

# Economic Collapse

## A SOLUTION



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## Chapter One



The best way to solve any problem is to reduce it to its lowest common denominator. The electron is the key to the universe. Even so, the key to society lies in the individual family unit—indeed, ultimately, in the individual *as* a representative of the whole, rather than as a unique personality.

A mother, having given birth, does not demand payment in coin for feeding her child. The very suggestion is absurd. Parents don't demand payment before they'll agree to bring up their children as well as they are able. Why not? Because, in these matters, it is human nature to give. Parents may hope that their offspring will eventually care for them—in their old age, for example, or in times of grave illness—but no contract is ever drawn up in advance to be signed by the child. All mentally and emotionally normal parents ask nothing in exchange for the loving care they give their children.

Love has no price. Kindness has no price. Free sharing has no price. All these spring from the heart, and are free.

A notable feature of all forms of giving born of natural instinct is that the energy of that giving flows outward, not inward. The giving, moreover, proceeds from the feeling quality, which—at least in vertebrates (I cannot speak for worms and insects)—is centered in the heart. It is not an emotion which one clutches to oneself. The more energy one sends outward from there, the more that energy becomes replenished from within. Where, then, does it flow *from*? Not from the outside, for the more freely one gives, without wanting (indeed, perhaps without ever receiving) anything in return, the more a corresponding energy wells up from within one, giving him sustenance which is not only emotional, but which draws more substantial support in return by means of an aspect of reality that is only lately beginning to be recognized: the power of magnetism. This is not an energy which flows from one's surroundings.

An important feature of self-giving is worth noting: The more one sends energy outward to others in a spirit of kindness—not only to the members of one's own family, but to others everywhere, as an intrinsic attitude—the more kindness he will receive in return. This return may come from his surroundings, but even if nothing comes back from there, it will well up within him as a positive, creative energy. The heart, in other words—unlike a sack of grain—is not emptied by pouring out its feelings in a positive way. This kind of fulfillment, to the materialist, may seem impossible.

Yet in business matters, one invests with a view to reaping greater profits. One might reasonably expect, then, for an act of kindness also to reap a profit of some sort—if not monetary, then at least in other terms. There is no way of computing what, of this kind of profit, one may reasonably expect to reap, but isn't it obvious that if one treats others kindly, he will more likely be treated kindly in return—if not by them, then at least by others?

Why is this so? The explanation is perfectly simple: Love, kindness, and sharing with others freely are forms of *energy*, and we live in a universe of energy. The more we channel energy outward to others, the more of it we draw inward to ourselves, from its source in the universe.

Let me explain my meaning more carefully. Since the time of Einstein, mankind has become increasingly aware that matter itself exists only as a vibration of energy. More and more, scientists themselves are coming to believe that energy is only a vibration of thought, which is, in turn, a manifestation of consciousness. In short, we live in a conscious universe wherein even the rocks are only, in their final essence, dreams; they exist like waves on the surface of an Infinite Consciousness, which man has labeled “God.”

Energy, then, is not an unconscious force: It can be directed *consciously*. As Paramhansa Yogananda stated, axiomatically: “The greater the will, the greater the flow of energy.”

This means that the more we exercise our creativity, the more inspiration for further creative deeds fills us from within. The more we exercise our intelligence, the keener our intelligence becomes. The more we exercise our muscles, the stronger they too become; by exercise we do not deplete a pre-allotted, fixed supply of muscle power.

The same is true of wealth. If a person simply hoards whatever money he earns or acquires, his supply of it will, in time, shrivel up. It will shrivel less obviously, for gold is something solid and substantial; if unused, it doesn't diminish in quantity, like muscle tissue; in quality, like intelligence; or in effectiveness, like creativity. Nevertheless, one's *ability* to use gold to any personal advantage does shrivel. An addicted miser may actually starve himself to death (though I've never actually heard of so extreme a case!) rather than spend the money to feed himself.

A wealthy person who uses his wealth more wisely will invest his money in projects that he at least hopes will bring him more wealth. Hence the stock exchange, which encourages people to invest in ventures that promise still greater earnings for themselves. This is a passive investment, of course. People usually invest in the stock market not out of any personal interest in the companies they support, and not for any person who works in those companies, but only in the hope of gaining more money for themselves. (They *gain* it; they do not make or earn it through any further effort of their own.)

Most investors don't even concern themselves with the moral fiber of the companies they invest in, or with the usefulness of such companies to mankind. Many years ago, my father gave me a little money to invest in the stock market. The stock broker simply couldn't understand why I refused to invest in a tobacco company. I kept on insisting, “But I don't believe in smoking!” And he kept on demanding in return, “What has that got to do with it? Right now, this company is hot.”

Monetary profit had become elevated in his mind to the level of a moral virtue. Could anything be more absurd?

People create companies, moreover, not to give their fellow human beings useful employment, but primarily—indeed, entirely—with the motive of becoming rich, themselves. If their company starts to totter financially, their first thought is not for the safety or security of their employees, but for themselves. Such company owners are like the Russian peasant who (as fantasized by the British humorist P.G. Wodehouse) heaves a sigh of regret as he tosses his last child to the pursuing wolves. The company owners, though perhaps wealthy enough to direct their employees' efforts into avenues that might be profitable for them all, simply let them go. "*Sauve qui peut!*"—"Every man for himself!"—is their motto. Even on a sinking ship, the cry, "Women and children first!" strikes them as naive; they shove it roughly aside in the name of a sterner philosophy.

In a world where the unwritten motto is, "Every man for himself!"—a world in which people think only of earning for themselves—what they have to feed on is an ever-shrinking carcass. People themselves call it a dog-eat-dog world, with less and less to feed upon, fewer and fewer profits to be gained, less and less security of any kind (even emotional) for anyone, less and less fulfillment. Instead, poverty stares everybody bleakly in the face: poverty of every kind—financial, emotional, mental, spiritual.

In an economy based on *fiat* currency (printed money), any hint of monetary greed places inflationary pressures on those who control the supply. They quickly learn that, to the extent that money can solve their problems, the more money they print, the more easily will those problems be solved. By flooding the market with money, they pay off their own debts. This fact is more important to them than other practical considerations—such as the sad reality that, in thereby also raising the prices everywhere, they make life increasingly difficult for countless others.

Those who suffer the most are citizens who no longer earn money—the old; the infirm. Workers can at least demand more pay, thereby keeping the money supply flowing to them even though inflation, which becomes a regular feature of existence for them, brings them increasing nervousness, fear, and psychological tension.

The home my parents bought for \$20,000 in Scarsdale, NY, 1941 is now (in the year 2011) worth about two million, even though its value as a building has diminished over the intervening seventy years. The milk shakes I used to buy in high school for fifteen cents cost many times more than that today.

Worse still, governments think nothing of going into debt, since they can always print whatever money they need. Monetary inflation has been properly described as "hidden taxation," since governments cannot tax people openly for all they need without risking a revolution. And even inflation cannot give them all the money they need.

Why not? Governments don't dare print too much at a time, lest hyperinflation ensue. In Germany in 1923, the mark (their currency at that time) became so worthless that one worker, carting his weekly earnings home in a wheelbarrow, left the wheelbarrow outside a store while

he went in to get (or perhaps only to look at!) something; came out again, and found his earnings blowing freely about on the street: the wheelbarrow was missing! Similar stories from that era abound.

Government indebtedness seems, at first, to be different from private indebtedness. A lender cannot survive forever on mere promises of payment. He needs at least *something* to keep him going. Of course, if what he is owed is something he doesn't directly know about—supportive bricks for his house, for example, that are missing without his knowledge—he may not consciously feel the lack—until, that is to say, his house collapses around him.

For a government to borrow money is not essentially any different from its printing the money. A call is made on diminishing strength. Sooner or later, the house must collapse: it cannot be shored up forever on promises, even as concrete cannot be strengthened by adding more and more sand, and less and less cement.

A serious problem of our times is big government. It may have begun with the Federal Reserve Board, but Franklin D. Roosevelt definitely launched that delusion in full battle array when he promised to solve the nation's economic problems from the central government in Washington, D.C. Everyone loves candy, especially when it is free! But the resulting problems for America were many, and kept on proliferating. An increasing horde of nonproductive clerks had to be paid. Increasing complexity, arising from an ever-swelling bureaucracy, made it impossible to hold any one person or department accountable. People started lining up for "free" handouts. Charity, of course, is always good, but charity from a government level is usually doled out for at least partly selfish ends: the securing of more votes, for example. It must be paid for through taxation, and by a swelling number of government "departments."

Corruption, of course, becomes endemic, because it is untraceable. But even without corruption, those tax dollars must support a growing support team of intermediaries, each (usually) receiving unwarrantedly high wages for the simple reason that there are no profits to place a limit on how much each person earns.

Government-sponsored charity seems good, but if you take a cube of ice and pass it from hand to hand around a banquet table, don't be too surprised if what comes back to you has shrunk to the size of a pea.

The ultimate beneficiaries of government handouts receive very little indeed of whatever money was allotted to them.

Is there any way of "bucking" this system? Yes, if it operates at a local level. People's consciousness needs to be changed. Shoveling the problem off onto big government is no cure, for it doesn't really make people more individually charitable: All it does is reassure them that "Something is being done about it, so why concern myself when I see people undernourished?" Conscience is assuaged, and people feel free to go on raking in as much personal wealth for themselves as they possibly can.

It seems to me that a much more effective way for governments to involve themselves in charity is for them to launch propaganda campaigns, with posters and public announcements, en-

couraging people to help their neighbors, and not only themselves. Posters could urge people to consider all the ways that, in helping others, they are also helping themselves.

Many fewer people, today, smoke than in my youth. Propaganda against smoking is what has accomplished the change.

I would even like seriously to propose that illegal drugs, such as marijuana, heroin, and cocaine, be made legal (perhaps with restrictions, such as a medical prescriptions stating, “It is permitted to sell this drug to . . . for medical reasons).” The whole point of this exercise would be to make the drug available at such a low price that the criminal world would no longer have an incentive to promote and sell it. Drug addicts may be beyond reclamation, but at least there would cease to be people in the streets doing their level best to *create* drug addiction. There would be no drug wars, no murders, no exploding drug problems. Rather, and almost overnight, the problem would *implode*.

“Lobbies” are another curse of big government: whole departments (is that the word for them?) created to plead for, and if necessary to enforce, private or special interests—often (if not usually) at the expense of other people’s interests.

Jobs proliferate, even if the actual output diminishes. The desire for self-importance produces the need to have others working under one. C. Northcote Parkinson (whose book, *Parkinson’s Law*, ought to be made required reading in every school) makes the point that government departments—and, therefore, governments themselves—proliferate in size and number quite independently of any work they actually produce. Indeed—and I don’t remember whether he makes this point also—their output often becomes counterproductive: like two equal forces pushing on opposite sides of a door. Thus, it once happened that a trainload of goods, urgently needed in the western part of America, was shipped westward across the country just as another trainload of similar goods, equally needed in the East, was being shipped eastward.

The larger the government, the greater the likelihood of inefficiency and confusion on all fronts.

## Chapter Two



The direct cause of economic depression is monetary greed. And the root cause of greed—whether avarice, or gluttony, or excessive desire of any kind—is an attitude of taking, not of giving and sharing: an inward-drawing or self-absorbing attitude, as opposed to one of expansive love, of outward-flowing energy, of interest in others, kindness toward them, and concern for their well-being as well as for your own.

If a mother breast-fed her baby with an attitude of, “I’m giving to you now because I expect to be repaid in some form, some day,” I expect even her milk would turn bitter. She nourishes the baby not only with milk, but with her self-giving love.

Oh, true, “self” always enters the picture somehow. The mother will think of the baby as her own, and may dream great dreams for its future as *her* child. But there are two kinds of selfishness: one which excludes others from its sympathies, and the other which includes the happiness of others in one’s own. One should always seek happiness *also* for others, and not only for oneself, and never at the cost of anyone else’s happiness. Economic depressions are caused by the former attitude: “Me-firstism.”

Wherever Me-firstism is practiced—and some people treat it with all the fervor of a religion, with rites (oblations poured out as investments on the altar of profit) and rituals (eagerly perusing the Wall Street Journal every morning); dogmas (“I believe in Money Almighty, Ruler of heaven and earth!”) and ritual prayers (“O Lucre, praise be to Thy beauty, Thy boundless perfection, Thy infinite abundance!”)—there emotional drought begins. *Always*. Monetary depression comes into being long before it is recognized as a reality.

Many years ago, a poll was taken of people in different income brackets, from the lowest to the highest. The question asked was, “Are you satisfied with the money you are making?” In virtually every case, the response was, “Well, we would be satisfied, *if we had ten percent more*.” “Desires,” Paramhansa Yogananda used to say, “ever fed, are never satisfied.”

That ten percent might have amounted to millions more, and still people wouldn’t be satisfied. Yogananda once asked a millionaire, “Are you able to rest, now that you’ve earned a million?” The man answered, “No! A friend of mine has forty million, and I have only one. I’ll never rest until I have as much as he.” Unfortunately, before he could amass his forty million and sit back to enjoy his gains, he died of a heart attack—from overwork.

There are two directions our energy-flow can take us: outward, or inward; toward expansion, or toward contraction. It can make us more giving, or more grabbing. The first direction, par-

adoxical though it may seem at first, is self-gratifying. The second direction is—again paradoxically—self-depriving, for it shrivels the heart, desiccating it; makes one less capable of noble or uplifting feelings of any kind; and reduces one finally to a dry gourd of humanity, containing no juice of human feeling left for self-nourishment.

Depressions come because the majority of people are like the rat in the children’s story, *Charlotte’s Web*. They ask repeatedly, “What’s in it for me, Charlotte?” Charlotte, in the story, is a spider; in life, she is *Maya*, drawing all those into her web who devoutly practice the religion of Me-firstism. When people’s energy flow is centripetal—that is to say, when it forms an eddy of inwardly drawing energy and magnetism—their very energy-source dries up. They imagine they are deriving that supply from money and things, but the world around them can only reflect back to them what they themselves are, inside.

When that inner wealth of energy, attracted from the universe, becomes depleted, because it has been directed toward receiving (or taking from) others, people see no solution to their problems, and soon become empty even of inspiration.

A laid-off worker may cry, “But I’ve lost my job. What’s all this nonsense about my drawing energy to myself? There isn’t any energy left to be drawn upon!” No? If he’d stand a little aside from his dilemma, he would certainly find a solution awaiting him somewhere. It lies within himself.

Think not, first, “How can I get others to employ me?” Think, rather, “What can I give to them that will make them happier, or feel more fulfilled in themselves?” And think then, also, “What would I *enjoy* giving them? Isn’t there some special gift that I alone have to offer?”

You can begin by helping someone else who, like you, doesn’t have a job. You can begin also by making yourself useful to others, regardless of the returns to *yourself*. You might go around picking up drifting bits of paper off the ground—menial work, to be sure, but work that other people would appreciate. No, you probably won’t be paid for it, but when people see your spirit of doing *something* to be useful, you will very likely attract new employment.

If no one employs you, smile anyway. Smile at every passerby. Help old people into their cars. Help the infirm to cross the street. Truly self-giving energy simply cannot be ignored forever—not by everyone! The way to reach a mountaintop is to begin at the base.

Suppose you have a talent for decorative display. Why not study a store window and ask yourself, “How could the wares displayed here be made more attractive?” Go in, and offer your services gratis. Sooner or later, you will surely receive an offer of a new job.

Don’t tell yourself, “I’m this or that by profession: a bank officer; a streetcar conductor; a policeman.” Don’t let yourself be imprisoned in self-definitions. Be free in your mind, and you can be *anything*. Yogananda, during the 1930s depression, used to say, “If I needed a job, I would shake the world until it *had* to give me one.”

In giving, not in taking, lies the answer. Instead of asking the world to be useful to you, think what you, yourself, can do to be useful to it, or at least *in* it. Think not in terms of what you will get back for energy expended. Think in terms of the energy you give out, to others.

## Chapter Three



A little-recognized, or at least seldom-pondered, reality is that we, each one of us, belong to a great web of existence: we are parts of a whole. What happens to that whole happens, to some extent, to each one of us also; what happens to us affects, in however slight degree, the entire fabric. As the Irish poet “AE” put it (I am paraphrasing), “The least movement of my hand affects in some way the most distant star.”

This truth reminds me of a curious, but true, phenomenon: On several noteworthy occasions, thousands of people who had assembled for a “heavy metal” rock concert seem to have attracted fierce retribution: sudden, violent (indeed, lethal) storms. Very recently, in mid-August 2011, 60,000 people in Belgium were dancing exuberantly at such a concert, their bodies vibrating in sympathetic rhythm to the music; the sky, at the beginning, was blue; the air was calm. All of a sudden, within only ten minutes, the sky turned so dark that day became night; a mighty wind sprang up, bringing with it a violent storm: thunder, lightning, a deluge of hail and rain. Within minutes, devastation was everywhere: the tent covering was ripped to shreds; five people were killed; 140 people were injured; many had to be hospitalized. The countryside around turned to a sea of mud.

On several other occasions also—in Finland, August 11, also 2011; in Lewiston, N.Y., this same summer; in Tulsa, Oklahoma August 7; at Niagara, N.Y.; in Colorado—the same thing has happened: a heavy rock music festival (I think it was that, but some of the music may have been less violent; in any case, it had a heavy downbeat, affirmative of ego), many thousands of participants dancing together: a sudden, devastating storm.

The entire universe exists in a state of *conscious* vibration. Sounds exert a definite influence on our environment, as well as on ourselves. The music we listen to has a definite effect upon our own consciousness. The influence of rock music, especially, is extremely deleterious.

One woman I know of wrote that she had once tried to commit suicide, and (until rescued) found herself in a dark region where people had been stuck—some of them, for centuries. Some of the people there were clothed in the style of ancient Greece; some, in that of 17<sup>th</sup>-century France. No one looked at anybody else. All seemed unconscious of their surroundings. They weren’t suffering, so much as mentally numb. This woman had been addicted to heavy metal rock music. After this grim experience, she stated that the vibrations of that region were the same as those of that kind of music. Since then, she has been campaigning to get people to stop listening to it.

I was in Yucatán, Mexico, in 1954, visiting the Mayan ruins at Chichen Itza. My guide was himself Mayan, so I asked him if any of the ancient knowledge still lingered in that country. He told me, “Several years ago, the countryside around here underwent a severe drought. I was out traveling in the jungle when I came upon a village where the people were performing a rain dance. Interested, I stopped to watch. When the dance ended, suddenly, as if from nowhere, heavy clouds gathered, and there was a real cloudburst! Everyone had to run for cover.”

Paramhansa Yogananda once said, “American Indian rain dances used to be effective. Now, through cultural exposure to Western rationalism, they have lost that power, but they had it, once.”

He himself showed on several occasions that he could change the weather. I could tell several stories on this point, but it would constitute an unnecessary diversion from my subject. You can read it in a book of mine, *Paramhansa Yogananda: a Biography*.

The point, here, is that thought has power. *Your* thoughts have power! Even if no one around you has a job; even if money has lost all its value; even if people in your area are literally starving to death, you don't have to be a part of that karmic wave. You can create your own little circle of protection against it.

In Lohaghat, a Himalayan village, I met a couple named Sharma. The husband was a medical doctor. Mrs. Sharma, his wife, told me of a time when she had been in the jungle with her guru and a group of his disciples. A heavy monsoon rain had fallen, but in a wide circle surrounding that group there was no rain at all. They remained seated together on the ground, in perfect comfort.

Yogananda taught that the true state of reality is “center everywhere, circumference nowhere.” Every human being is, in actual fact, the center of the universe. The more he gathers his own forces inward, unto himself, not allowing himself to be swept helplessly down the river of life like a pebble, the more he can control his own destiny.

I have written of the need to give out to others, rather than depend on what you will receive from them. You cannot give, if your mental “chickens” are scattered far and wide. You must realize, first, that all powers of accomplishment are centered in yourself.

Indeed, it goes much deeper than people generally realize. All knowledge is at your fingertips. You can acquire knowledge, talents, abilities without even studying. Schooling is useful, but it is also limiting because it makes one think he needs others to tell him how to solve all his difficulties.

I remember that in algebra class in high school we were given formulæ to help us solve our problems with the equations. I never used those formulæ, because I wanted to follow the thread of reasoning each time to its own natural conclusion. I was happy to see that, by applying myself according to my own lights, I gained more understanding, and more quickly. Languages came easily to me; abilities came easily; insights came instantly; even outward circumstances bent themselves accommodatingly to the expectations I held of them.

How much has past karma to do with our present circumstances? Well, in a way it has almost everything to do with them. Paramhansa Yogananda, however, insisted that we can in fact, by our own will, alter those karmic influences for the better. Such, indeed, is the value of having a guru: he can direct our actions in such a way as to steer us around our karmic hurdles. In the specific instance of an economic depression, which is caused by mass greed, one can create a little haven of security for himself, and even for others, by holding firmly to the consciousness of kindness and generosity.

When you give outwardly from yourself, you become a cause, rather than an effect. You take the reins in your own hands, and steer the course of your life as *you* choose, rather than as others choose for you. When you decide to be true to yourself, and not to others' expectations of you, you can mold your own destiny.

So you've lost your job, and no one else wants to employ you? Study the market. See what people need. Ask yourself, "Is there any way that I might supply at least one of those needs?"

Study yourself: Ask, "What have I got to give that is unique, or at least useful? Is there a way that I might use that knowledge, or ability, to help others? If so, how might I carve a useful place for myself?"

Have you any knowledge that others might find useful? Then advertise that ability. The rarer, perhaps, the more in demand it will be.

When my own organization threw me out on my ear (I won't go into the ins and outs of that unhappy episode), I ended up realizing that I still had something to give people: my knowledge of the yoga teachings. I then put a little one-column by one-inch ad in a local paper, and put up in various places a few very poorly designed (but at least legible!) posters, which I tried to make eye-catching, all to announce a free public lecture. Some fifty people came, liked it, and signed up for my first series of classes, which I made as economically available as possible (\$15 each for a six-week series of Hatha and Raja Yoga classes; \$25 if they signed up for them both). From that humble beginning I was able, only a few years later, to found the first Ananda community.

Have you a computer? With computers it is possible nowadays to offer assistance from afar. Perhaps you have specialized knowledge you can share with people. With Facebook, you might like to offer suggestions or advice. Whatever you offer might be backed by information they would like to know, or that would benefit them, and for which they would be glad to pay in return.

Do you play a musical instrument? Even if you don't play it well, you might be able to offer lessons to beginners.

The possibilities are endless. The important thing is to realize that you, as the epicenter of all reality, can do *anything*, provided your attitude is one of outward giving, not of inward absorbing.

## Chapter Four



I mentioned earlier the case of Germany, when it underwent hyperinflation in 1923. In the last century, several other countries suffered a sort of staggered hyperinflation, that is to say, one of them at a time. The whole world, however, these days is pegged to the dollar. What will happen if the dollar collapses? Hyperinflation will then become worldwide. I said, If. I should have said, When. It is very near total collapse already. Once the house of cards falls, it will fall very quickly indeed. Money will not be worth the paper it's printed on.

What can the individual do? Some people have recommended such collectibles as great art. Do you think a Monet painting for which you paid millions will sell for more millions of worthwhile currency when money is worth nothing? In Germany in the 1920s, such treasures were bartered in exchange for a little food.

Gold is more stable. Of all commodities, it has maintained its value fairly evenly through countless centuries. I am unsure of the exact figures, but essentially, in the eighteenth century, a man's suit cost—let us say—fifty dollars, or one ounce of gold. In the nineteenth century, it cost a hundred dollars, or one ounce of gold. In the twentieth, the same suit (virtually) cost several hundred dollars, or one ounce of gold. In this century, the suit might cost a thousand dollars, or (again) one ounce of gold. My figures certainly are inexact, but the point is obvious.

Gems have a rising value, but that value is not necessarily sustainable. In hard times, jewelry becomes a mere luxury.

Gold coins are more reliable, and easier to exchange, than bullion. They can also be sold in small bits, rather than in large bars. Banks, by the way, will be unreliable in the coming times. Countless numbers of them will fail—perhaps even all of them. The demand for gold can only increase. And its value won't go down with hyperinflation.

Silver is another commodity: more in demand than gold as being commercially *useful*, but considerably bulkier. Silver may rise in value more quickly than gold. It is more difficult, however, to transport or to store.

The trouble with both these metals is obvious: You can't eat them.

The two absolute essentials for all living creatures are food and water. And the surest place to obtain both these essentials is not in the cities, where food must be brought in from outside, and water, piped in from some source beyond individual control.

Arable land is the obvious solution. If you can be assured of an adequate water supply, perhaps in the form of a deep well, and if you can work the land, you will have the greatest chances of survival. Granted, water (the most essential of all) may evaporate or in other ways disappear. For this reason (among others), large countries are beneficial: what disappears from one region can be supplied by another. Still, owning land in the country is a much safer investment than either gold or silver.

There is another consideration also: Imagine life in the city, where trucks need to bring food to the grocery stores. And then imagine those trucks trying to force their way past hungry mobs outside but near the cities—let us say in the suburbs, or even further out—equally desirous of that food. During a massive layoff of auto workers in Detroit only recently, two men had to ride shot gun on the sides of every truck, just to get into the inner cities.

Widespread rioting, looting, crime, and violence of all kinds is much more than a possibility at such times: it is a *probability*. I'll go further: it is a certainty! Human emotions in recent times have already been stirred to fever pitch. Popular music not only reflects public attitudes: it *fans* the flames. Yes, flames! We have already seen such events, exploding for no rational cause.

And war? Well, can you really believe there won't be another war? People will say, "Who would be so stupid as to want one?" But did calm reason prevent the adolescent rioting we have seen so far? (And, yes, sixty-year-olds can be mental adolescents also.)

Atom bombs? There are over 30,000 of them stockpiled in various spots around the world. Do you seriously think no one would go *that* far? when people are willing to commit even suicide to kill others?

Where, then, would an atom bomb be more likely to be detonated: on Mt. Shasta, or on Los Angeles? On Indian Lake in upper New York State, or on Manhattan? In the Malvern Hills, or on London? Surely these alternatives don't even beg to be resolved!

No, I strongly suspect the great cities of the world will disappear. There *is bound to be* a return to the land.

If you have arable land where you can grow your own food, you may not be entirely safe, but you'll certainly be safer. You can also help others with food. Land, then, is the first and most obvious solution.

## Chapter Five



Years ago, I spent six months in a Catholic monastery called New Camaldoli. I had a little room, with a little private garden. The monastery was new, and the garden was only a fenced-in plot of ground, with nothing but a few weeds growing on it.

One day, I bought a flat of pansies to plant in it. I visualized those pansies smiling up at me from neat little beds.

About a month later I looked out the window and saw those pansies, still in their flat, wilted and dead! Shame on me!

But, let's face it, farming is simply not my *métier*. It is not that I'm lazy. I've written nearly 150 books; composed over 400 pieces of music; founded nine communities; taken about 15,000 color slides (art photos, not snapshots); traveled and lectured around the world; addressed millions of people also by television and radio: enough work, anyway, to keep me off the streets! And yet, there was that block against planting those few little pansies.

Let's face it, no one can be good at everything. A good farmer may not be a good carpenter. A good farmer and a good carpenter may still need a good doctor. Man is a social animal.

If you buy land in the country, you will need others to share it with you. The individual who can survive on his own is very rare. You'll need others to go in on the venture with you.

Whom, then, can you invite? Your own extended family members: parents, brothers, cousins, nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles? Let's face it, being part of one's own natural family is no guarantee of compatibility. One person's absorbing interest may be, to his family members, an irritating or even absurd obsession. What one person likes, the others may intensely dislike. What one regards as funny, the rest may find merely shocking, embarrassing, or trivial. Granted, families are under some obligation to care for one another, and they naturally extend help, if possible, where it is needed. Beyond this "tie that binds," however, it is not often that they are forthcoming.

One's true family are people—wherever they may be—who are of like mind with oneself.

There are people whose similarity of tastes does not incline them to work on any enterprise: drinking buddies, for example. Those with whom one can most safely embark on such a venture as building a community in the country will be people with similar ideals—the nobler the ideals, the greater the likelihood of success. That is why monasteries, in the past, were the most likely to cohere and thrive.

Nowadays, however, monasteries everywhere are nearly or entirely empty. Huge edifices that once held hundreds of monks or nuns have now been reduced to a handful of tottering old men or women in their eighties. Well, I'm in my eighties myself, and I do totter, but at least I have younger people around me to assist me physically. A way of life is needed that will attract people of all ages.

A God-centered life is the strongest guarantee, surely, of continued coherence and security. Back in the hippie era of the sixties and seventies, a study showed that the average new community then lasted only thirty days! Ananda communities, by contrast, have completed their forty-third year of existence as a way of life.

The subject of how to build enduring and mutually supportive communities is beyond the scope of this paper. I offer the idea, however, as the greatest possible bulwark against a worldwide depression. Yes, world wide. The cases of hyperinflation that have been seen in the last two centuries were isolated cases. The next depression, ending in massive hyperinflation, is destined to be worldwide. The dollar will fall, and with it, the whole world currency. The euro is no alternative. It is too late to change this rout on all fronts. Money won't be worth the paper it is printed on.

Most important of all will be a change of attitude: from taking to self-giving; from greed to kindly sympathy and practical, personal help. Finally, however, I must add that giving itself must also in a sense be receptive. For all things are reciprocal. To thrust one's benevolence on others would be a mistake. In the very act of giving, there should also be that attitude of tentativeness which asks, "Do you want to receive this from me? I want my kindness to be a sharing, not an imposition." Benevolence without respect for the receiver is a presumption.