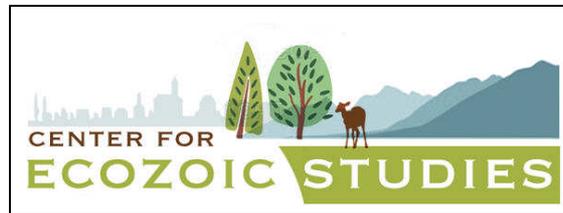


CE'S Monthly Musings

November 2008

(Published November 22, 2008)



*Seeking integral community
in an ecological age*

“Ecozoic” means “house of life.” An “Ecozoic Society” means a society of life.

**The “Ecozoic Era” is a time of mutually enhancing relationships
among humans and the larger community of life.**

The “Great Work” is living the promise of the ecozoic.

In this issue: [“Living in a Culture Built on Exploitation with Restlessness and Mercy,”](#) by Alice Loyd.

LIVING IN A CULTURE BUILT ON EXPLOITATION WITH RESTLESSNESS AND MERCY

I’ve heard it said that the ecological crisis is a spiritual problem. I’ve said it myself, and when I did, I think I meant that by separating matter and spirit as our culture does, it has become blind to Earth’s holiness. When I heard others say it, I thought they meant we were not following our wise traditions, not living by the Golden Rule, not practicing “love your neighbor.” As I’ve just stated them here, though, neither interpretation spells out what recently has become clear to me as a spiritual problem related to the damaged ecosystem.

Lately I’ve been asking, “How can I live with integrity as a citizen of the world’s most powerful nation and a member of a culture built on exploitation? How can I live at the top of the heap, knowing that my privilege has required others to lose theirs, even if I consider only the cost to other humans?” I have in view the blood-red line connecting my home energy consumption with coal-and-uranium mining on Navajo and Hopi lands in Arizona, arranged by treachery and violence, and leaving behind poisoned soil and water. I draw another line from my automobile to bombings in Iraq. My cell phone’s trajectory goes to the Democratic Republic of Congo, where coltan that can be refined to tantalum is indicted in the human rights abuses and the exploitation of resources in areas in the DRC occupied by Rwanda and Uganda. Abandoning my phone, my car and my home would not make me pure, however. There is no purity at my level of awareness. If I take to the streets, to remain alive I will eat from industrial agriculture’s trough, and the charity I accept will come from someone else’s involvement in the systems I have escaped.

For me, the Sacred is marked by more than beauty and compassion; it also has a knife edge that cuts a swath through good intentions as it pursues fairness. To love this Mother—this Spirit of all that is—I must try to live fairly as well, and whatever makes that harder hinders my religious practice. I find that policies at all levels of my government implicate me in wrongdoing, and centuries of human civilization hurt my character more than they benefit it.

People who don’t know the consequences of our collective conduct don’t struggle with conscience when they see the news about strife in the Congo or turn up their furnace. They may see me recycle, hang clothes on the line and ride the bus on occasion, and imagine that I consider myself virtuous. Knowledge prevents that illusion, and I am asking how I will manage knowing the facts I have striven to understand.

A friend helped me when she said I seemed angry as I told her how I felt about all of this. She asked, "Are you angry with yourself?" Following the path of my anger, I saw that indeed my own spirit was being attacked. To be condemning of wrongdoing is proper, but to blame the one trying without success is not. In asking with such vigor, "How can I succeed at being virtuous when my culture doesn't support me?" I was lamenting my own failure. And being locked into the judging posture, ultimately the blame was directed toward my own spirit. When I fail, I don't need condemnation but compassion, and so it happened as I mulled over the conversation that I let compassion flood through me instead of anger, and I received comfort. I remembered that The Shepherd Psalm says that both goodness and mercy follow me. When my aspiration to be good falls short, there is mercy. My spiritual discipline requires that I aspire toward the good, but accepting myself with my limitations is as essential to spiritual integrity as is conserving resources or loving my neighbor.

Progressing from my personal story to the culture's, I see a deeper layer to the assertion that our ecological problems have a spiritual basis. Our culture doesn't aspire with serious intent to be informed about ecological reality, but neither does it extend mercy to those who fail. We breathe dirty air, but we also absorb toxins from the atmosphere of blaming in which we exist. Today I'm seeing that the Ecozoic society will not be realized simply through reducing resource consumption, because what has been lost over the centuries is not only the aspiration to be good but also the grace to accept failure.

Blame and condemnation characterize our familial as well as our legal relationships. Children are raised under stern judgment even while pampered in too many ways. Until our intra-and-interpersonal relationships mirror a spiritual world where there is justice but also forgiveness, we can hardly meet our obligations with courage, much less cheerfulness. Humans are not machines but rather ever-throbbing soft-tissue organisms. To thrive, we require the support of community, neighbors and families, and these social units become supportive through practices that are spiritual in nature. As always before, future human choice-making will be shaped by human experiences in relationship, particularly relationships in the formative years. When a critical mass of human children has been viewed with sufficient respect, maybe human culture will be able to extend respect to other species and to the ecological whole. Maybe schools need to teach the practice of compassion as well as the science of ecology.

Adults, too, need particular comforts at this juncture. Even those in privileged classes experience many indignities. Relationships with government, corporations and even technology tend to reduce rather than enhance our sense of worth. Suddenly I see the sense of sermons that comfort rather than afflict! I hope that as I become more accepting of the limits on my ability to push against the current, I will grow in graciousness toward all who fail, or who fail even to aspire. The Beatitudes of my own faith tradition promise satisfaction in return for the attempt: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

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The mission of CES is to offer a vision of an ecozoic society and contribute to its realization through research, education and the arts.

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