

Eco-exercise for the Soul - Empathy and Inter-being

This week an eleven year old child said to me, her serious little face filled with pain. "When I hold money in my hand, I hear the trees sobbing. I don't know why people are so worried about money. Why are they not worried about the trees?" She went on to tell me, "...when we rip up the grass and the plants it is as if we are tearing the hair out of God's head."

What are we to tell our children about the legacy we are leaving them?

This eleven year old child knows that every act of destruction and war is an act of self mutilation - she feels it in her own body which is one with all that is. And she lives in the midst of people that are unaware and well defended against the consequences of their destructive acts... her awareness and knowledge leave her with no option but to feel the pain and suffering all around her. She does not need therapy - she is the only sane one in an insane world.

We wince when we hear about teenagers cutting and burning, carving and piercing their bodies - and yet this is what we teach them - that it is okay to cut and burn and carve and pierce, mutilate and destroy. We teach them that this is a perfectly acceptable way to dissipate the inner feelings of worthlessness, loneliness, alienation, emptiness, pain, shame and fear. And what we do to others and to the planet - and the cosmos which is already littered with our debris, - is what we do to ourselves. We are one body. Thich Nhat Hanh talks about 'interbeing' - the entire universe is one - interconnected and alive.

We may be caught in the illusion that we are separate individuals, but this is not true. Until we understand this in the breaking of our hearts instead of in the lofty and distant realms of our intellect, we will continue to destroy with impunity. The unconscious pain of our hearts is acted out in the world in unknowing acts of cruelty. This little girl showed more maturity, depth, insight, empathy and love than I have experienced in a very long time. She was so real - she was experiencing the pain - not thinking about it. Her heart of compassion was wide open.

My prayer is that we all have the courage to feel and experience what we are doing to ourselves and each other, as well as the creatures and plants of the planet. If we stopped dissociating ourselves from this pain and face our inner feelings of desperation and loneliness then perhaps we could save ourselves.

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"People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child -- our own two eyes. All is a miracle." ~Thich Nhat Hanh