

TRANSCRIPT

Jem Bendell - Acceptance & Evolution in the Face of Meltdown: Deep Adaptation, Climate Change, and Societal Collapse

by Jem Bendell with Amisha Ghadiali

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Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): Jem, it's so wonderful to see you and have you on the show. And to be here in Bali. We've done our best to make the space quiet. But the beauty of Bali is that there's always... nature's always present. And so, we can hear the birds, and maybe some other things in the background. But it kind of adds to the reality of what we're talking about, and being in the world.

I really enjoyed spending time with you yesterday at the Green School, and being with these amazing 15-year-olds, discussing your paper and your work. Seeing the kind of questions that they have, and the reactions that they were holding.

Can you share with us where this notion of "Deep Adaptation" came from, in terms of your own research, but [also] perhaps your own journey?

Jem Bendell: Hmm. Yeah, I'm still very... I'm still digesting what happened yesterday. It's only the third time I've spoken to a group of people since my report came out, my Deep Adaptation report came out in July, [2018]. I was worried, because it's a very difficult message I'm offering, which is the inevitability of climate-induced societal collapse, soon; I guessed at within 10 years.

I think any prediction is just a guess, because we live in complex human systems. So it's not just trying to work out what's happening in the climate, but also then having guesses at how that will impact on food systems, and on political systems, and so on.

I was impressed with how they were so immediately open to explore what does this mean for their lives and their choices. And seemed to be very comfortable with sharing in front of each other, their classmates, about emotions, and confusion, and how this really does change everything in terms of what they're going to focus on, for what they're going to study, what they're going to aspire to.

I think "curious!" They were curious, and that's quite different from the presentations I gave to adults, where there's more grieving – there's much more grieving I experience when I present this to an adult audience. And I still haven't quite processed why that is. It might be because children have less to unlearn, have less invested in existing stories. Maybe less of a sense of responsibility for others. I'm not sure. But it was fascinating.

I guess I've already said something about the work. How did I arrive at this conclusion, and then offer a framework, which I've labeled "Deep Adaptation?"

I became an environmentalist in 1988 when it was really high in the public eye in the UK. It was the year Chico Mendez was murdered – the Brazilian trade-union leader – murdered because of his environmental activism. It was the year when the Green Party had their biggest ever election result in, I think, the European elections. So there was a real awakening in the UK at the time.

And that coincided with me, as a 15-, 16-year-old, myself back then, becoming connected to more existential questions about "Why am I alive?" And, at the time, then, Christianity was the thing for me to look into. And so I decided back then that... I talked about it back then as "The world would be my church. And my work would be my worship." And that meant environmentalism.

So, since then, I was driven – that was my purpose. It was a purpose connected to a concept of the transcendent, and it was an answer to this existential crisis: "What's the purpose of my life? My life's going to end one day." I think teenagers around that age do become much more conscious of their own mortality. And at University, in my geography degree, I studied climate science. And then I decided, "Ah! Okay, to do something about this, I can't be a climate scientist – that's pointless – I need to try and work on economics and politics and business and finance, and so on."

So then I went and worked in the sustainable business field, for most of my career. I mean, I'm now a Professor in that field. I was in senior management in the World Wildlife Fund, and we were doing a lot of corporate responsibility work. For the last few

years, seeing all this information about the latest trends in climate, the latest impacts on permafrost, and ice caps melting, and so on – it meant that I had this suppressed panic, because I knew these things I was seeing were the... In front of my eyes, the very worst case predictions from when I was studying climate in 1993, being taught by an oceanographer and looking at the ice cores (pulled) and all the paleo-climatology stuff.

It was like a horror movie unfolding before my eyes, and I couldn't postpone it any more. I had to take time off and actually go back to the science myself, to see, well... I can't sit on the fence anymore. I have to look at it again, for myself. So I took time to look at the various different papers, and where there was a dispute about the situation of methane in the permafrost, I would then go and find out the latest from the research institutes and also the latest measurements of methane in the atmosphere.

Through that process, I ended up realizing that we have many signs of already "runaway climate change," meaning that we're not in control. So for example: The fires in California, at the moment, are contributing as much to America's carbon emissions as all their energy consumption this year, according to one study. It's just yet another example of: Once the changing climate impacts on the biosphere, it then releases more carbon, but also absorbs more energy. So with the "albedo effect" on the bouncing off of the light coming into the Arctic: 95% of all light that comes in hits the ice and the light goes back into space. Once that's melted, then 95% is absorbed into the Arctic Ocean, and therefore some scientists – top, top scientists like Professor Peter Woddens (???) – say that if we lose the Arctic... It's equivalent to 50% of all the warming from people since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. So if we've got 1-point-something already [i.e. 1.5 degrees C warming] from our own activities, that immediately puts us over the tipping point.

So I looked at all that, and I thought: "My own truth, based on this, is that it's too late for us to control this. We are going to have increasingly disruptive and catastrophic effects on our own lives. And the key concern is the impact on agriculture."

So, my paper came out in July, [2018,] but that was before the latest data about the 2018 Northern Hemisphere summer. It wasn't just in Britain or in Europe; it was across the whole of the northern hemisphere. In most countries, they'd experienced between 25 to 35 percent reduction in grain or vegetable output. That's because we rely so much on rain-fed agriculture. That's just with one summer! My conclusion was, we will have some form of collapse, by which I meant: a breakdown in the normal ways that we gain

our sustenance, security, identity, entertainment – the normal way of life that most of us experience.

And of course it's already happening for some people. Many people when they hear this say: "Well, I think breakdown's already begun." And they point to poverty, mental health, or what's happening across the global South. Lives are being ruined already.

So, with Deep Adaptation, I felt that people in my field – sustainable business, sustainable development policy fields – knew this, deep down. But they were scared of accepting this, because it would question everything – about their career, their profession, the projects they were working on, their identity, who they are. And therefore they were scared that despair would set in, and therefore depression; they wouldn't get out of bed in the morning. They were also scared about what accepting this might mean in terms of What do they tell other people? What do they tell the public? Many of the people working in this field are very focused on communicating publicly, and thinking about "How do we tell better messages?" So there was a lot of fear there, and I felt that was blocking acceptance. And I also felt that unless we begin to accept where we're at, we can't have generative conversations about what do we do now.

So I offered Deep Adaptation as an invitation for people in that kind of position to explore. It doesn't mean it's "the end" of your work, to accept collapse is inevitable. Not at all. It just means there's going to be a new agenda.

It was very simple! I just introduced three questions, because I don't have answers. This is an entirely new field for me, as much as it is for anyone else. So I offered Resilience, Relinquishment, and Restoration. Basically, Resilience meaning, asking ourselves: What is it we most value, that we most want to keep, ahead of, during, and beyond collapse. Relinquishment: What is it that we really must let go of, because if we don't, we'll make matters worse? And Restoration: What is it that we've lost, because of our industrial-consumer civilization, our busy-ness, our assumptions of what progress is – What is it that we've lost that we need to bring back? Or that would be useful to bring back, to help us soften the collapse and find equanimity, peace, joy, kindness, creativity – ahead of, during, and beyond collapse?

And I deliberately, therefore, framed Deep Adaptation not as a "progressivist" thing. All those "three Rs" are not about inventing something new. It's not about "the new." It's about going deep inside, into what we most value. Rather than the stuff we prioritize because of fear, or busy-ness, or status, or what was expected of us from friends and family and employers, but delving deep into what we most value. Relinquishment is very

much the “letting go,” and Restoration, the “bringing back.” So this wasn’t a “progressivist” framing. We need to stop – stop thinking we can go forward. And we need to rethink everything.

So that was the “offer.”

I thought, when I published that paper, it was going to be a bit of an ending for me. Because I was sort of saying that my past work to some degree is redundant now; the paradigm is over, and we need a new paradigm. I did wonder what that would mean for my work, and who I work with, and my University job, and so on.

But what’s happened is, surprisingly, that report exploded around the world. It appeared all over the world. I had people from all corners of the globe writing to me, in all kinds of institutions. I’d have NASA scientists, or EU (European Union) bureaucrats writing to me, but then I’d have a single mother with an 18-month-old baby writing to me, saying she’s crying while writing to me. I had people who were religious leaders in America writing to me about the role of religion in the end times. I had people writing to me who were joining movements to launch direct action. It was suddenly an explosion of connection and emotion, which put me into a bit of a spin, which I guess I’m still in.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): Did you feel lonely with all this information, in all these years that you’ve been looking at the research, and then actually putting together this paper? Do you feel like you were holding a piece of information that wasn’t reflected in the conversations, or in the daily life that you had?

Jem Bendell: Yeah. The origin of this was: I was asked to give a keynote speech a couple of years ago at an institute I helped set up in Australia 10 years ago; so it was a 10th anniversary, and I was asked to give a keynote. And it was all about “Pulling together! We can do this! We can stop climate change.” And there were going to be hundreds of climate policy people in the audience. And I decided to do a very different talk, where I said: “In my world, this seems no longer true.” So, this was December, 2016. And I mentioned I was coming up with Deep Adaptation as a framing.

I didn’t realize at the time, that what I was talking about was so certain or so soon. But the reaction I got from people, in the coffee break after my talk, was incredible. People were coming up and saying: “Thank you for being so brave! You’re saying what I already feel, but I don’t feel we have any permission to talk about and recognize in each other, let alone spend professional time working out ‘What does that mean we do?’ Or,

at least, “What does that mean we *stop* doing to create space to start thinking about what new to do?”

That stayed with me. It gave me a sense that people would welcome this. And I could find powerful conversation and community if I was more open, more often. And then there was someone who got in touch to say he’d been using that speech to frame his grant-making, in Britain, funding community development initiatives. Exploring what “relinquishment” would mean for their community. And funding artists to explore what these ideas meant. When I heard that, as well, that was further encouragement.

After that conversation, I thought, “Okay, I can commune with people, I can connect with people on this topic.” So then I knew I needed to delve deeper. I needed to really look at the research, get my head ‘round this, and actually produce something more coherent and publish it. So that’s what I did.

So, yes, there was loneliness... Hmm. It’s interesting you ask that question, because... I used to fear being unemployed, or unable to get contracts as a consultant, because I thought I needed income to avoid being lonely. And that’s because I only ever lived in expensive city environments in growth economies, consumer economies, rat-raced based, mortgaged lives, where “Oh shit, I can’t afford a house!” Or, “I can’t afford the rent!” So I kinda thought, to have the lifestyle I want, to be the person I can be, and therefore not be lonely, I needed a career and I needed money. And I think that was trapping me. That was holding me back from exploring the world more fully and expressing my truth as I see it.

So I think it was the fact I was here in Bali for six months, and I discovered that I could be loved, just as one of a group that played together, rather than as Professor Jem Bendell, with career and a hundred publications, and a “young global leader,” and former U.N. (United Nations) person, and all that crap. I was just enjoying being in community with people here and learning together through conversation, and play, and dance and all manner of things.

And that gave me a foundation to then talk publicly about this with less fear, because I didn’t mind losing any of my old identity, old forms of income, all that. I didn’t mind losing my profession.

So, yes, loneliness was a factor, but in a slightly different way. I’ve been impressed in the power, the depths of connection I’m now experiencing, through talking openly about this topic. Because what I’m doing is talking openly about grief, loss, impermanence,

panic, fear, trauma, and despair. Fear of depression. But I'm also talking quite openly about what else is true, or even what's the answer to all those things I've just listed. Which is: Love, including compassion, connection, wonder at Nature, at people, at our creativity, at our resilience.

My way of relating with people has changed incredibly this year. And my way of relating to myself has changed. I'm not denying who I am and trying to fit into a role that I've chosen to tell myself is the better me or the more responsible me. So I'm more loving to myself, as well.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): And has that freed up more space in yourself to dive deeper into the work and into understanding fully where we are?

Jem Bendell: It's still early days, for me. I am still, some days more than others, at some deep level, petrified. And I'm still, when I tune into that, on the verge of tears. I'm petrified on many levels, but one is the idea that..."What am I doing? What am I putting myself forward to offer to others? Who am I to do any of that?" I am someone who has not been open to the emotions and experiences of life to the extent some other people have been by my age, 46. I almost like, gave my life to my cause, and I was very "in my head." So, I'm a novice when it comes to emotional awareness, or grieving, or tending to other people's grief, and all that. I'm a complete novice in this.

My answer is "Yes," by looking inward and going deeper, I am feeling like I am... This is part of the work. This is part of, therefore, what I can help other people with. And that's becoming clearer to me recently, as I persuade more people to work on this topic.

Getting busy with action can be a distraction from full acceptance of our predicament. Where our predicament is: We don't know. We don't know what the best things to do are, anymore. And we don't know whether whatever we do, with the best intention, will work.

That is not a reason for inaction. But the problem is, is when that reality... If you can't deal with that because your own emotional equanimity is based on feeling like you know the world, you know how things are, and therefore you have security on the basis of somehow having psychological or intellectual "control" of your surroundings, and stuff. If you have great difficulty moving into that space of uncertainty and insecurity, then a lot of the ideas your coming up with about what to do, to develop local resilience or national-level collapse-readiness... I think it looks a bit manic. It's about trying to snatch security from a fundamentally insecure and unknowable situation.

And then what happens is, is that we get all a bit combative. I can see people get combative about “My idea! My world-view! Not yours.” I’m beginning to get a sense that my work in future could be around bringing back people to a sense of calm in the face of not knowing, and that we can have curious, kind, joyful dialogue where we don’t need to prove ourselves right, in order to make ourselves less petrified.

So, yeah! What does that mean I do? I’m not sure. (Laughs.) I’m having a conversation with you about it, I suppose. That’s doing something, isn’t it?

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): Kind of! (Both laugh.) We’re definitely doing something. I feel like I want to invite us, and all of our friends listening to just take a few breaths. It’s a lot, what we’re talking about!

(They breathe together.)

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): It feels like what you’re saying, underneath, is that it’s about detaching to the ideals of this system that we’ve been brought up in. It’s about beginning to really “let go,” of all of the trappings of that system so that we can allow something else to arise.

Jem Bendell: Yes. And I recognize... And it was good that you’ve brought us back to this sense of relationship with your listeners. Because I realize what I’m saying is... It’s much easier for me to explore this than it is for many people. So many people have mortgages, family responsibilities – whether it’s children or elderly parents – and a sense of responsibility to their organization. So many organizations are doing good things serving... In my case, University serving students, or whatever. So there’s that everyday busy-ness, and decent meaning within that.

So for me, or people like me, to come along and say these kinds of things, which you summarized so well, which is about stopping, doing less, letting go, allowing despair with a faith that there will be a new way forward after that; it will emerge for you. I realize it’s much easier said than done.

And, therefore, I guess the first message is: Be patient with yourself. I mean, I work on this stuff. I first starting thinking about this properly in November, 2016, ahead of my speech, and then I just shared some ideas. And then it took me until January 2018 to actually properly start looking into this. And I’m a Professor of Sustainability Leadership. This is central to my being!

So: Patience! Know that no one should change their whole lives on the basis of just hearing one person talk about these types of things. You need to look into it for yourself. Look at the analysis of people like me, looking at the latest climate science and saying it's too late to stop a collapse of our society because of climate impacts on agriculture, and then knock-on impacts on financial systems. You have to look at that, and integrate it to the extent that you believe it for yourself. And then be patient about how you will change your life. Because otherwise, this will just be disturbing, and confusing, and potentially just spoil your way of life now, without bridging you into a new way.

I'm conscious that I'm a novice on this, and I've only started talking publicly properly about this since the report came out in July [2018]. And I'm learning how people integrate this. Some people are just changing everything – dropping everything and joining the Extinction Rebellion. I know a few people who are becoming leaders within that – I know a few people who have done that since waking up to the idea of imminent collapse. But other people will respond in other ways. It could be just that you stop stressing over your Inbox, and your angry boss. And you just go to work every day in a spirit of loving-kindness. And you decide you won't work late, and you'll go home and you'll spend more time with your children. And you'll pick up the phone and talk to your lonely mother. Rather than being so exhausted with work. You know, it can be simple stuff. A rebalancing. Patience, rebalancing, doing less attached to the current... It's basically losing some respect for the current system. That will flow through in many ways.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): It could be choosing to have less drama in your relationships, for example.

Jem Bendell: Hallelujah! (Both laugh.)

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): It's almost just an acknowledgement of "Life is short," in a grander sense.

Jem Bendell: Yes. Thank you! I'm having one of those moments where I spent ages to say something which is obvious. Thank you for summarizing so well! Yes, it's "Life is short. Less drama. Love everyone. Love yourself." Yes! That's number one when you're processing this kind of information.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): But I also feel like there's a lot of information that makes this all feel a bit more real. And a few of the examples that you shared yesterday, I feel they would be useful. So for example, the way in which climate change

is at the core of what's been happening in Syria. You could share that as what's been happening as an example. Also, what's been happening, or what's going to happen around food. Because I think that some of this stuff is still quite hard for anyone to comprehend that it's real. I mean, you go read a few reports, but what does reading a report mean when you look around and everything seems the same. And when you watch the news and your politicians are talking about something else. And it's always the same as when you read a beautiful piece of spiritual work and you see a new reality, and it doesn't feel reflected in everything around you. You know? So I wondered if you could just drop us a little bit into how this is very real, and it is happening.

Jem Bendell: So where are we at with the evidence for inevitable, near term, societal collapse because of rapid climate change?

So we could start with basics on the climate itself. The last four years were the hottest ever on record. The way climate change will impact on human society, our very civilization, is through food and finance. So for example: sea-level rise will be devastating over a long duration, but we can deal with it. So it would disrupt ports, and cities, and some agricultural lands, but the pace of it is such which we could adjust. The wildfires we're seeing, which are truly terrifying, again, to a degree, we can adjust. For me, where climate change is already immediately impacting on human society is through food, and soon through finance.

You mentioned Syria. Analyses of what happened in Syria, with the breakdown of a very... – places like Aleppo were World Heritage sites, with loads of tourists, booming cultural centers – and suddenly that country is ripped apart. Obviously, there's a political dimension to it, and interference from various different foreign groups. But the key was a collapse in agriculture, leading to rapid rural-urban migration. So they had the worst drought for 800 years, just running up to 2011, and this meant that you had a lot of people who had moved from their traditional livelihoods and jobs and family structures and cultural relationships, suddenly, then, squatting in cities. And with no income. And with no sense of belonging. That real disruption to their life.

In such a situation, the government helped a bit, but also community groups, foreign aid agencies, but significantly the mosques. And the mosques were also being funded by the Gulf States, with very much a radicalizing agenda. And there were many other reasons, in terms of what was happening in Iraq, but it meant that the conditions all came together where you would then have a rise in extremist, militarized groups. Now, that's not to say that the government was a good government, and it's not to say there isn't blame on all sides.

But the disruptions to ways of life, leading to mass urban migration, leading to people being vulnerable, and turning... Because what also was happening there, which could be happening elsewhere, which is that people no longer believe in the future. They no longer believe the idea that they just work hard, and conform, and then they'll have a good life, or a good-enough life, and their children will have a better life. When people stop feeling like that, and there's desperation and confusion, then that's a context for either radicalization, or even just allying with the strongman in power in government. It's not a very conducive context for compassion... Well, for some people it is. And my hope is that we can respond with more compassion in such contexts. But in the case of Syria, unfortunately, it then led to an awful civil war. And in that country, I think "collapse" is a good description for what's happened there.

The concern is: we only have four months of global grain reserves. And so if we have about 25-35% reduction in Northern Hemisphere grain production in 2018, we only need that to happen for another couple of summers and then we've got mass starvation, including in the West.

When I say that... Okay the FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the U.N.) reports that we've got almost 900 [million] people malnourished in the world today, anyway, and that malnutrition is rising, and climate is the main systemic driver of growing hunger over the last three years, already. But "we ain't seen nothing yet," if we have more summers like 2018.

And also the El Niño effect, which is this Pacific current, which typically doesn't happen more than every 5 to 7 years. It finished in 2016. It's already coming back. It will kick in properly within the next 12 months. Last time, that produced droughts in East Asia, which therefore impacted significantly the production of rice in Viet Nam, Thailand, and elsewhere, to the extent that they then banned exports of rice.

So if you can imagine, all we need is the El Niño to kick in properly towards the end of 2019, and the 2019 Northern Hemisphere summer and 2020 Northern Hemisphere summer to be like 2018, which is not unlikely. Then we have a global food crisis. Literally, just within a few years.

Now, we could respond to that in a way which wouldn't lead to collapse. We could focus on the most important thing, which is keeping people fed and watered. When I say "the most important thing," I mean more important than having a free market in food, and restaurants and hotels, and food processing, and supermarkets.

The thing is, we have such a combative political system, in so many countries, and a combative media, that... Are we going to be clever enough to say: "Hmm. Okay, we do need centrally planned food systems, to avoid malnutrition, and therefore civil unrest?" It doesn't mean you can't go shopping for your T.V., or your next iPhone, but for food, we have to keep everyone fed. And therefore, it does mean that certain types of restaurants will close. It does mean that we would probably ban any grains being fed to cattle. And of course, in the current paradigm, we would obviously see people up in arms: "You just destroyed my industry! You just wiped off the share value of my big investment!" If you're in the meat industry, for example.

This is why it's going to be so difficult. Because we are going to have to make dramatic decisions to respond. For example, right now, we should be having a massive investment, government-led, in building greenhouses, irrigated greenhouses, in Britain and across northern Europe. Because we need to have an insurance policy, a real one, against the potential collapse of rain-fed agriculture next summer and the summer after. I mean, Spain has a lot hotter weather than Britain, but it produces more [vegetables from agriculture] than Britain, because it's all under plastic and it's all irrigated.

Now, that means there will need to be difficult decisions made, I presume, around planning laws, and water tables, and rivers, and so on. A typical environmental narrative would be "Oh no! That's going to damage biodiversity! That sound like a techno-centric solution. That's not rewilding, that's not agro-ecology." And no, it's not. But the thing is, if Britain or other countries fall apart because of civil unrest, because people can't eat, then I don't think we're going to have much widespread support for, say, transforming industrial agriculture more generally, and rewilding things and cutting carbon emissions and reforestation. If societies are in upheaval, and people just want to focus on feeding their kids, I think a lot of these things will just fall away.

So I think preparing for bold measures to adapt to disruption to our normal way of life is not a distraction from mitigation, at all. As in reduction of carbon dioxide, or capturing more carbon dioxide in ecosystems. It's not an abandonment of the view that we can transition to a more beautiful, caring, post-consumerist way of life. Not at all. I actually think that if we don't face up to these realities, and make quick decisions, bold decisions now, we're setting ourselves up for more traumatic collapse.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): So essentially, these are the last few years of being able to do all these things, like reforestation and all of these sustainable initiatives, in a place where we're choosing to do them. And then if we miss that boat, which it feels like

we are doing, given how high this stuff is on most government agendas and budgets – as in, it's not! – that we're basically setting ourselves up for a situation where it's just all going to be very immediate, around "What are we eating today?" And it's going to be a lot of hungry citizens.

Jem Bendell: I would return to the issue of "We don't know what will work." I've talked about emergency efforts to keep people fed and watered despite the possible collapse of rain-fed agriculture, as if 2018 is the start of the collapse of rain-fed agriculture in the Northern Hemisphere. We should be doing that now. We absolutely should be doing that now. We should also be preparing for "Okay, what happens if we have issues with food supply? How are we going to manage that in a market economy?"

It doesn't mean it will avoid a complete collapse of society. What I'm saying is it would at least buy us time. It would mean at least we don't make matters worse through our inaction or our delusion. I think some of the stories we're hearing in the environmental movement about we only have a certain number of years to stop catastrophe, and therefore people don't talk about adaptation *to* catastrophe, I think that's unhelpful. Because I think we need to act now on the basis that a collapse of our agricultural systems is coming, or is actually upon us already. That will buy us more time for mitigation and a transformation of culture and values, and so on.

It doesn't mean we succeed.

And therefore we have to sit with that. We have to accept that we may not grow old. That we may just be facing a future of grief and loss and insecurity. Yeah. So we need to act without certainty.

So, yes, absolutely, I would say this is the last... Hmm. No I don't want to say that! Because, no, even if there's a massive irrigated greenhouse building program in three years time, and even if people start doing "Marine Cloud Brightening" in the Arctic in three years, say, when "Oh, there's no sea ice!" in September, say, of 2021. And then it's only at that point that people think: "Oh, let's brighten the clouds and try and bring the ice back." It's not too late, but we really should be doing all that now.

Do I believe we will? I do not believe we will, sufficiently at scale, in enough countries, for it not to lead to civil unrest and breakdown in societies, and therefore more refugees and... Yeah...

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): And a lot of disruption.

Jem Bendell: Um hmm. (Yes.) So, it's a heavy thing to live with.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): Yeah.

Jem Bendell: As I talk about it now with you, I think it raises a question of how do we live with... If this becomes your own perspective, as it has mine, how do you live with that? It's all well and good me saying it, intellectually, that we need to act without certainty. So my response to the potential "Siren call to action" was: "Yeah, absolutely. But it probably won't work." (Laughs) So how do you live with that?

It's an invitation to spiritual questions. It's an invitation to spiritual practice. It's an invitation to tune into what you most love. But also, I think, we probably need to work out how to help each other through forms of stress relief and fun distraction which don't add up to denial or delusion.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): That's quite a tall order! To find distraction that doesn't add up to denial, or delusion!

Jem Bendell: Yeah. But I think if I'm always talking about this stuff with everyone all day... I already know that a few of my most important relationships have become dominated by this topic. And we've noticed that, and, at the same time as bringing us closer, breaking open our hearts, we all realize that we don't want this to be what our relationship is only about. So I'm still working on that one.

I've come to a realization that just because an awareness of collapse has brought me to a point where I'm going to stop working on what I used to work on, and at the moment I'm working on collapse and bringing people's attention to this and inviting people to drop the taboo, and have creative, generative dialogue about what do we do now, that doesn't mean I should stay working on that in the future. You know, I can just integrate this and then maybe something else is true and real.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): Totally.

Jem Bendell: I'm not a very good musician or painter or anything, so I'm not quite sure what I'd end up doing. But I think I don't want to just get stuck, in the next ten years, of being the proverbial sandwich-board man walking up and down digital street saying "The end of the world is nigh!" That's a pretty depressing vision for myself.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): (Laughs)

—break—

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): As I've sat here, I've felt everything that we've been talking about. I'm sure all of our friends listening can feel the energy and the emotion that is here in this space. And yet, perhaps because of my spirituality, I feel okay with everything you've just shared. I feel in a place where I can accept that this is what's happening, or what we perceive is happening, because I also feel like there is this space for a mystical component that we don't understand or know, and can't predict. And, I don't even know what that is. I don't even know if that is something that will support us, or actually speed up destruction. I don't know, but I sense there is more to this than the science.

Jem Bendell: Yeah. The strange joy of climate change is the invitation to look, right now, at questions that we sideline in our busy-ness to be respected; loved, even. It is, with me and other people I know, it's making us really think about what is... "Why are we alive?" and "How do we wish to live?" and "What's important to us?"

So the grieving and the despair that comes from looking at the latest trends, head on, fully integrating it. The grief and despair can be transformative. In some perspectives, it's almost like a... it's a very tough blessing, in that it's... Many people don't think about this until later in life. Or until they, say, get a terminal diagnosis. Or until someone they love deeply dies suddenly.

And then, those sorts of things get people to reflect deeper on the meaning of life. Some people then reach out to certain religious or wisdom traditions. This is an invitation to do that. And that's really interesting. Because then do you want to... In my case, I'm wondering: Is it the ego that wants to keep me involved in "doing," keep me involved publicly in this stuff. Or is it a particular spiritual path, like an engaged spiritual life. Because another part of me wants to disengage. Learn more ways to return myself to a state of equanimity and bliss, no matter what. But I still have a bit of a story around that being a bit selfish. (Laughs)

So if you see the spiritual invitation of climate change, then there are many different ways of walking that spiritual path. Some people may choose to become better able at helping people with trauma, and panic, and grief, and therefore sort of mitigating the emotional side of climate change. Other people will choose another path, from spiritual awakening because of this predicament.

I'm often asked, now, about: "Oh, Jem! This sounds hopeless! And you've got no vision." And I think what we're talking about now is where, for me, hope and vision are. Which is a hope and vision of more people waking up to what's truly important in their life, yet not being attached to that in a way that makes them squabble with others. You know, it's sort of like: Waking up to what's important to you, but also still holding it lightly. Not needing to sort of die with a tight grasp on your worldview. It's quite an abstract vision, but it's of groups of people being curious, kind, joyful in supporting each other and learning from each other, in a space that is constantly changing, and where reassuring stories are not the ones that are going to help.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): It feels to me like it's a place of living with more freedom. And I mean that in a sense of one of the things I think about a lot, which is a reason where this show (podcast) came from, to have these conversations, is how "siloes" the system makes us. How it focuses us on, like, an identity and a path, and a set of skills. And that for me the richness of being human and the real permission to be human lies in actually being able to just do what is needed of you in whatever moment that you're in.

And when we were talking yesterday, with the teenagers, one of them, who is only 13, said "What are the skills that are most needed for post-collapse?" And what I found interesting about your answer was that it was like: "Everything!" But it was all quite practical, and also creative. It was like thinking: "Okay, how am I going to be able to fix this? How am I going to be able to build this?" and "What am I going to be able to bring to the group of people in front of me? How can I bring some entertainment, or some creativity?"

Jem Bendell: Yeah, he was impressive, wasn't he?

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): Yes! Oscar, thank you for your question!

Jem Bendell: There's a story around that which is: Many parents of young children I meet are very... they find it very difficult, this information, because of the pain they then feel about their young children. And in the case of Oscar, we've seen how it was he who, through crying on a beach one day, talking about that he won't grow up to live like his parents do, helped his parents because he was voicing something that they had felt but not really voiced. And it then meant that they sat down with him with my paper, "Deep Adaptation," and read it together, and his response, I think, looks to have been very nourishing for them, to have helped them to think that they can bring this work to

other children. Because Oscar has responded so... He's almost *led* his parents a bit emotionally, in terms of saying, this is something we can talk about.

And Oscar then deciding to focus on this for his project at school, about "What does collapse mean for me, and my life, and what I should be doing?" which is also what he was then asking – shows you that there will be some grief, some tears, but then: "Okay! Now what do we do?"

So, it's not a time to be sorry, but a time to be yourself.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): Absolutely!

Jem Bendell: And that's very much what I'm getting from chatting to those teenagers. The answer to his question is, well, pretty much: "Nothing that you're being taught in school." And so "climate strikes" by school kids are spreading around the world, where then they say: "I'm not gonna go to school because I'm learning to be able to work hard in a future that won't exist. And so I'm going to protest outside government."

I think there's another element that could be incorporated to future climate strikes by school kids, which is to say: "We rebel against your curriculum!" and "We want to be involved in deciding together about what kind of skills we need to learn." And that can be all kinds of things: teamwork, and mindfulness, but also practical skills like electrics, and permaculture, horticulture, tying ropes, doing *basic stuff*, which we'll need to know more of if we just can't get everything shipped in from abroad.

So if you're in a child's mindset, it's super fun! It's creative quests, and feat-based approach to everything. "Let's build things! Let's do things! Let's become more capable!"

So that was a big lesson for me, yesterday. There may be a moment of grieving, but then the children there seemed to move really quite quickly into: "Okay! Things are different. What do we do now?"

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): Absolutely! We have to close. I feel like it's perfect, because we've landed on the opportunity.

Jem Bendell: Hmm. "The opportunity." Yeah. In my life, I'm more enthusiastic about engaging the young, rather than nervous about what this means for them.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): And I believe they know more than we do. They're more designed for these times than we are. If we listen to them.

Jem Bendell: Well, thanks for the "download" of ideas! It's good to be able to talk at these multiple levels of what this means.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): Thank you for putting this out there, and opening up this exploration for us.

Jem Bendell: Yeah. I'm um... Fingers crossed, that more and more people explore this in a spirit of love and curiosity, rather than panicked approaches that are basically about fear and saving themselves. That's the big challenge of our time, is to make sure that when our hearts break, we stay open and connected and curious, rather than coming up with stories to justify ourselves being violent to others, that we have "othered" more than those closer to us. So that's, for me, a big challenge. A big thing to be getting on with.

Amisha Ghadiali (Interviewer): Absolutely! Thank you so much.

Jem Bendell: Thank you!

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