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## **LET IT BECOME**

Evolution works by spontaneous emergence of a variety of life forms followed by selection between these forms. The useful forms prosper whilst the rest vanish. There is a certain balance between emergence and selection, and it varies through time. During some evolutionary periods, the Earth was a busy place, covered by individuals, with few vacant resources. During other periods, mass extinctions freed up space. Sometimes the evolution of new life forms, such as the flowering plants, expanded the space. When all available space is occupied competition is tough and selection rules. When there is unoccupied ecological space, the balance shifts towards the emergence and becoming of new life forms.

Human consciousness has an impressive capacity for selection. We have selected the most useful breeds, crops, game, fish, soils and raw materials. We have also modified our environment by reducing the ecological space to fit our notion of the useful. We have drained the land, cut the forest, ploughed the soil, fertilized the fields and dammed the rivers. This extreme selection has left us in a situation where every generation of humans is larger than the previous and leaves less variation in environment and life forms for the following generation.

The outcome of human selection and occupation is a biodiversity crisis that has been coined the sixth mass extinction. It differs from the former five mass extinctions in two important respects. The obvious difference is that for the first time in the history of Earth a single species is driving other species to extinction. Less obvious, but perhaps more critical, is that while the former global mass extinctions freed space for new creative evolution, the mass extinction of our time leaves no vacant space. On the contrary, its very mechanism is the increasing occupation

of the Earth by people, cities, industry, roads, plantations, crops and livestock.

Reversing the loss of biodiversity is one of the greatest challenges that humans face and several transformative steps are required if we are to meet this challenge. The most obvious step is the full acknowledgement that continued growth in human consumption of resources and occupation of space cannot continue. We have considered limiting growth for decades, but obviously haven't convinced ourselves yet. The less obvious step is to fully acknowledge that such degrowth is not primarily a necessity for survival but rather a call for love and compassion. Biodiversity is a product of profound creativity more than of clever selection and therefore akin to arts more than to industry and farming. So when we release space, it is not to avoid doomsday, but to allow the living world to emerge. The generous giving of space to wildlife will be like an open door - it turns both ways - and will therefore also stimulate evolution inside us.

Our challenge is thus to change the perspective and modus vivendi of the human consciousness. We are in serious need of a weakening of our preference for selection, giving way to creative emergence. We may stimulate this process by human degrowth in consumption and occupation and I believe this will require a conscious relaxation of the individual and its unending desires. The chances are then that we discover that we are all, individually and collectively, part of this wondrous life. Such a future will know of birth, love and joy as well as death, grief and sorrow, just as the present. But there may be more peace, flowers, butterflies, elephants and lions, if we dare and care.