

Earth Day Essay

I'm in my backyard haven. The chipmunks, squirrels, finches, and chickadees twitter and scamper about. In the wake of the violence humans continue to inflict on one another and the Earth, and in honor of Earth Day, I'm inspired to speak out.

We face the greatest challenge we've ever faced. We are all part of the tree of life. Humans, like other creatures are like the leaves, sitting on many different branches, yet dependent on the very same trunk. Chief Seattle's wisdom comes to us in the phrase "The Earth doesn't belong to us. We belong to the Earth." This is difficult for those of us raised on the cornflakes of human supremacy to swallow, yet unless we digest this essential message we doom ourselves to extinction. Each day newcomers are added to the endangered species list. The absence of the human species on the list is a glaring statement of our failure to connect the dots and acknowledge the interdependence of all life.

A part of our population, fueled by ignorance and greed, is sawing through our trunk. Each being on Earth depends on clean water, clean air, and healthy topsoil. It's time to realize that our most threatening enemy is our ignorance. Our delusion, that we are somehow separate from the natural world and each other, is what we must annihilate! We can no longer try to make a particular part of our planet or population the scapegoat. The notion that we can get rid of all our problems by removing or imprisoning the part of our population that makes visible the problem is as erroneous as thinking you can get rid of measles and stop the disease from spreading by putting on makeup.

Our planet is ill and reaching critical condition. Humans are engaged in matricide. As our newspapers are glutted with blurbs that tabulate the effects of human pollution, we seem to be paralyzed. We haven't yet realized that instead of fighting and competing with each other, we can pool our talents, creativity and courage into a cooperative re-visioning of the human community as integral with the Earth.

It's apparent to some that the "emperor has no clothes." Yet it is inevitable that we will deny the costume or lack of it, if we still deny that there is an emperor. Our modern Darth Vader is the corporate world, in collusion with government. Faceless and hidden, these mysterious figures deftly and invisibly manipulate the world economics under the table. Who

are these masked bandits dictating the policies that devastate our natural world who and who sell us illusions, addictions and distractions?

When my Father and his brothers owned and operated a clothing manufacturing business, the company bore the family name. They lived in the same town as their employees, saw them outside of the work venue; they knew their parents and their children. They were visible and accountable, in contrast to the corporate kingpins, who are so remote from their workers they can easily depersonalize them, turn them into statistics and numbers that they can then maneuver and manipulate with no experience of the anguish their policies create.

Mergers allow benign sounding “cookie making” companies to be the parents of companies that engineer genetic foods, which decimate the insects, kill the birds and poison the soil. Major corporations control the media and newspapers, insuring that news will be censored, filtered and distorted to create appearances that falsify what is really going on. The same company that is your ally in the “war” on tooth decay may also create warfare used on humans and the planet alike.

Our country was founded to combat “taxation without representation.” Taxes go to further the war machine and to subsidize corporations whose top executives make more in a year than many will see in a lifetime. An important value is freedom, yet corporate interests have lobbied to effectively prevent us from even knowing the contents of the food we buy! They hide genetically manipulated or irradiated ingredients by purposefully keeping this information off the labels! How can we think we have choice? Let’s break through the illusion of what we’ve been told to believe and dare to see what’s in front of us. Democracy is dependent upon accurate and full information from which we make our choices.

While it is important to take off the corporate mask and insist that the corporations comply with “Earth Ethics,” we must not single them out as the only embodiment of wrongdoing. If we do, we evade our responsibility, take on the victims’ stance and tell the truth but not the whole truth. The whole truth asks us to ask ourselves in what ways we support and collaborate with corporate power. If we have investments, are they designed to earn the most they can at any cost, or are they in alignment with ecological and humanistic values? Do we run to the mega-chain-store to save a few dollars and unconsciously put local businesses, the folks we know and who are generally accountable to us, out of business? Do we complain to each other yet fear to speak out or stand up to protect what is threatened?

Corporations may be the culprits but unless we give them our minds and bodies they can't function. Until enough of us awaken to and see through the illusion of the separate self, the acceleration of "us versus them" will be sure to increase. From the perspective of separation, it is inevitable that we would be pitted against each other. Yet, it is the belief of both "victim and victimizer" that perpetuates the system.

In the Sixties, Buffy Sainte Marie sang the great song "Universal Soldier"- reminding us that no army can function without individuals giving them their bodies. Likewise, if we allow ourselves to be drafted into policies that don't comply with our well-being, we also play a role in the destruction. From a whole system assessment we can all see that the present crisis reflects a crisis in consciousness. Our false identity as separate and superior life forms has caused us to act out these assumptions in ways that we now recognize are threatening the entire web of life on Earth.

In ecological observation it is noted that great problems occur because of the imported species - the "exotics"- that are not indigenous to a bioregion and which often wipe out the native species. Habitats are successfully restored and rehabilitated primarily by the removal of the exotics. Native species spontaneously come back on their own. It seems that the most destructive "exotic" is the mind-set that has allowed us to think we are separate from each other and from Mother Earth. Letting go of this idea and the behaviors that accompany it, enacts a radical transformation that allows the innate underground knowing to re-emerge and revises the ways in which humans live as part of the Earth community.

Isn't consumerism the manufactured behavior that eclipsed our natural capacity for satisfaction and fulfillment? We are lured into the mind trap that says our happiness depends on what we own rather than who we are. Yet, the collusion of government and corporation has been fleecing all but the tiny wealthy minority, step by step disassembling the protective laws that were designed to safeguard us against monopoly and centralization of power. "The many" find it harder to cover the bases in basic survival while "the few" are favored with sizable tax breaks and favoritism that enables them to indulge in luxuries.

Nature is paradoxical. We are both the One and the many. We are united in essence and unique in form. When we lose touch with the spiritual experience of unity, humans act out a perverse form of "oneness" in which differences are regarded as something to be eliminated. The dominant western culture has been like a steamroller paving over cultural and ecological diversity. It is both diversity and unity that allow us deep communion. Subjective knowing

makes life worthwhile. As more and more of us wake up, we can uproot “monomania” and advocate for diverse solutions, designed for specific bioregions and cultures.

Peace creates peace. The “powers that be” learned from the Vietnam War that hiding news of American aggression keeps Americans in the dark – placid and unquestioning. Adults still seem to be able to distinguish between the Hollywood versions of assault and the “real life” atrocities. The war makers know that what is out of the range of the senses is hard to apprehend. Like radiation, what we do not see doesn’t “make sense to us.” It is too abstract. When we are spared seeing the actual devastation of bombs, it’s much easier to agree with the idea that the opponent is the agent of harm, giving us full justification to take whatever measures we “need to” in order to stop the apparent threat in full ignorance of the atrocities committed by our military in supposed defense. We also discount the destruction of wildlife, soil, water and air, as well as innocent civilians.

School shootouts and child murderers have come into being. I began this essay in the weeks following the massacre at Columbine. I continue to write while funerals are taking place for school children and teachers who were taken hostage in Beslan, Russia. Why are we surprised when a whole generation of youngsters is raised on nonstop footage of violent “heros” who track down and kill the “enemy?” They learn that the way to resolve conflict is to destroy our opponents – those identified as the problem. Constant repetition desensitizes us to a multitude of violent behaviors.

The all-pervading media machine becomes the omnipresent teacher of children. Their favorite recreation at the malls is the arcade. Parents feed machines quarters in the spirit of providing their kids with a good time. I did it too, succumbing to the pressure of whines and pleas by my young child, he, not old enough and me, not wise enough, to differentiate what was beneficial or harmful to his well-being. We temporarily pacify our kids with diversion. We give them a quick fix - an experience intense and overwhelming to the senses. Aren’t these games the conditioning that makes it easier for them as adults to destroy real people who they regard or label as an “enemy?” We call it entertainment.

Central to these “games” are the activities of finding enemies and shooting them down without the groans that accompany actual pain. They drive too fast and win races without injuries and death. They imagine themselves as sports heros, making vicarious home runs, touchdowns or baskets. What’s wrong with the natural high that come from actual physical activity?

We are taught to sort people into “good guys” and “bad guys.” It’s ok for the “good guys” to act like the “bad guys” if the “good guys” believe that the “bad guys” started it or if we believe that the behavior of the “bad guys” was so bad it justifies and makes it all right for the “good guys” to do the very same actions that the “bad guys” do because it’s done by the “good guys” to combat the “bad guys.” This dualistic thinking creates a non-ending cycle of reactivity that can only cease by seeing the inherent trap in the thinking itself. It is like the right and left hands engaging in a battle for supremacy. Until they realize they are a part of the same body they continue to unwittingly hurt their mutual self.

The media teaches kids that it is ok to return hostility when they feel pain, attack or threat. Marshall McLuhan articulated the statement “The medium is the message.” We are now discovering the significance of his realization. Images filled with sensory and emotional content pack a powerful message unequaled by the “cool” medium of a talk.

Television provides role models and endless examples of pain producing behavior. Children and adults are calloused and our abilities for empathy are stunted. Kids see heads of countries rationalize “war” on foreign enemies, crime, and disease. We wonder why kids opt for these behaviors!

Terrorism creates terror. It is not ok to engage in terrorist actions in response to terrorist actions. This makes no sense.

The media culture venerates youth and belittles elders. Inter-generational contact is minimal. Kids look to their peers, who are as bewildered and alienated as they are, for direction and validation. We can learn from ancient, indigenous cultures, which remember that young and old have a symbiotic relationship. Youngsters keep elders in touch with play while youth are enriched by the wisdom of experience.

The good news is a growing number of people are hearing the “wake up call.” The liberating and frightening truth is that we are already in the midst of breakdown. Why not embrace a vision of what eco-theologian Thomas Berry has called the Ecozoic Era, a time when human’s live with each other and Earth in a mutually beneficial manner?

We learned the power of intention when humans committed to the vision of putting a person on the moon. Organizations such as ZERI, (zero emissions reduction initiative), and the Rocky Mountain Institute demonstrate that technology can be used in alignment with nature. We can choose to make the commitment.

Stories that inspire us with the wonder of life need to be the center of our educational formats. Reverence and respect for all the diverse expressions of life on Mother Earth can be cultivated and celebrated. Science has unearthed for us a magnificent “universe story” which we all can look to for a sense of belonging and blessedness.

Education can emphasize the commonality and interdependence of all life. We can learn that we can respect differences. We don't need to be afraid of people who don't look or think the same as we do. We can learn that there are ways to resolve conflict that do not attempt to remove “opposition.” We can take the healing and stewardship of our planet as our mutual and noble calling. We can learn true community and teamwork, cherishing the wisdom of tribal and religious cultures, sifting them to preserve the grains of wisdom that will sustain us in this time of planetary awakening, discarding irrelevant ideas.

We must expose the illusion a country's government represents the wishes and sentiments of its people. Most citizens don't know what is being done in their names. If they do know, they are often powerless to change their government's policy. Yet people are told they have the means to direct and control their government. All over the planet, horrible things are being done by governments, without the awareness and consent of the people living within their borders. If this was fully understood it would go a long way to counter the hate and prejudice that arises from blaming the people for their government's actions. Witness the planet-wide expression of opposition to the war in Iraq, and the clear evidence that the dominating powers did not represent the will of all the people.

Our most important challenge is to remember that all life is sacred. When everything is regarded with respect and dignity, we cannot rationalize that the means justifies the ends. People could no longer be demonized and the cruel conditions of factory farming could no longer be tolerated.

Peace is a dynamic process. It requires courage, action and awareness. We must awaken to our common threat. We must redirect the energy previously wasted in conflict toward appreciating and preserving the awesome gift of life on Earth. Our common heritage bonds all of Earth's life forms together. Humans have forgotten that the physical, natural world is a manifestation of divine presence. As we reawaken our sense of the sacred, our latent “sense-abilities” and work together to create a new way of being in residence on Earth, We'll discover true wealth. The accumulation of money will be seen as a mere token.

We'll turn off the road of competition, fear, domination and hoarding and onto the paths of co-creation and compassion. We will work together to find how to share our resources for the benefit of all.

May we find the courage to initiate the changes we wish to see in the world, the wisdom to carry them out intelligently and the heart to love with generosity and compassion. May we recognize that we are falling apart so we can come together. May we be alchemists and transform the ravages of war to exuberant, creative peace. May we recognize the breakdown of our human domination as the breakthrough to a way of living in harmony with Mother Earth and all of her kin. May we recognize the dark night of our species as the prelude to dawn, new birth, re-birth, into a new era. The myth of separation is replaced with a new story that re-invents and re-defines who we are, rooted in our identity as particle and wave, energy and matter, physical and meta-physical. May we recognize that the "uni-verse" is awakening within us, as us, enabling us to realize we are the Earth in the form of unique human beings, each with gifts to share, in a co-creative, cooperative re-creation of the Earth community. May we live in full respect and wonder for the web of life, in and around us, recognizing the miracle and magnificence of all life from micro to macro!

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