

# A WORKBOOK AND ONLINE COMMUNITY for Co-CREATING OUR SUSTAINABILITY ETHIC

## Section I – Playing the Game of Life Chapter 3 - Monopoly and Polyopoly

... the rules of an infinite game have a different status from those of a finite game. They are like the grammar of a living language, where those of a finite game are like the rules of debate. In the former case we observe rules as a way of continuing discourse with each other, in the latter we observe rules a way of bringing the speech of another person to an end.

James P. Carse,  
'Finite and Infinite Games'

### How adept am I at being cooperative when I'm in a competitive situation?

Here's a story of trying to play the game of community - it was an incredible learning experience for me, but not a very successful one at the time the game was played. Margaret Wheatley asked a small group of us if we would be willing to focus on her book, 'A Simpler Way' in a conversation group that we convened monthly. The book was written from a perspective of abundance - the infinite game. Toward the end of a session, one of our participants blew up: "This is bulls..., it's not how the real world works," he passionately insisted. After some conversation on the distinctly different world-views of scarcity and abundance, we agreed that the next time we met, we'd play the very finite game of Monopoly as an infinite game. I asked Ken Roffmann, who'd introduced me to Carse's book, if he'd help us. He developed the guidelines for the infinite game he called, 'Polyopoly', and showed us how the new rules differed from those of the finite game, Monopoly.

The learning was incredible. I couldn't play Polyopoly, and it seemed to me that no one else could, either. We could soften the rules, but we didn't really get the hang of guiding

principles. Speaking for myself, I was just too steeped in my competitive upbringing – something in me was demanding winners and losers. It was weeks later that I shared the 'Polyopoly' experience with the daughter of a friend, and she said, "Oh, we play Monopoly the way you've described it all the time. When I land on someone's property and can't afford the rent, I tell them that I can sing or dance or cook or paint or whatever I have to offer that seems like a fair gift on my part." What a breakthrough that was for me – to unhook from the predefined consequences, and to have a community member offer a new, creative option and ask others in the community if her gift was acceptable. I learned the necessity of shifting from a hierarchical, rules orientation to a more relational, communal one when playing an infinite game.

I shared what happened with Margaret Wheatley. She laughed and said, "When my granddaughter and I play it's the infinite game, but when my grandson joins the game he insists that we follow the rules." I point this out because, as this work progresses, we'll look more closely

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at our models and structures for the games we play; it appears that our feminine instincts and ways of being are critical to being able to play the infinite game. As we saw in the last chapter, we aren't posing male and female as

duality, but as a spectrum. Our challenge is to blend, and shift from our predominantly male paradigm.

## **Reflection**

Think about a person in your life who seems to naturally gravitate to playing the infinite game.

What is an example of a situation s/he handled differently than you might have?

What is the influence of this person on you and others?

How might you adopt this new way of being into your life?