streets. Floods, hurricanes, droughts, and heatwaves. The world is falling apart. And what are you supposed to do? Swipe and watch another video? It feels like it's hopeless. It seems like it's impossible to escape.

But wouldn't you rather have a world where you're close with your community? Wouldn't it be nice to not be surrounded by people who are always stressed and angry? Wouldn't it be better if technology brought us together rather than pushed us apart? Imagine if you and your co-workers made decisions about your workplace instead of your boss. You can guarantee if that happened, you'd have good hours and vacation time to boot. You could make sure you had time to raise your newborn child. You could go to the doctor without worrying about the bill.

You wouldn't be paying for the boss to take another vacation. You'd be paying for you and your fellow workers to live a good life.

Or imagine if you and your fellow citizens wrote the laws instead of politicians and the rich. If a law got passed that you didn't like, you could stop it. And if a new law needed to be passed, you could propose it. There would be no more rigged system. You and everyone else could come together and make a better system. After all, why should only a small group of people get to vote on how we run everything? They aren't the only ones affected! In fact, they are usually the ones least affected.

All these problems happen because we don't live in democracies. We live in tyrannies where we get to vote for the tyrants every few years. In a true democracy, we wouldn't vote for somebody else to make decisions for us. We would make decisions ourselves!

If you've been told that that would just be chaos or that we aren't good enough, that was no mistake. Those beliefs help those powerful people keep their power over you. People who want to hurt you, lie to you, and threaten you, obviously don't want you to be able to imagine a world without them, a world where you get to make the decisions. Dreams of a better world are a threat to an evil society.

That's why they have told us to accept that there are always others in charge, that decisions are made by a few corrupt politicians and CEOs and shareholders. They want to train us to think and act like slaves, from the way we view authority figures to the way we respond to injustice. They want you to keep your head down and let powerful people make all the decisions.

But isn't it miserable being told what to do all the time? Isn't it scary watching the world burn, but being powerless to change it? Corrupt people control every major corporation and every body of government. Every day you may tell yourself "it is how it is," but you and everyone else knows there is something rotten in the system. Things are too hard, the world is spiraling too fast, the crises are adding on to one another.

Mom can't afford her medicine. Your childhood friend got laid off and nobody will hire him. Grandpa is getting old, but he has to work for minimum wage because they raised the retirement age. Dad's pension is gone because the company gambled it on the stock market and lost. You love your dog, but it's so expensive owning a pet. And God forbid they get sick. Nobody should have to watch their pet suffer because they can't afford to help them live a good life. Maybe you have children who you love. And you work as hard as you can to make ends meet. But now, when you finally get time to see them, you're too exhausted to enjoy it. Your best friend signed up for the army and came back without a leg. He's not the same person anymore and you miss the old him. And now the state will barely even provide him functional healthcare!

We humans have a bad tendency to sit around and do nothing until the problem is impossible to ignore. And, by then, the problem has become much bigger than it would have been if we had just done something about it when it was smaller. It's like your house set on fire while you were asleep. No matter how tired you are, you can't just fall asleep again while the fire destroys everything. If you don't do something, it's all going to get worse and worse. The danger that once burned in the distance has now reached you. The house is on fire.

And it won't just harm you. It will harm everyone you love. That fire is going to consume your housemates as well. Maybe you are just now feeling the heat on your skin. But you need to understand that there is no fire truck coming. In fact, everyone in power is stoking the flames.

The consequences of inaction are dire. What's happening will affect generation upon generation to come. The urgency is real and the stakes are too high for complacency.

We can have a different world, where we control our destiny. We can have a world where decisions aren't made by rich strangers who know nothing about our lives. We don't have to be bossed around by rich snobs and do-nothings. These systems that oppress us are not unchangeable. Monarchy reigned for thousands of years, yet now it's a thing of the past. This was all built by human beings, and human beings can dismantle it too. Together we have the power to rewrite the rules of society. If we want that world, however, we must be willing to take action to make it real.

And when you hear me say that, it's hard to blame you if you don't know what to do. They've created a thousand ways to waste our time. Another peaceful march probably isn't going to fix it. Another petition with thousands of signatures probably isn't going to convince all the worst people to do the right thing. We've been "voting with our dollar" for decades now and what has it changed? And one thing's for sure, the change isn't going to come about by voting for new politicians. Feel free to do so if you want. But no ruler is ever going to abolish their own power and they're certainly never going to side with you! They're powerful people and their job is to protect other powerful people. They don't care about what you need. If they did, they wouldn't be powerful to begin with. In a hierarchy, you get to the top by stepping on other people, not by being good and generous.

So it's understandable if you feel overwhelmed. There are so many things going wrong, where do we even focus our attention? So many of us are paralyzed by this question. We see people everywhere fighting against the symptoms, but never the cause. As Henry David Thoreau said:

"There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root."¹

That's because there are many, many groups of people who want you to hack at the branches of evil, but not the root. These parties, these ideologies, these powerful people, they want you confused. More than that, the powerful want to convince you to stop hacking at the branches and help nurture the tree of evil. They want to convince you that they will solve your problems, when they are the ones at fault. But we have to reject all these half-measures and conmen. We have to strike at the root.

The root is that you do not make the vast majority of decisions that affect your life.

Sure, we don't have the kind of power our enemies do. They have entire globe-spanning institutions which function on deception, coercion, and violence. That's what's called hierarchical power. But that's not the only kind of power. Power is just the ability to carry out decisions.

We have to build power for the people, so that we can all make decisions together and carry them through. This kind of power is called horizontal power and it's based in cooperation, self-defense, and free thought. Horizontal power comes from each of us working together, not one small group of people ruling over the other. Horizontal power is power that makes us all stronger without making any of us weaker. Horizontal power is democracy taken seriously.

Maybe at our jobs and in our government, we can't choose what happens. But in the kind of systems we're discussing here, nobody makes decisions for us but us. Instead of waiting for someone to fix things for us, we take responsibility for ourselves.

Because, in this society, it's always someone else, somewhere else telling you what to do, controlling you. The decision you face now is not just about choosing one issue you're going to pour all your energy into. Your problem lies in your lack of control and the solution lies in

¹ Henry David Thoreau, Walden (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/205/205-h/205-h.htm>)

you regaining control. True change is not about patching up a broken system but about building something new. As Buckminster Fuller said:

“You never change something by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”²

That means we have to create new models from the bottom-up. We have to combine our powers together and deliberate over our problems. Every time you make something new, make it democratic. Don't make a corporation. Make a workers' cooperative. Don't vote to give the police a bigger budget. Make a community defense crew. Don't run for city council. Become a local organizer. Don't try to become the boss. Make a union!

And making new things requires a lot of work. When you choose a new path, you're choosing to get outside your comfort zone. You're choosing to be around people you may not agree with. You're choosing commitment to a cause. That means you're going to have to become the best version of yourself. That's hard work when the system wants you distracted and demotivated.

But aren't you tired of low expectations? Aren't you tired of a life without meaning and direction? You're not going to find that meaning and direction by watching from afar. That sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach isn't going to go away so long as you sit by and do nothing. The only antidote to hopelessness is action.

But it's not just about creating an alternative. The solution is both creative and destructive. Think about it: if you're a shackled slave and you want to escape, you have to do two things. First, you have to ensure you have the strength for the journey ahead. Before you set out, you have to know that you can travel a long distance from your prison. You have to gather food and water and everything else. And second, you have to destroy the shackle fastened around your ankle. Would you care that the shackle was the property of your master?

To escape the slavemaster, you're going to have to do whatever is necessary. In that process, you're responsible to your fellow slaves. But you're not responsible for what happens to the master. After all, he put you in those shackles. The relationship between you and him is inherently coercive. It isn't some coincidence or happenstance he's got you chained up. He's exploiting you. Without you, he wouldn't have any power to begin with.

You can have a different life, as can we all. We can destroy the shackles of all those people imprisoned by the system we're under. However, only if we work together.

Because that is the first and most important lesson: you are stronger with others. And there are others out there! It may not seem like it. But wherever you are, there are allies. If you're lucky, they're out in the open. If there's some group around you who seems like they're trying to change things, go join. But if not, remember: often your allies are hiding. They're like you. They can't go around saying that the world is a mess and that everything has got to change. So they're living the best they can in secret. Some of them have also pretended to obey for so long that they've forgotten their spirit of rebellion. You might have to remind them of their moral core.

Be patient with others as you grow. Remember that once you also went along to get along. Every part of this society is built to dupe the people, to beat them down, to surveil them, to make them forget who they are. The people are the victims of the system, not its drivers.

But you know that's still a tall order, don't you? It's going to take a lot of work. All kinds of things could go wrong in the process.

² As quoted in *Beyond Civilization: Humanity's Next Great Adventure* (1999), by Daniel Quinn, p. 137

For example: even though we are most powerful together, that doesn't mean that others will want to act alongside you. Even after you realize that everything is rotten. Even after you understand that things could be better. There will still be resistance among other people who are in your same situation. A lot of them just don't know any better. They think smart people built the system to help them and keep them safe. You're going to have to be patient. Despair and distraction can immobilize the best of us.

But there are also people who won't want to help because of self-interest, not naivete. Making new things disrupts the systems that benefit the powerful. That means that powerful people will probably consider us their enemy. They will use their money and their influence to maintain control. This resistance might come in the form of misinformation, propaganda, or even outright violence. They will lie about us. They will try to hurt us. They will make up laws to target us. They will imprison and mock us. They will turn our friends and families against us. They will even convince other oppressed people to fight against their best interests. Against us.

All that is why one of the biggest obstacles is isolation. Everything in our culture is about trying to get us to act alone. But the power structures we're up against thrive on division and fear. We've got to come together with others who share the same vision. We've got to overcome apathy. And we have to find the courage to confront those obstacles that are within us and within society.

We must prepare ourselves psychologically and emotionally for the difficult work ahead. We have to learn to see ourselves as active participants in the shaping of the world. This will require us to embrace values like self-reliance, mutual respect, and resilience. We will also need to strengthen our collective sense of responsibility. Change is not just about what we are owed but about what we owe one another.

We can no longer wait for permission or rely on others to step in and solve problems. We all have to take the lead. We all have to make decisions together. We all have to share power, while holding each other accountable. This deep internal preparation will help us withstand the pressure of the old system.

But we don't just stop with a dream, do we? Dreams without actions are fantasies. We need to transform those dreams into real, tangible changes. So how to start?

Read political texts. There will be some recommendations at the end.

Read history about the people resisting tyrants.

Attend a protest. No, the protest isn't going to solve all your problems, but you can meet with other people who know there is a problem.

Read the news and learn how the bad guys function.

Go join a local organization that is democratizing your community.

Learn to grow food, then grow food for your community.

Learn to shoot a gun and protect your community.

Learn how to use a First Aid Kit and be where people get hurt.

The truth is: you've probably already got skills you can offer that will help other people. You just need to use those skills to help your neighbors.

Think of yourself as a learner and learn from everyone. Talk to people about the issues and find out how they think. What people tell you will inform the actions you need to engage in.

Preparation also means learning how to protect and grow the new systems we're creating. Our communities must be strong and capable of weathering external pressure. We have to make

systems that function without reliance on governments and corporations. This includes everything from alternative economies to community-run media and health systems.

About now, it seems good to talk about a law of systems science called Gall's Law which says:

"A complex system that works is invariably found to have evolved from a simple system that worked. A complex system designed from scratch never works and cannot be patched up to make it work. You have to start over with a working simple system."³

That's what we have to do. Authoritarians all think they can force a new world into existence from the top. But we know we have to start from the bottom. Nothing that's forced from the top will ever last for very long. Top-down force is arrogant and disconnected, self-sabotaging and destructive. It relies on domination because it's inherently fragile. We have to create simple working systems at our own scale which can later become complex systems.

For example: maybe our neighbor brings us some extra veggies, so we help them fix their car. Maybe we watch their kids for the afternoon and they lend us their extra lawnmower. It's not about owing each other. It's about us being stronger together. We try to solve problems collectively as neighbors when they arise. And, over time, as more people become involved, the systems become more complex as well, turning into organizations with charters and long-term vision.

We must also work to interconnect these new systems. The enemy wants us fragmented and disorganized. So even though we might start with simple organizations, we have to begin linking these organizations together as soon as we can. This makes us more resilient when the powerful try to deprive us of food and water and housing. Sharing power makes us more able to resist.

And yeah, we might have conflicts from time to time, but we're also responsible for trying not to hurt each other. If something goes wrong we have to try to take accountability and fix it. No one is making us do this. We do it because there is no other alternative. Because we all enjoy the way we live together. And that's not just humans. We share our lives with our animal companions, the land we help steward, and even the beings we eat. Respect is important. As Seneca said "all cruelty springs from weakness."

This process of transformation isn't something that can be done overnight. It starts with small steps. It starts by realizing that the systems that claim to be for our own good, usually don't exist for our own good. They exist to control us. They exist to prevent us from organizing together to make something better. We need to break free from the delusion that some boss, some owner, or some bureaucrat cares about us. We need to act as if we already have the capacity to shape the world around us and we need to do it together.

Our struggle will not be without setbacks, and no plan is foolproof. So we must remain flexible and open to changing tactics when needed. As we face new challenges, we must focus on our long-term goals and resist the temptation to settle for less. The key is persistence. The existing power structures were built over centuries and they won't be defeated in a day. But with enough time, preparation, and effort, we can build something far better in their place.

It's understandable if you're feeling afraid of leaving behind the old story of your life. But just remember, your life is not one story. It's many stories. This probably sounds like a big change. But if you've watched this far, it's because you already know the old story has to go.

³ Systemantics: How Systems Work and Especially How They Fail by John Gall (<https://archive.org/details/systemanticsshows00gall>)

And that old story was dark, wasn't it? The people in power are there because they're good at tricking regular, moral people. They want you to compete when cooperation is better. They distract you with hatred and resentment so you don't focus on the selfish, destructive monsters that run our society. In short: they want you to hurt other people so you don't hurt them instead. That's how they keep their power.

It's okay to leave that old world behind. It's okay to begin your new story.

You have many more skills than you currently believe and you bring more to the table than you know. You are crucial to the communities you care about. The people who want to boss you around want you to believe that you are powerless and that you can never be free. But they're telling you that so that they can control you. If the situation were truly hopeless, why would they spend all this money spreading propaganda? They know that their power relies on you just nodding your head and following along.

Your new story is one of moral courage and kindness. A new story you can be proud of. This is a story of community, growth, and change. That might sound radical or unrealistic, but if you look at history, you will see that it's possible. When the people are no longer willing to live under tyrants, tyrants fall.

Once we've built this new structure, the next challenge will be maintaining it. We have to make sure we don't fall into the trap of recreating the same power structures we sought to escape. We will need to make sure that power never consolidates in the hands of a few. If you have power over others (rather than with them) you have to be aware that this will corrupt you. It leads to rationalization of why you deserve this power and not someone else. It creates an incentive to maintain your power even if it might undermine the cause you're fighting for. Many of the greatest harms to humanity and the planet come from this desire to create or defend power over others. From slavery to environmental destruction, hierarchical power is the root cause. We must reject positions of hierarchical power and we must reject hierarchical systems.

That means we must keep checks and balances in place, ensuring that every person has the ability to challenge and question decisions. This means empowering everyone to speak up and make their voices heard. Everyone's input should be valued, and no one's voice should be silenced or marginalized. We oppose the idea that some people are more fit for deciding what we want than ourselves.

That being said, we should not let our actions harm the community. We oppose extreme selfishness, because we demand accountability and responsibility. We stand up for each other when we face injustice. Every day, each of us should ask ourselves, "How can I contribute to this society in a way that fosters mutual respect and shared responsibility?" In this way, we continually reinforce the new system and ensure that it cannot easily be corrupted or co-opted.

This isn't about planning some glorious coup. Not only do we not want a "seat at the table" of this corrupt society, we don't want to create another hierarchy in its place. What we want is to build a world that respects everyone's humanity. If the powerful won't build it, then we'll build it ourselves. And if the powerful try to destroy it, we'll defend it ourselves.

Those old systems built on hierarchy and control will try to push back. They'll try to convince us that the new system is unworkable. Time and time again, they'll tell us that the world is too complicated for the people to decide their fates. They'll tell us that it's safer to let the "experts" or "leaders" make decisions. But we know better. Their attempt to destroy us proves that horizontal power is workable. After all, if it were so infeasible, why would they need to sabotage us to begin

with? They work to destroy us precisely because our method can and does work. Because our method, as it develops, undermines their power.

The forces that enjoy the current system will attempt to weaken our efforts. They will attempt to divide us, sow distrust, and undermine our progress. But we have a unique advantage: we know how to come together, how to support each other, and how to work for the common good. To maintain this new society, we must always be educating ourselves. We must be mindful of our biases and work to create a culture of empathy and collective action. The more we educate ourselves about the world we want to build, the more resilient our systems will become.

There will be times when doubt or temptation leads you astray and it feels like the old world is creeping back in. When your back is against the wall, it might seem easier to accept the status quo and let someone else take the reins. But that is the moment when we need to remind ourselves why we started this journey in the first place. When you feel hopeless, remember: the constant of history is not stability, but change. When people come together, they have the power to change the world.

Maintaining this new world requires humility, a willingness to listen to one another, and an openness to change. We must recognize that no system, no matter how well-intentioned, is perfect. We will make mistakes, but we must learn from them, make corrections, and keep moving forward.

We are fighting for everyone to be able to make those crucial decisions that affect their lives. We are fighting for all power to lie in the hands of the people. We are fighting to restore harmony with the natural world. If we let ourselves fall back into the old systems, we risk undoing all the hard work we've done toward those ends. Every time we witness the suffering of others, we must recommit to building a better world. We must continue to work together, even when it seems difficult. The alternative is a world where only a few corrupt people decide the fate of many.

The strength of our movement lies in our love for other human beings, in our love for all living things. We believe in the people more than the people currently believe in themselves. For that reason, change is not about one person or one group leading the charge. It is about all of us, together, rejecting power over others and embracing power with one another.

The house is on fire and you can't stop that fire alone. The landscape is filled with smoke. The air is clogged with a choking ash. And soon, if you do nothing, you will become part of the ruins. Will you let the powerful suffocate all that is true and good? Will you be humiliated by exploiters and parasites? Or will you save your housemates, abandon the wreckage, and build a new home together with the people?

You must reject hopelessness. Your hopelessness is a handout to the rulers. They want you demotivated, nihilistic, and aimless. They want you weak and isolated and afraid. Get up, dust off the ashes, and find those others who will fight against the blaze. No one is coming to save us. We are the heroes we have been waiting for.

The preceding piece is the also published in a video form on my channel Anark. If you would like to watch that video, it is here: <https://youtu.be/po6RBW3l544>

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