

# Signs of Health

## Stories of Hope and Creative Change from 2009 and 2010

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by Kenn Burrows

*The strange paradox of the news business is that on any average day the world's best papers and radio and television stations are not covering the best stories. The media's attention is focused on loss, failure, deceit, murder and war. In short: on everything that's going wrong. . . . The choice to tell a better story does not mean denying or hiding from misery and abuse. Better stories change the world. . . . They promote progress, inspire the recipients and fulfill the messengers.*

—JURRIAN KAMP, veteran newsman and co-founder, Ode magazine

The world is full of complex problems and much suffering. Add a constant stream of bad news from the commercial media, and reality can seem mean and dangerous. It is easy to feel discouraged, disengaged, and afraid. Discouragement and fear are powerful forces; some people respond by becoming cynical, some by giving up and some by taking sides and fighting. These reactions take a real toll on us and don't seem to help in solving the problems that concern us.

Now contrast the above predicaments with those moments when you get a glimpse of something new, a promise of something that signals a whole different understanding. This is what “good news” does. It gives us a sense of possibilities that you had not imagined before . . . and things seem different. Good news is not about feel-good stories that mask the challenges of life; it's about inspiring solutions and creative insight that don't make the problem-oriented headlines. We need a regular dose of this inspiration and hope to maintain a healthy balance with today's challenges. Yet, this is just what gets left out of the news. War, crime, and big business are news, yet love, peace, and spirituality are not. The things that are deeply important typically lie outside the scope of conventional news.

The rest of this chapter explores solution-based stories from this last year—healing stories that embrace real change and new possibilities. These “better stories” suggest that when ordinary people use their imagination and work together, they can do extraordinary things. This news of creative accomplishment is organized into four areas: 1) Community Solutions, 2) Environmental Solutions, 3) Economic Solutions, and 4) Psychological Solutions. Each of these four areas has a unique role to play in the multidimensional reality of local and global change. These stories suggest that a better world is both possible and practical and that every day, all over the world, people are solving problems. The message is simple: stop fighting and lamenting existing reality—be an innovator and help create something better. Pass it on . . .

## COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

These stories are about using collaborative processes within communities in order to recognize, support, and act upon common needs and justice-related issues.

### Coalition of Peace Groups Permanently Shuts Down Army Experience Center

A coalition of thirty peace groups triumphed in their goal of shutting down the Army Experience Center (AEC) in a suburban shopping mall in Philadelphia. In June 2010, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that the army plans to permanently close the \$13-million, 14,500-square foot facility stationed at Franklin Mills Mall, which housed dozens of video game computers and Xbox video game consoles simulating interactive, military-style shooting games.

Former United States Army Sergeant Jesse Hamilton stated, “By portraying war as a game, the AEC glorified violence to our children. As a combat veteran, nothing makes me happier than to know that the AEC will no longer have the ability to corrupt our children’s minds and disrespect our deceased war heroes.” Teamwork among the peace groups led to the coalition’s success in shutting down the center.

**Sources:** “Peace Groups Permanently Shut Down Army Experience Center in Philadelphia,” Shut Down the Army Experience Center, press

release, June 10, 2010, <http://shutdowntheaec.net/?p=398>; Edward Colmore and Nicole Lockley, “Army Experience Center in Northeast will close,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 10, 2010, <http://www.philly.com/philly/news/local/96031939.html>.

## **Local Food Comes to a Neighborhood Near You**

Communities across the United States are turning to local food to improve health and combat obesity, strengthen the local economy, and bring fresh foods to those living in food deserts. While some school cafeterias, such as those in Boulder, Colorado, already incorporate fresh, regional produce in their menus, others have much work ahead of them, such as the University of California students who have launched a movement to serve 20 percent “real” food on campus by 2020, referring to products that are local, fairly traded, and environmentally sound. In Savannah, Georgia, the Southeastern African-American Farmers Organic Network regularly hosts farmers markets at historic Forsyth Park—a location African Americans were excluded from just decades ago. Cities like Seattle and Minneapolis fund the creation of community gardens on vacant land, and San Francisco requires that all farmers markets accept food stamps. Community gardening has even gone cyber; Web site Hyperlocavore connects “landless gardeners with land hosts” to involve everyone in the movement.

**Sources:** Ellen Mahoney, “Smarter School Lunches,” *Yes! Magazine*, January 12, 2010, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/smarter-school-lunches>; Berit Anderson, “People We Love: Hai Vo,” *Yes! Magazine*, April 13, 2010, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/america-the-remix/people-we-love-hai-vo>; Mark Winne, “African American Farmers Go Organic,” *Yes! Magazine*, March 5, 2010, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/planet/african-american-farmers-go-organic-bring-healthy-food-to-georgia-community>; Pamela O’Malley Chang, “Yard for Share: My Hyperlocavore Garden,” *Yes! Magazine*, April 13, 2010, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/blogs/pamela-omalley-chang/yard-for-share-my-hyperlocavore-garden>.

## **Outrage Turns to Action Over Supreme Court Decision on Corporate Elections Funding**

Seldom since the Dred Scott decision in 1857 has a Supreme Court ruling been so clarifying, yet viewed by so many as so wrong. Just as Dred

Scott caused outrage by declaring that black people could not enjoy full constitutional rights, the Citizens' United case is causing outrage with the declaration that corporations have the constitutional rights of people and can spend unlimited amounts of money on elections. Across the political spectrum, polls show that people oppose the decision and are getting organized to protect the rights of real people, to elect the representatives of their choice, free of the outsized influence of corporate treasuries.

**Source:** Doug Pibel, "Real People v. Corporate 'People': The Fight is On," *Yes! Magazine*, Summer 2010.

### **Ranchers and Tribes Agree to Protect Critical Salmon River**

For years, ranchers, farmers, environmentalists, and fishermen had been at loggerheads over one of the West Coast's most important salmon rivers, the Klamath River. In 2010, all the parties reached an agreement to protect the salmon on the Klamath River, following the intervention of the peoples who claim to speak for the salmon—the tribes of the Klamath Valley.

**Source:** "Western Showdown: Saving the Klamath," *Yes! Magazine*, Summer 2010, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/water-solutions/western-showdown-saving-the-klamath>.

### **Paraguayan Farmers Mobilize for Agrarian Reform**

Marching through the streets of Paraguay's capital city, Asunción, thousands of farmers raised signs and fists demanding that President Fernando Lugo follow through on his campaign promises for agrarian reform, including the distribution of land to poor farmers, and access to health care, education, and better homes and roads for rural communities. These various farmer organizations were motivated to voice their concerns after President Lugo had failed to meet promised demands after a year and a half in office.

**Source:** Benjamin Dangl, "Paraguayan Farmers Mobilize for Agrarian Reform," *Toward Freedom*, March 29, 2010, <http://towardfreedom.com/home/content/view/1903/1>.

## It's Not a Silent War: Israel's Blockade of Gaza

In response to the current blockade in Gaza, an international group of fifteen hundred men and women from forty-two nations traveled to Egypt over the New Year (2009–10) to join a Freedom March. Marchers protested the fact that a year after the attack by Israeli armed forces—destroying most of Gaza's homes, hospitals, schools, and other structures—residents have no possibility of rebuilding because their borders are closed. In addition to mobilizing communities in solidarity, some independent media, including the documentary *Roadmap to Apartheid*, has garnered awareness and supportive action for this tragic human crisis.

**Sources:** “The Silent War: Israel’s Blockade on Gaza,” World News, May 25, 2010, [http://article.wn.com/view/2010/06/14/Gaza\\_blockade\\_to\\_be\\_eased\\_within\\_days\\_declares\\_Tony\\_Blair](http://article.wn.com/view/2010/06/14/Gaza_blockade_to_be_eased_within_days_declares_Tony_Blair); Ana Nogueira, *Roadmap to Apartheid*, <http://www.grittv.org/2009/03/01/got-docs-roadmap-to-apartheid>; “Never Before Campaign,” Window into Palestine, <http://windowintopalestine.blogspot.com/2009/02/never-before-campaign.html>; “Roger Waters Records New Version of ‘We Shall Overcome,’” Musicians for Freedom, <http://musicians4freedom.com/?p=8597>.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS

We cannot be healthy if our environment is sick. Here are news stories of efforts to align culture with nature, including strategies to reduce environmental degradation caused by human activity and to restore the earth to a sound and healthy state—thereby enhancing everyone’s future.

### Permaculture—Greening the Desert

This year’s winner of the Buckminster Fuller Challenge—Allan Savory for Operation Hope—demonstrated that it is possible to apply whole-systems thinking and permaculture design principles to reverse the desertification of the world’s savannas and grasslands, thereby contributing enormously to mitigating climate change, biomass burning, drought, flood, drying of rivers and underground waters, and disappearing wildlife, and, in turn, massive poverty, social breakdown, violence, and genocide.

Educator and consultant Geoff Lawton has also cultivated permaculture on the salted land of the Dead Sea Valley, designing a strategy to harvest every drop of rain that fell onto a ten-acre area. Using man-made ditches called swales, mulch from nearby fields and micro-irrigation, he reduced the evaporation of water then planted trees. Afterward, he planted fruit trees. The bountiful harvest produced four months later proved that the desalination of the soil had been successful.

**Sources:** “Buckminster Fuller Challenge: Operation Hope: Permanent Water and Food Security for Africa’s Improverished Millions,” Buckminster Fuller Challenge Web site, [http://challenge.bfi.org/winner\\_2010](http://challenge.bfi.org/winner_2010); Geoff Lawton, “Greening the Desert Project—Outcomes Profiled,” February 2010, <http://www.growvideos.com/video/2264/Permaculture-in-Action—Greening-The-Desert>, <http://www.permacultureusa.org/2009/01/29/greening-the-desert-project-outcomes-profiled>.

## California Bans Free Plastic Bags

The California State Assembly passed Assembly Bill 1998, banning single-use carryout plastic bags at large retail establishments. California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger publicly stated his support, applauding assembly member Julia Brownley (D-Santa Monica) for her efforts in passing the bill. In accordance with new regulations, plastic bags will no longer be available to the customer, though paper bags may be purchased for a nickel each. Californians use 19 billion plastic bags every year, or about 552 per person. These bags are a major contributor to marine debris, which is responsible for the deaths of large volumes of marine life. With the implementation of this bill, there will be not only less plastic waste in our water, but also less in our landfills.

**Sources:** Brian Merchant, “California is Banning Plastic Bags,” *Treehugger*, June 7, 2010, <http://www.treehugger.com/files/2010/06/california-ban-plastic-bags.php>; “60,000 Plastic Bags are Being Used This Second: Help Slow it Down,” <http://planetgreen.discovery.com/home-garden/plastic-bag-facts.html>

## Town Bans Bottled Water Sales

The town of Concord, Massachusetts, has banned the sale of bottled drinking water to take effect at the beginning of 2011. Under the meas-

ure, refillable water containers would still be delivered and sold in town; only non-reusable plastic bottles would be banned. Supporters claim that the production of plastic water bottles uses 17 million barrels of oil each year. The beverage industry opposes the measure.

**Source:** “Town Bans Bottled Water Sales,” WCVB (ABC) TV, May 1, 2010, [www.thebostonchannel.com/news/23320994/detail.html](http://www.thebostonchannel.com/news/23320994/detail.html).

## Returning to the Soil

For every unit of food we consume using conventional agricultural methods employed in the United States, six times that amount of topsoil is lost. According to the US Food and Drug Administration, the average person eats one ton of food each year, necessitating twelve thousand pounds of topsoil. Topsoil, or dirt, is the product of the decomposition of dead organic matter and the waste products of living animals. When this material is not circulated back into the natural cycle, the soil suffers erosion and nutrient runoff, leaving the next season of plants—and those that consume them—less healthy than before. At the forefront of the movement to reduce the soil footprint of humankind is John Jeavons, who asserts that all farming on the planet takes more than it gives. With composting at the center of his system, he recommends that gardeners devote 60 percent of planting space to growing crops whose primary purpose is to add biomass to compost piles. By putting this and other strategies into practice, Jeavons says his system can increase the productivity of food and dirt sixtyfold.

**Source:** Larry Gallagher, “The Joy of Dirt,” *Ode*, March 2010, <http://www.odemagazine.com/doc/69/dirt>.

## Mail In Your Old Cell Phone and Support the Planting of Trees

Plant My Phone is a new company designed to reduce the large number of old cell phones occupying landfills. The idea is both simple and potentially far-reaching: cell phone users may send in old, unwanted cell phones using postage-paid bags available in cities like Chicago, San Francisco, and New Orleans, or on the Internet. The mailed phones are recycled, and their materials are sold to fund tree planting. According to the company’s Web site, mailing in an average two-year-old phone will result in the planting of fifteen trees. A first generation Apple iPhone in

good condition equates to the planting of seventy-nine trees. Cell phones contain heavy metals, which are toxic to the environment when not disposed of properly, thus recycling them is important because “of the 140 million old cell phones each year, only 10 percent get recycled.”

**Source:** Jake Richardson, “Plant Trees by Mailing In Old Cell Phones,” *Care2*, June 3, 2010, <http://www.care2.com/greenliving/plant-trees-by-mailing-in-old-cell-phones.html>.

## **A Win for Grid Innovation and Green Power**

Despite a massive \$46 million campaign, Proposition 16—a California ballot measure, backed by Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E), that attempted to block local governments from creating or growing their own municipal utilities—failed to pass in a June 2010 election. The measure’s failure is a major victory for its opponents—including the Sierra Club, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and local sites. Opposition voters claimed that PG&E was actively working against the incorporation of renewable forms of energy and was insincere in its arguments.

As the largest electric corporation in the United States, PG&E is often held up as an example with its activities capable of setting precedents for the hundreds of other corporate utilities across the country. Because many smaller utilities look to the company for guidance, the results of Proposition 16 have national consequences.

**Sources:** Camille Ricketts, “PG&E Loses \$46M Prop. 16—A Win for Grid Innovation,” *Beat*, June 9, 2010, <http://green.venturebeat.com/2010/06/09/pge-loses-its-46m-prop-16-battle-in-california-a-win-for-grid-innovation>; Kevin Drum, “Prop 16 and Ratepayer Rage,” *Mother Jones*, June 10, 2010, <http://motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2010/06/prop-16-and-ratepayer-rage>.

## **Bacteria May Help Oil Spill Cleanup—Bioremediation**

The greatest environmental disaster that has ever occurred to the US is looming a few miles offshore in the Gulf of Mexico. Given the amount of oil already spilled and the undetermined amount of oil still flowing up from a mile under the sea, it is impossible for the upper areas of the Gulf of Mexico to survive as we know it. There is a simple and natural

solution: oil-eating microbes. Microbes occur in nature—in fact, humans have over a pound of microbes in their bodies—and each type performs certain tasks. Some decompose plant matter, while others help break down toxins. In the last twenty years, scientists have discovered and “harvested” naturally occurring microbes from around the world so that trillions are now available to help us!

Commercially available, these microbes have been tested successfully on large oil spills around the world. The microbes are simply mixed with water and sprayed on the oil as it reaches the calmer waters near shore or onshore itself. Once applied to the oil, the microbes eat it—leaving a natural waste product that is harmless to marine life. The process can completely clean an area of oil in just a few weeks—not years. NY<sub>3</sub>, a new form of a bacteria developed at Oregon State University, may help to break down oil even faster and safer. The bacteria produce rhamnolipids, a natural, nontoxic, and biodegradable substance that breaks down oil before it has a chance to hurt ecosystems. Discovered years ago in China, researchers have made a new form that produces ten times the amount of rhamnolipids, which are safe to all life and break down naturally.

So far, British Petroleum has decided not to use microbes to clean up the Gulf Oil Spill. The Gulf Oil Spill Bioremediation Industry Alliance has been formed to bring the top bioremediation companies and their scientists together to create an implementation plan, with hope they will be called in.

**Sources:** QMI Agency, “New Bacteria May Help Oil Spill Cleanup,” *Toronto Sun*, June 13, 2010, <http://www.torontosun.com/news/world/2010/06/13/14372716.html>; “Spill Fighters Posts,” Spillfighters, June 7–10, 2010, <http://spillfighters.com/category/recent-posts> *Biomediation*; Environmental Inquiry, <http://ei.cornell.edu/biodeg/bioremed>.

## **Worldwide Climate Movement Flexes Its Muscles**

The December 2009 United Nations climate talks in Copenhagen did not produce a binding treaty, but they did galvanize a united international movement of people calling for solutions to stop runaway climate change. The movement builds on years of political organizing in Europe, the United States, and around the world: in Europe and Australia, civil

disobedience training camps have blockaded and shut down coal-fired power plants, and in the United States, rural conservatives have joined young people to protest mountaintop removal mining. On October 24, 2009, citizens in 181 countries staged demonstrations during a global day of climate action coordinated by the group 350.org, founded by author and activist Bill McKibben. In December, climate activists delivered a petition calling for an ambitious climate treaty to the United Nations with 10 million signatures.

When negotiations broke down and leaders failed to agree on a binding deal, civil society groups and countries from the Global South stepped forward to propose their own solutions. A climate conference held in May 2010 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, drew thirty thousand people. The gatherers drew up a “People’s Agreement,” which demands that wealthy nations slash their carbon emissions and pay for the damages that climate change will cause to developing nations.

**Sources:** Mark Engler, “Rise People: The Climate Justice Movement Breaks Through,” *Yes! Magazine*, Winter 2010; Jim Schultz, “Climate Talks End With People’s Agreement,” *Yes! Magazine*, Summer 2010; Richard Graves, “10 Million People Petition for Climate Action,” *Yes! Magazine*, December 8, 2010, [www.yesmagazine.org/blogs/copenhagen/10-million-people-petition-for-climate-action](http://www.yesmagazine.org/blogs/copenhagen/10-million-people-petition-for-climate-action).

## ECONOMIC SOLUTIONS

With the dollar is no longer the global reserve currency it was designed to be after World War II, economic uncertainties fill the air. And few people understand the nature of money and finance. The average American lives in a web of debt and a state of servitude to a mortgage, taxes, and a job. These news stories explore alternative systems of banking, currency, and work exchange, and call for the monetary and financial literacy necessary for a better tomorrow.

### Wall Street Banking Crisis Spurs Development of State Banks

At a time of state budget crises, North Dakota has a sizable budget surplus, and while other states are cutting back on essential services and jobs, North Dakota is adding jobs. How is it different than other states?

North Dakota is the only state in the United States that owns its own bank. Now, other states are taking notice. Massachusetts, Washington, Illinois, Michigan, and Virginia have bills introduced in their legislatures, and state leaders in Missouri, New Mexico, Hawaii, and Vermont are also calling for the study and development of state banks.

**Sources:** Ellen Brown, “More States May Create Public Banks,” *Yes! Magazine*, Summer 2010, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/water-solutions/more-states-may-create-public-banks>; Ellen Brown, “Whose Bank? Public Investment, Not Private Debt,” *Yes! Magazine*, February 19, 2010, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/new-economy/campaign-for-state-owned-banks>; Josh Harkinson, “How the Nation’s Only State-Owned Bank Became the Envy of Wall Street,” *Mother Jones*, March 27, 2009.

### **Time Banks Thrive in the Midst of the Recession**

We use money to pay for services, but what if we paid for services with services? This is precisely what is being done among people who participate in “time banks,” which are online systems that people can use to record the barter hours they earn: “Spend an hour doing something for somebody else; deposit an hour into your time bank account as a time dollar. You now have one time dollar to spend on having someone do something for you.”

The idea is that a time bank—such as Hour Exchange Portland (HEP) of Portland, Maine—provides the vehicle for a community to come together and work directly for each other without the need of traditional currency. With traditional currency, such as Federal Reserve notes, one earns money from an employer; but with time banks, one earns “time dollars” by directly engaging with members of the community. In addition to the benefit of fostering cooperation and communication within communities, time-banking helps people through difficult financial times such as recessions and market collapse. Time banking is a new way of increasing the efficiency and practicality of simple barter systems, and may be one of the key ideas needed to strengthen the cohesion, trust, and stability that many communities desire.

**Source:** Leah Dobkin and Carmel Wroth, “Time Banks Thrive in the Midst of the Recession,” *Ode*, September/October, 2009.

## Happiness, Not Economic Growth, Is Becoming the Goal

Increasing numbers of people are recognizing that growth-at-all-costs policies can't continue: growth-based policies may increase wealth for the already rich but have failed to result in broad well-being. And fast-growing economies are hitting up against limits to the planet's natural resources (like energy) and sinks for wastes (like the atmosphere). Global surveys confirm that the happiest people are not those living in countries with the highest growth rates or the most wealth, but those with the most equity, "social solidarity," work-life balance, and strong safety nets. Happiness is emerging as a substitute goal among researchers and leading policy makers in the European Union, in the Kingdom of Bhutan, within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and, increasingly, in the United States.

**Sources:** John de Graaf, "Putting the Science of Happiness Into Practice," December 6, 2009, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/putting-the-science-of-happiness-into-practice>; Richard Wilkinson and Brooke Jarvis, "Want the Good Life? Your Neighbors Need It, Too," *Yes! Magazine*, March 4, 2010, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/happiness/want-the-good-life-your-neighbors-need-it-too>.

## Altruism and Economics

In order to bridge a municipal budget deficit, the City of Yonkers, New York, planned to terminate six of its firefighters. The men and women of the Yonkers Fire Department, however, saw another possibility to overcoming their city's economic crisis: by a 75 percent majority, they chose to work without pay enough time, over six months, to save the city the money needed to save their fellow firefighters' jobs.

The president of the local firefighter's union, Patrick Brady, stated that the firefighter's union "banded together and voted to save our brethren." By cooperating in partnership and solidarity, the firefighters of the City of Yonkers were not only able to save the jobs of six of their colleagues, they likewise contributed to the overall safety of their community, and demonstrated the strength of altruism over personal material gain. This story is an illustration of how an economic problem can be addressed with new ways of thinking about economics, such as realizing the long-term value of fostering harmonious group and com-

munity dynamics, rather than merely cutting jobs so that the money comes out “right.”

**Source:** Jeremy Mercer, “The Altruism in Economics,” *Ode*, May 2009.

## **Worker Ownership Burgeoning in the United States**

Corporate outsourcing and trade policies that encourage the movement of production to the world’s lowest-wage countries had already created long-term unemployment and community decline before the 2008 economic crash. But in the last two years, these trends have only gotten worse. Those facts are well covered in the media, but what is unreported is the growth of cooperatives, which are creating the sorts of jobs that can’t pick up and move overseas, while helping some communities make a green economic recovery. Worker-owned co-ops are just one segment of the 30,000 cooperative business in the US generating \$500 billion in revenue.

**Sources:** J. Trimarco and Jill Bamburg, “Worker Co-ops: Green and Just Jobs You Can Own,” *Yes! Magazine*, Summer 2009; Ted Howard, Steve Dubb, and Gar Alperovitz, “Cleveland’s Worker-Owned Boom,” *Yes! Magazine*, Summer 2009.

These cooperatives are among the many inspired by the Mondragon cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain: Georgia Kelly and Shaula Massena, “When Worker-Owners Decide How to Ride Out a Downturn,” *Yes! Magazine*, Summer 2009.

## **Citizen Budgeting Comes to the US**

Born in Porto Alegre, Brazil, participatory budgeting has come to Chicago’s 49th Ward, the first place in the United States to adopt the practice that allows taxpayers to directly decide how to spend public money. Over 1,600 community members got involved in the process: proposing project ideas, planning budgets, and voting on what they felt was most important. Participatory budgeting has already spread to cities throughout Latin American and Europe, where the process keeps government spending transparent, adapts governmental priorities to people’s needs, and makes democracy palpable.

**Sources:** J. Lerner and M. Antieau, “Chicago’s \$1.3 Million Experiment in Democracy,” *Yes! Magazine*, April 20, 2010, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/chicagos-1.3-million-experiment-in-democracy>; Jeff Raderstrong, “Chicago Ward Tries Citizen Budgeting,” *Yes! Magazine*, Spring 2010.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

These news stories emphasize the importance of our state of mind, of the beliefs and views we hold, and show how we can expand these limited perspectives. And when we do expand our perspectives, everything else seems to change—notably our health, and our capacity to create, relate, and succeed.

### The Power of Hope

Any experience of utter powerlessness—whether a serious illness, a robbery, or a rape—leaves emotional scars. If persistent, these feelings of powerlessness and despair can weaken our body’s natural defense systems, leaving us more vulnerable to the very illnesses we fear. A study from University of California–Berkeley has suggested the power that negative thinking holds by analyzing patients’ answers to two questions: “Do you feel it is impossible for you to achieve the goals you’ve set yourself?” and “Do you get the feeling your future is hopeless and is it difficult to believe things will get better for you?” Participants who replied “yes” to both questions were three times more likely to develop cancer in the six years thereafter, and four times more likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease such as heart attack or brain hemorrhage. Awareness of the power of hope is the first step in regaining some measure of control over our body and our emotions.

**Source:** David Servan-Schreiber, “The Power of Hope,” *Ode*, April/May 2010, <http://www.odemagazine.com/doc/70/The-power-of-hope>.

### Change Your Mind in Troubled Times—Try Good News & Intelligent Optimism

Tired of the focus on doom and gloom that that surrounds us these days? *Ode* magazine sheds light on people solving problems and on the positive things being reported around the world.

Every January, *Ode* raises awareness of good news by honoring twenty-five “Intelligent Optimists”—leaders and change agents who are changing the world with their creativity and commitment. If you know someone who is making a big difference, make a nomination.

Sign up to receive good news daily via e-mail: <http://www.odemagazine.com/p/good-news>

**Source:** “Intelligent Optimists,” *Ode*, January 2010, [http://www.odemagazine.com/intelligent\\_optimists](http://www.odemagazine.com/intelligent_optimists).

## Art and Imagination—Creating Comics for the Middle East

Jordanian comic book artist Suleiman Bakhit explains why Superman, Spiderman, and Batman, are not fit for Middle Eastern youth: “We cannot relate to these Western heroes, because they’re so out of tune with our cultural values and our daily experiences.” Bakhit says that a Middle Eastern superhero would not “leap tall buildings in a single bound,” but rather would provide youth with the “inspiration to deal with the challenges of their daily lives.” And, he continues, “there are few if any public leaders that youth can relate to.”

Bakhit was studying at an American university at the time of the 9/11 attacks and recalled feeling attacked himself by others who judged him based on his appearance. The negativity he felt from others spurred his attention to “reducing people’s fear of Muslims and the Middle East.” He spoke at elementary schools and answered questions from the children. When one child asked him what the Arab superheroes look like, he began drawing comics to give the youth of the Middle East the heroes and role models they were lacking. “[Middle Eastern youth] were always told what to read and what to believe,” he says. “That needs to change, and it’s already changing.” Bakhit plans to post his comic books online in Arabic and English.

**Source:** Marco Visscher, “Creating Comics for the Middle East,” *Ode*, May 2009.

## Cultivating Worldview Literacy—High School Pilot Program

Globalization, technology, and urbanization have sparked a need for an adapted curriculum that emphasizes creativity and learning from a range of perspectives beginning early in one’s educational career. To address

this need, the Institute of Noetic Sciences has begun the Worldview Literacy Project, a large-scale initiative dubbed Seeds of Change, which aims to promote awareness by celebrating diverse outlooks in California classrooms. The program, which began as a curriculum created for students from kindergarten to twelfth grade, facilitates learning through a systems level of understanding—how everyone and everything is interconnected and valuable. It consists of fifteen lessons, with disciplines ranging from science to poetry, using paired dialogue, small group processes, and class discussions to explore the unique beliefs, attitudes and assumptions of the students.

Over the past several months, Seeds of Change has been piloted at Bay Area high schools. High school-age students who had felt disconnected from both the curriculum and the idea of working with classmates on a more intimate level showed a noticeable change in disposition after eight weeks. They began incorporating new students into discussions, sitting together, and saving room in their circles for any late arrivals. Students once uninterested in school became noticeably enthusiastic about the learning that was taking place through interactions with fellow classmates. “Consciousness is all it takes for one to transform and transcend the obstacles we face in life and really see the beauty of life that surrounds us,” one student said of her experience in the program. “I am learning how to know myself and recognize all that’s meaningful and authentic to me.”

**Sources:** Liz Miller, “Cultivating Worldview Wisdom,” *Noetic Post*, Fall/Winter 2009–10, [www.noetic.org](http://www.noetic.org); Liz Miller, “‘IONS’ Worldview Literacy Program: Notes from the Field,” *Noetic Post*, Fall/Winter 2009–10.

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To further your exploration of creative solutions, integrative thinking, and an expanded definition of health and activism, see the Web site for the Holistic Health Learning Center, San Francisco State University, with its extensive set of links and articles: <http://www.sfsu.edu/~holistic/Links.html>.

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