

The latest IPCC report came out a few weeks ago, and like all their reports in recent years, the news ain't good. Time is quickly running out for us to mitigate the impacts of our CO2 emissions. Time is quickly running out to preserve a climate that is generous to humans and other living species.

Most people don't realize that the real danger isn't just that things are warming up, but the impending collapse of the ecosystems we depend on. This is not just caused by rapid warming that doesn't give most creatures time to adapt, but by overuse of resources, and externalizing costs onto the environment.

Some are optimistic we can reverse this; others, not so much. Either way, we are now left with little choice but to adapt to the massive uncontrollable and unpredictable changes coming our way. Sometimes it feels as if the climate crisis is like Elmer Fudd blasting away with his shotgun at me, and all I can do is duck and cover.

Adapting to changing external circumstances is not always easy. Are there ways to make it easier, and where might we look? Might I suggest Bugs Bunny?

Bugs and his relatives in both the physical world and the imaginary worlds have taught us many lessons over the years, and I think some of those lessons will be useful in the times ahead. We might even think of Bugs Bunny as a role model.

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I am just old enough to remember the original Bugs Bunny. That Bugs Bunny was less polished, ruder, with a laugh like a manic Woody Woodpecker. He was more of a smart aleck, not afraid to offend. He had a bit of a mean streak. Like many of the original cartoon characters we know and love, Bugs got sanitized over the years to become more acceptable to a wider audience. More loveable, less edgy.

But still possessed of a quick wit and an unflappable demeanor. Still naughty and brave in the face of danger.

Bugs is a master of context shifting, of breaking the assumed logic of a situation. He has the ability to constantly flip the script on his unwitting counterparts – one moment he's a wabbit being hunted, the next he's a game warden taking Elmer's gun away, or maybe he's an opera singer, pulling his antagonists into a new world where the acts play out in a different way. No situation is fixed or immutable, escape is always a creative leap away.

What underlying assumptions about our world and the way it works can we subvert in creative ways? What scripts can we flip? What game can we refuse to play?

Bug's sense of self, and his place in the world, is not dependent on his identity as a hare or rabbit. Changing perspectives can be as easy as changing as putting on a different hat or a new costume, and Bugs seems to have an endless supply of them.

How many identities might you have? What new ones can you take on? How fast can you change them?

Like Bugs, we are not limited to being any particular 'self' or person. The Buddha and many others taught us that the self is an illusion, and that to tie the self to an identity is to voluntarily lock yourself in a mental prison cell. And if you allow others to lock you into an identity or a role, the same thing applies, except they have the key.

Who holds the key – or keys – to your world, to our world? You? Or someone else?

Bugs is a modern child of the trickster rabbits and hares in myth and folklore. There is Jitsu, from Native America, who brings fire to the people. There is Brer Rabbit, of the trickster rabbit stories brought to America by African slaves. There is Lepus the hare, from Greek mythology, who tormented the hunter Orion in much the same way Bugs torments Elmer Fudd.

Both rabbits and hares are associated with the moon, and in ancient traditions hares and rabbits belong to the realm of women; they are powerful avatars associated with mystery and magic, the lunar cycle, fertility, longevity and rebirth. Hares are believed to be messengers from the realm of the Great Goddess, moving by moonlight between the human world and the spirit world. S/he is also androgynous, sometimes appearing in a male form. The male aspect appears most often as a trickster figure – kind of like Bugs Bunny, who is also a cross-dresser and gender bender. Bugs is referred to as both hare and rabbit, so he's kind of a species bender as well, but I think he's mostly hare most of the time.

Again, we're back to this fluidity – in this case, the ability to move between worlds with ease. To be just as much at home in the briar patch as the garden. To be just as much at home in the moonlight as the sunlight. To be just as much at home with the feminine as the masculine. To be balanced and aware, in the moment with our eyes on the future.

But what is most important lesson that those wascally wabbits have to teach us?

We are an ecologically illiterate species. Ecology is the language of the living world, a world in which humans are not special, nor exempt from its laws.

Way back in 1971, Barry Commoner proposed four informal laws of ecology.

First law of ecology is that everything is connected, and that those connections are complicated and subject to feedback loops. These feedback loops mean that

small changes can cascade to cause big changes in an ecosystem. For example, the role of rabbits and hares in many ecosystems is that of a keystone species. These are species that the ecosystem depends on. When a keystone species gets out of control, or when a keystone species is removed, the whole system is likely to collapse. The same applies when resource limits are reached, or the carrying capacity of an ecosystem is exceeded.

The second law is that everything must go somewhere to be reused. In nature, there is no such thing as waste. In every natural system, what is excreted by one organism as waste is taken up by another as food. We've broken that cycle, and so waste becomes pollution, and because of the first law, that means it usually ends up in the air, water, or food.

The third law is that Nature knows best. As Barry Commoner puts it, "the third law of ecology holds that any major man-made change in a natural system is likely to be detrimental to that system." We aren't smarter than Nature and our track record of "improving on Nature" is pretty poor, so humility is in order. We are most emphatically NOT the crown of creation.

The fourth law is that there is no such thing as a free lunch. A price will always be paid for ignoring the first three laws, and the bill is due.

Our current culture ignores all of these laws. The invisible hand of the free market never picks up the check at the common table, and guess who gets to pay the tab?

We think we all know the answer to that one.

Ecological thinking and acting needs to become part of our economics and politics and our daily lives. We've known that for some time.

While our current predicament can seem hopeless, we need to remember that life has an amazing capacity to renew and regenerate itself. From winter comes spring, the rebirth of life from deep within the Earth. After the forest fire, grass grows and flowers bloom.

This is the ancient message of Easter from long before Christ. Resurrection is the rule, not the exception.

We can aid and abet the next resurrection. Bugs Bunny shows us the way. Flip the scripts, be fluid in our roles and actions, reclaim the archetypal powers of love and the goddesses of Earth and Sky. Re-learn the oldest of languages. Obey the laws and pick up the check.

And when in doubt, just ask yourself: What Would A Rascal Rabbit Do?