

BioInspire.11 12.16.03

This Year's Reflections on Thanksgiving

David Eisenberg, Director

Development Center for Appropriate Technology

P.O. Box 27513, Tucson, AZ 85713

(520) 624-6628 voice / (520) 798-3701 fax

strawnet@aol.com

<http://www.dcat.net>

Greetings,

As many of you know, over the past few years I've often sent out a Thanksgiving message. Sometimes, when I haven't had the time or inspiration, I've sent those messages of thanks-giving at year's end. This year, I've struggled because I have too many things I want to share. My past messages have been, logically enough, centered on the things for which I am grateful in my life. Again, even in a time of considerable challenge and seeming lack, there is still an amazing bounty for which to say thanks.

In wrestling with all this, and not wanting to send you one more thing too long to actually read, I started thinking about what is most important to me at this moment in time. I realized that what I want to share is in two realms; what I am grateful for, and what I am working hard against. I see them as equally important aspects of what is unfolding all around us - two halves of a larger whole. At least this seems true for me in what is the most troubling period I've experienced in my 54 years.

So, I will share a brief expression of what I am most grateful for, framed by a story from many years ago, that gave me an insight that has fueled much of my work over the past eight years... imagine some of that weird harp music as the scene before your eyes starts to get all wavy as it fades into a flashback...

In October 1995 I had the good fortune to attend the EcoVillages and Sustainable Communities Conference in northern Scotland, at the Findhorn Foundation. Jonathon Porritt, among the UK's most articulate green spokespeople, gave the closing plenary talk, which brilliantly elaborated the strengths and weaknesses of the green movement in an entertaining, accurate, and highly useful way. That it lacked "heart" escaped me while I was listening to it, but his equally brilliant, and extraordinarily heartfelt response to a question from a woman in the audience at the end of his talk opened a door in my heart that has not since closed.

In response to Porritt's comments about the need for us to not just preach to the choir, but to go out and fully engage with the people and institutions we are working to change, the woman said that she had, in fact, been out there in that other world doing it for years and in the process had "lost her voice." She said that the conference had restored it somewhat and given her encouragement, but how, she

asked, can one maintain your vision and focus in a world that does not seem to care about these values? She said she had been unable to find a way to do it and that made her work incredibly hard.

Porritt started by saying that he had been intentionally, and perhaps overly upbeat and optimistic in his prepared remarks. He said that it was, in reality, extremely hard to maintain our balance and motivation in this work over the long periods of time that it often takes to carry it out. He spoke of the reality of the need to deal with periods of despair and the setbacks and challenges that inevitably occur and said he didn't know what else to say.

Then, after a pause, he spoke of a moment the previous evening, when a woman sitting near him in the audience had started sobbing loudly, profoundly, in response to one of the evening presenter's long and unrelenting list of desperate problems around the world. He said that to him, that woman's sobs more eloquently spoke to the real state of the world than probably any of the words spoken all week at the conference. He then said it's very hard. The reality is that there are millions of people living today who only get through each day by denying the reality of their existence. He said that it is only our openness to the knowledge of that reality, only our willingness to experience that pain, to see it and not look away, to know what is happening to the ecosystems and to people all over the world, it is only that acknowledgement that can give us the strength and the power to go forth and joyfully do the work that needs to be done. He said we must deny denial without allowing that to disable us.

The beauty and power of that insight brought tears to my eyes then and still does. I had the added good fortune a few years later to hear Joanna Macy speak, and then again, in the weeks immediately preceding September 11, 2001, I had the blessing of being able to attend a ten-day intensive workshop retreat with Joanna on "The Work That Reconnects." In that intensive, Joanna elaborated extraordinarily on this process. I am more convinced than ever that this is our real work, those of us who are awake today. To witness and not look away, to know yet not be incapacitated, to feel and not deny the very real tragedies that are unfolding everywhere, at every scale from the personal to the planetary as a result of the blind quest for material wealth and satisfaction, power, comfort, and way beyond comfort - excesses of desire of all manner and manifestation....more weird harp music as the scene again goes all wavy until we're back in the present...

On Thanksgiving day, I thought of a new job description that I think I may add to my business card - "Planetary Assistant"...that's how I want to start thinking about my work. Perhaps we can all give ourselves that unofficial title, even if it is just in our own heads and hearts...that's our task; to work in service to each other and to the planet as a whole. And this work is way bigger than any of us and will take generations to achieve. We need to be working hard now and also teaching our children about what we're doing and what needs to be done.

The battle (and no, it isn't a war - I'm so tired of the long and sorry history of politicians declaring unsuccessful wars on everything from poverty, hunger, drugs, crime, and homelessness, to terrorism) that must be won is against the culture of dissatisfaction, which is spreading all over the world in the name of the market, in the name of progress, in the name of technology, in the name of growth. And please, make no mistake, I'm not talking against the work to ensure that all of the people on the planet achieve a decent quality of life. That IS the work. The only way to achieve that is to fight against the shockingly growing proportion of today's global economic activity that flows directly out of the ability of

a small minority to make huge profits by creating insatiable desires in people everywhere and then making those desires look like needs (through marketing and advertising), rather than on our ability to satisfy the real needs of people anywhere.

To do this we must stop denying that wasting our precious resources, energy, and time on things no one needs is rapidly foreclosing the possibility that we'll have the time and resources we need to create a future that can meet the needs of our children and grandchildren and all future generations. We must stop denying the suicidal nature of our dependence on fossil fuels. This is crucial, and a no-brainer. It's undeniable (all one needs to know is that all the major auto manufacturers in the world are building car factories in China and encouraging the building and "improvement" of roads there, or consider the degree to which our entire food production system in the U.S. is dependent on petroleum for pesticides, fertilizer, power for farm machinery, processing and transporting the food, etc.). Directly related is the need to stop denying global warming which tells us that even if we had all the petroleum we might need, we need to stop burning it. We must also stop denying the urgent need to preserve farmland and switch to sustainable agriculture, to preserve all remaining intact forests, to respond to the accelerating loss of species and biodiversity, of coral reefs, of glaciers. And last but certainly not least, we must stop denying our very real ignorance of the actual, though unintended consequences of nearly all of our actions. Humility must begin to replace our hubris.

We need to begin relentlessly asking simple questions of the proponents of this insanity. Why? What are the real costs and likely consequences? Who benefits and who pays? What happens next, and next, and next? And keep asking until you either get good answers or the person you're asking has to admit that they haven't thought about what is really happening as a result of what they are doing or proposing to do. This is not the time to be shy. Nor is it the time to be tempted to adopt the tactics and ends-justify-means immorality of those promoting the destruction.

We need to look beyond the first costs, first benefits, first consequences, to start looking at what simpler, more local, less harmful solutions might be available to us. We need to ask if what we're doing needs to be done at all? We need to work continually at rebuilding and enhancing the local capacity to meet local needs. That is foundational for sustainability, for healthy communities, for anything approaching real security. And if we understand it deeply enough, we would see that this should be an underlying goal in what we do everywhere, because as we do that, we increase the security of people everywhere, rather than undermining it as our current systems now continuously do. That is the way, the loving way, the only way out of this morass that our so-called leaders have led us into.

Our calling today, in my opinion, is to embrace the reality of the loss, anger, grief, despair, longing, and the love we are all suppressing out of our belief that we must suppress it to be able to live our day-to-day lives. I sincerely believe that we must cease this denial and stop accepting the unacceptable, or our day-to-day lives are numbered. The trick is in learning to know it, feel it and not dwell on it.

In reality, I don't know how to do this any better than any of you do. But I am sure of this: if we don't start standing up every day and saying no to greed, saying no to those whose power is based in fear, who insist that it is "us" versus "them," that our survival depends on winning the war against "them," who constantly work to drive us apart - only by standing together against that fear-mongering can we have any hope of leaving anything worthwhile to any of our children anywhere on this little planet.

A couple of weeks ago I wrote something about this transition: This ultimately will require a journey of the heart. For those of us who are awake and see what is at stake, our added task is to make enough room in our own hearts for those who don't yet know, so that they can make that journey with us. That is hard but essential work. But I also pay attention to something else in Jonathon Porritt's reply to that question; that this is also joyful work. One of my e-mail signatures is this: The way to subvert the dominant paradigm is to have more fun than they do and make sure they know it.

Find joy in the company of good caring people, in good, hard work, in being who you really want to be, doing what you truly want to do, working toward right livelihood, healing relationships, loving communities. And, yes go out and fully engage with those you hope to influence, not just the choir. But remember also to get together regularly for choir practice, to learn our parts, harmonize our voices, remember we aren't alone. We are an awesomely powerful majority that has yet to understand our true identity or our power to change everything. This is our world. These are our lives we are living. They belong to no one else, no matter what anyone else might want you to believe.

I am so grateful to have the freedom and the ability to write this and share it and that all of you are also similarly blessed. We are in a small minority on the planet today and I am grateful and openly acknowledge that I am in that relatively wealthy, privileged minority. I have been blessed in innumerable ways by so many wonderful people - family, friends, co-workers, colleagues, board members, clients, worthy adversaries, teachers, mentors, more... There are many I could write about but will only single out a few today. First, Pat, wife, partner, civil engineer, breadwinner, mother and so much more, whose unwavering support and love have been essential to everything I've done over many, many years. Second is Joe, our five year old grandson who teaches me things and inspires a new level of urgency in my work. And then there's Tony Novelli, who has been through a lot with me at DCAT over the past few years, ups and downs, thick and thin (do we ever know thin!) and shares the deep commitment to this work. There are several others I won't mention by name here, with whom I have such deeply caring, loving friendships that I am at a loss to say anything beyond my deepest gratitude for the opportunity to explore, learn, and share what loving friendship means at that level. Thank you, all of you for what you contribute to my life.

I've been given so many extraordinary opportunities and they continue. I celebrate that I have reasonably good health and stamina, a very curious mind, decent senses of humor and of the absurd (essential survival tools), and work that is so aligned with what I really care about. And I am especially thankful that what I have experienced thus far in my life has left my heart and mind open, and thus the possibilities for the future also wide open. I'm grateful that you've actually read all the way to here and so out of respect for your time, I'll close, though there is so much more I could say thanks for.

I'll close with this Rumi poem that speaks so clearly about how to be thankful for what we encounter in this life, no matter what it may be.

Blessings and love to each of you,

David Eisenberg

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.

He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

-Rumi

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ABOUT THE PUBLISHER:

John Mlade is a green building professional researching and teaching sustainability-related courses at Colorado State University and is a research assistant at the Institute for the Built Environment (www.ibe.colostate.edu). He is also a member of the Biomimicry Guild. Visit www.biomimicry.net for more information.

TO CONTACT THE PUBLISHER:

Email John Mlade at BioInspire@yahoo.com

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