

The Future just around the corner

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A prediction of where the world is going. This is a quick draft.

Here is my general outlook on where I think the world is going over the next few decades and centuries. Details might need modifying, but it's my current best prediction.

Until recently, almost all people grew up, married, and died where they were born, with their family, siblings and relatives close beside them, living off the land farmed locally by people they knew, in a world of personal interaction, contribution, mutual solidarity and destiny. A few people travelled, but they were the exception.

Recently, energy was thrown into the system. Like petrol on a fire, in a great flash everything roared up and exploded everywhere. Suddenly people move all over the place and all over the world, often every few years or even every few months; relatives are scattered everywhere and far-between in a disconnected disarray, with people's friendships becoming ever-increasingly remote in an incredibly impersonal world, where most interactions are with strangers and communication over a distance. We wouldn't dream of imagining everyone could fly to mars or the moon, but for some reason people think it's okay for vast numbers to travel vast distances across the world to Australia and foreign lands for no especially good purpose. It's no wonder that community is evaporating all around us. The edifice of society and community cannot be built on an ever-shifting quicksand of people constantly on the move.

We have built up a huge and complex society, built upon rivers of freely-flowing energy.

It creates the fertiliser that grows our food, harvests it with machines, powers the vehicles that transport it across country and the world; it heats our homes in the night and through the cold winters. All the plastics, chemicals, fabrics and containers we use are made from it, all commercial interaction is built upon customers travelling in vehicles powered by it. Almost our entire society and all its services, industries and basic necessities are built entirely upon petro-energy.

What happens if we pull the plug on that energy?

According to official estimates, energy is shortly to run out, not just petrochemicals but also the other sources such as coal. Some say in 20 years' time, some say a little more. Some even say the peak has just recently come. Even if they last a bit longer, fossil fuels have to be curtailed for climate reasons.

We do have alternative, sustainable energy sources, but there is little chance of the sustainable sources we currently have covering what petrol gives us. We have biofuel, but we would have to turn all our food-growing into fuel-growing and all starve, whilst turning the atmosphere into a polluted smog from its use. Others show promise, but to roll any new energy solution en-masse across the planet requires a lot of effort. Can you imagine the task of building and implementing hundreds of millions of wind-turbines all across the planet - could we even remotely do that in 20 years? and would we really want such an eyesore?

The reality is, petrol is too damned good; nothing sustainable that we have comes close to it, we have built up a huge society on it, knowing it is shortly going to run out. The world is like a train heading toward a cliff; everyone is dancing in it to loud music, and everybody wants to board it and join in. The few who know about the cliff it's heading for, don't have the heart to dance and party. They warn people, but nobody seems to care, they just want to dance and be oblivious.

How will it all happen?

First of all, energy looks rosy. As long as western lights are on and cars are moving, everybody dreams of having it too.

India, China and Africa each have 1 billion people. Our energy supplies are rapidly declining, and demand is about to absolutely soar, with India and China both clamouring to use fuel and energy big time like the West. Africa can't yet, but will want to in due course.

This will create shortages, pumps will run dry; prices will run high.

What will people's reaction be? if we double the price of fuel, or make it £10/gallon, will society function? it scarcely breaks even as it is. You are looking at an ultra-recession, with no one having any mobility to make, ship or buy, anything. Society will completely and utterly collapse like a giant tower of playing cards with the base removed.

A little way further than it is now, the major oil

producers like Saudi Arabia and Russia will all run dry. No one has found any major new oil since the 1960s. Maybe there's some lurking under the antarctic, who knows, but it'll last a while and then be used.

Energy supply will stand in the hands of really interesting countries, particularly Iran. Big consumers like America won't like that, and so will do all they can in the world desperately to keep fuel flowing to them - as you've already seen, to a tiny degree, with Kuwait and Iraq. Whether through force, manipulation or politics, the alternative will be to have no energy.

You might think this will all happen slowly and gradually, but it won't be a slow decline:- it will be very sudden. If there were a hint of a food shortage, everybody would arise in a mad rush to empty the shops of food, and you can imagine it will be the same with fuel and energy.

The few countries who actually have real energy sources will immediately in their national interest stop exporting their energy, and keep it just for themselves. Either immediately or a little bit on, they'll stop selling it to the public altogether, because they'll realise they need to keep all their fuel for military use (which uses a lot). The military will be required both for controlling internal anarchy at the situation, and also the threats from the chaotic and collapsing world outside.

With the food and services crisis, cities will dissolve; people will abandon the cities en masse for the countryside, onto land that isn't theirs, and this will create enormous unrest, with those who own it realising their most important task is farming it.

To try to avoid all this in the first place, there may well be huge investments in nuclear power everywhere as the only alternative energy source we've actually got working - although it won't fuel planes or current car usage, and some say there's not much Uranium in the world to last very long. Look how the UK is pressing ahead in this area. In an increasingly fragile and hostile world, these will increasingly become military/terrorist targets, and the whole of politics will centre around energy use and defending it by the military, not about beauty, people and hearts.

Along with this energy crisis, about the same time will come its partner crisis of Climate Change.

Why is climate change so dire?

If a person puts their hand or their foot in cold water, little harm comes; if a country experiences a

bout of cold or hot weather, little comes of that. However, should a person's entire body temperature drop by just a few degrees, the person will get hypothermia, and if it increases by a few degrees he will become delirious and die; for a few degrees' overall change, completely destroys a carefully balanced complex system. The world is like a body, and a few degrees change will throw it into an earth-fever and planetary delirium. Currently the minimum expectations for climate change are at least a few degrees C, with many expecting 6°C or even 10°C changes. What would happen to you if you got 6°C or 10°C hotter? you wouldn't last more than a few moments. All your organs and chemistry would be thrown into complete disarray and you would die, and it is very similar with the Earth. Climate change is very bad news, and every few months scientists revise their estimates to be worse and worse. It is unprecedented.

All the plants in the world will find themselves in the wrong climate zones, vegetation and agriculture will go haywire, and everything that depends directly or indirectly on plants and water - and that's all animals and humans on earth - will be in mass migration from food and water shortages, and rising sea levels - most the people on the planet live beside the sea and will have to move. Much of the planet will become refugees, and famine and thirst will be everywhere, and the invariable outcome of such a world-wide friction is civil strife and warfare across the whole world.

As one article puts it, enumerating the climate trigger-points-of-no-return, which each impact the next like cascading dominoes [my own comments are in brackets],

"...Greenland [icesheet] collapse could be triggered by temperatures 1 °C warmer than today's, of which 0.7 °C is already "in the pipeline", held up by time lags in the system... Lenton's study has identified eight dangerous tipping points that could be passed this century. Several could have a cascade effect, with each triggering the next... The tipping points include a collapse of a global ocean circulation system known as the thermohaline circulation [that's like your blood circulation stopping]. Besides shutting down the Gulf Stream [i.e. Britain will become frozen all year round like Siberia], this could also "switch off" the Asian monsoon and warm the Southern Ocean, perhaps destabilising the West Antarctica ice sheet [Antartica holds an 80-metre sea rise in its ice]. This would cause a further 7-metre

rise in sea levels [on top of the 7-metre rise caused by Greenland's collapse]. Likewise, warming may cause a near-permanent El Niño in the Pacific, which would hasten a runaway burning of the Amazon rainforest and its disappearance by mid-century [the Amazon becomes a desert in 2050]...

Things are very bad indeed. Worse than can be imagined, and just around the corner. Forget about holidays, facebook and all idle distractions. We are in for the real ride.

What is the solution?

"The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy." (Bahá'u'llah)

The solution can be found clearly in the Baha'i writings.

Things needs to be village-based, or village-like, with people knowing and working mostly with their neighbours, with farming as the top job (not the bottom), and villages need to be pretty self-sufficient, growing their own food, and self-administrative. You can perhaps create a semi-city of tiled villages with greenery around each, so long as they still have an identity and feel like villages which people put their whole heart and soul into.

Travel I would suggest needs to be an activity for the small minority, and telecommunication needs to be used for administration, sharing *concepts* and theoretical knowledge, and providing abstract services. The purpose of telecommunications isn't for creating long-distance friendships, as that takes away from real interaction with neighbours, and the purpose of travel isn't to holiday, the earth simply can't sustain it. Abdu'l-Bahá said that He was the first person to cross from east to west with a good reason to do so, and He is absolutely right. In the interim people need to travel for vital needs, including travel teaching to rescue the world from its plight, but when travel-teaching is no longer needed, travel will not at all be as we currently have it. It is vital to have communities where everyone is active and interacting with each other, and in such a community, knowledge that does flow in, either directly or indirectly through osmosis, is instantly absorbed, internalised and turned into something beneficial for that village or village-like community. Who would ever want to leave such a vibrant, dynamic village, full of their friends and family they have grown up with? Should a village ail or become insular, the purpose of the Bahá'í administration is

to put it back on its feet. But where people do not know neighbours, the whole earth can travel around the globe and no real community or solidarity will ever come of it, and without community and personal involvement in it, all the knowledge in the world will bear little spiritual fruit.

But that community development, as I see it, is the goal for a future, of which we are building up the embryonic seeds even now.

In the end we will harness the ultimate energy source, the sun. It may not provide all the material excess that we have now, but we will be a *happy* and *contented* people yearning and growing together with the spirit.

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