



## Peak Oil--Beyond Fear

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A Guest Post by Shepherd Bliss, and we're happy to have him.

Upon first hearing about Peak Oil, a few years ago, I doubted it. "Just Big Oil propaganda to raise gas prices," I initially thought. But the more I read about how our natural petroleum supply will reach its mid-point and then dwindle, the more convinced I became. So I got angryâ€”at Big Oil for not informing us and at Americans for over-consuming a limited, non-renewable resource.

Then I got afraid. What would happen to all my careful plans? How could I get the food, water, and other essentials that I need to survive without the oil that drives our cars and runs modern agriculture? One's first response to hearing about Peak Oil is likely to be denial, bolstered by arguments about why it could not be so.

Change can induce fear. Change, even of civilizations, is inevitable, but fear is not. When fear emerges, it can either linger or evolve into other more positive feelings, such as acceptance. Fear-based actions are seldom effective. Denial is often followed by anger and/or fear. This is understandable. Peak Oil is an unprecedented event in human history. But getting stuck in fear or anger and merely blaming or working individually only to protect what one has accumulated--rather than working through one's feelings and with others--can be dangerous.

Then I began to bargain, which is when I remembered Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's stages of dealing with death. Maybe if I just reduced my own use of oil, things would get better, I bargained. I reduced my consumption and drive a vehicle that gets nearly 40 miles to a gallon, thus doing my part to deal with the demand aspect of Peak Oil. This is not enough. I'm just a little guy. If other gas-guzzling drivers, American itself, and now China all reduced their petroleum use, that could make a difference. Personal responsibility is important, but it is certainly not enough to deal with the global twilight of the oil supply.

A learning curve with respect to oil depletion is important. We should also consider that there is a feeling curve that might go something like denial, doubt, anger, fear, bargaining, acceptance. It wouldn't always occur in this order, or with all these stages; some people jump ahead, then back. With the learning and feeling curves can come a doing curve. Many people are acting and making major changes in their work, relationships, and habits related to transportation and where to live.

Which stage might you be in with respect to Peak Oil? What do you need to move to another stage? Perhaps there are stages that I have not described, which you experience. If so, please explain them to me at [sb3@pon.net](mailto:sb3@pon.net) (and cc them to [theoildrum@gmail.com](mailto:theoildrum@gmail.com), please). I am interested to understand how we can reach more people with the information and metaphors that could convey the Peak Oil situation and helpful ways of responding to it.

After reading nearly a dozen authoritative books and talking with many experts, I have finally accepted that Peak Oil is inevitable and will create many personal and global changes. Though

some of those changes will be uncomfortable for me personally and others, I am now mostly beyond fear. Mostly.

I've moved into direct action. I have been talking with friends and writing about oil depletion and its probable consequences. We have set up a free local email source of information and discussion in Sonoma County, Northern California, called Beyond Oil Sonoma. Since food security will be one of the main issues as Peak Oil unfolds, we hosted a meeting at a local farm. We initially thought a couple of dozen people would show up, since we only had a few days to inform people. Over 100 people came.

There are many actions that one can take personally and with others to deal with the twilight of oil. We are certainly not doomed. As I have met with people recently, I do not feel gloomy. In fact, by moving into action I have begun to feel the pleasure of working with others on a common problem. Rather than being depressed, I feel inspired, creative, and connected. Keeping fears to oneself can create isolation. Part of the solution to dealing with feelings about Peak Oil is to talk with others. We now have an ongoing monthly group that has met six times to talk about and make plans for our post-carbon lives.

As I've conversed with others I've come to see that the oil depletion cloud is not all dark; it has silver linings. Without the greenhouse gases that burning fossil fuels emits, the climate changes that it creates may not be as harmful to the Earth.

Without abundant oil, global warfare will be increasingly difficult and perhaps eventually impossible. Starting with World War I, every global war has been over natural resources, especially competition for oil. These wars are likely to heighten as the demand for oil increases and its supply decreases. Now I can imagine a world beyond oil and beyond war.

Some contend that technology will provide us the tools to make a transition to other sources of energy. But nothing will provide the energy for us that easy oil has. I would choose warm friendships--sometimes described as "social capital"--over cold technologies.

Let's talk, and even argue, about how to move through various feelings--denial and doubt, fear and anger, bargaining, and eventually to some level of acceptance and moving into positive actions. Being fear-based is not much fun.

(Shepherd Bliss, sb.3@pon.net, has taught at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo for two years, but because of Peak Oil plans to move back to his farm in Sonoma County, Northern California, after the next academic year.)

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