

Picture this:

October 2008.

The world is falling apart.

And I am on a ship. A ship cruising the fjords of Norway with neither cable television nor Internet access.

On my third day at sea, we hit a storm.

The week before, I had been following, hour-by-hour, the mad fluxuations of the stock market on CNN or the New York Times. Now, I am riding the fluxuations of 30-foot waves, and wondering which is worse.

I am aboard the *MS Hurtigruten Midnatsol*, navigating along side the spectacular rugged coastline of Norway. I am attending a travel conference with about 200 other travel and marketing professionals.

We could not be further removed from what I had left a few days ago - the crashing sounds being heard on Wall Street, a few blocks from our office, or the beginning of what is now the complete meltdown of the global financial market.

I had just left what seemed like the end of the world as we know it, and was now sitting on a ship that seemed a world or worlds away.

Of course, we survived the storm in Norway. But we are still in the middle of the economic one.

And when we came out of that storm in Norway (all of us a little green around the gills, I have to admit) it occurred to me that we were going through perhaps the final tipping point in the sustainability movement. That there is an epic battle taking place between greed and green.

Maybe this will become the tipping point or the dawn of the Awakening Consumer. Maybe this is the crystallization of the Awakening or sustainable movement.

Maybe this is a point in history that once crossed, will allow no turning back, because we Awakening Consumers have suddenly woken up to see that we are living in a totally unsustainable way.

No longer can we live in a way that rewards CEO's with super-sized salaries and bonuses, even if they did not perform well. A way that Wall Street regulates itself; nor in a way in which government "regulators", like the Securities Exchange Commission employees, were able to regulate the financial institutions to which they would someday be sending their resumes. As Michael Lewis and David Einhorn wrote in their excellent New York Times editorial, *"The End of The Financial World as we Know It"*:

"A casual observer could be forgiven for thinking that the whole point of landing the job as the S.E.C.'s director of enforcement is to position oneself for the better paying one on Wall Street"

And nor can we any longer live in a way in which our friends, families, neighbors, and yes ourselves, live beyond our means and mortgage our children's future to sustain that living. In the end, it all came crashing down.

Call it greed, call it short-sighted, or call it selfish.

We woke up to see that all those things that we wanted to do, we now may not be able to do. Reform healthcare? Our education system? What about climate change?

The dawn of the Awakening Consumer is here. And that means what was once OK will longer be tolerated, including inflated salaries, gas-guzzling SUVs and McMansions. Because all of us are now our paying for that excess with our future and our children's futures.

The Awakening Consumer will not only hold our Government accountable but the companies and products that they purchase as well. Money is tight,

so they will support companies and products who share their values of today, not yesterday.

They will support the companies and products that understand that we are all in this together, and we need to think of tomorrow. It is not just thinking about the next 100 days it is about the next 100 years.

Yes it is an epic battle. Where green will overcome greed. Where long-term thinking and sustainability will trounce short-term thinking. Where companies that stand for more than the bottom line will be the companies that come out on top. Because when the storm passes, green will rise to the top and greed will sink to the bottom.

Back to that ship.

As I was witnessing crashing waves on those truly beautiful, spectacular passing fjords, I was a world apart from the spectacular crash of our global financial system. What I was witnessing was the real world. What was crashing back home was something completely artificial and man-made. Greed.

Welcome to the real world. Welcome to today.
Welcome to the dawn of the Awakening Consumer.