

used these methods on a larger scale?

I would suggest that as well as the much needed structural/political changes that need to take place, we must also inquire into the myths that surround modernity. If we can begin to unpack our desires for

technology, fast living, travel, to really understand what these things hold below their surface lures, then perhaps we have a chance to make our resistances conscious. Only then can we move forward to a different kind of sustainable future.

What is an 'Ecological Self'?

A personal account of a 'deep ecology' experience

Tania Dolley

At a weekend meeting that I attended recently, I took part in a group activity that was designed to invite people to find and express whatever feelings they have about environmental issues and the state of the planet. It was called a Truth Mandala, and I was surprised to find this a very powerful experience. We started in pairs, each asking and then answering three specific 'open-ended' questions about our thoughts and feelings about the environment. Then followed a group 'ritual' where people were invited to share whatever they felt, be that anger, hope, despair, grief or numbness.

My first surprise was to realise how rarely, if ever, anyone actually asks me how I feel about these things. It was in fact a delight to be asked, and to be given the space both to ask myself, and then to speak about how I did feel. I already knew I felt

strongly about some of these issues, but I did not anticipate the power and depth of some of the emotions that I contacted when given the opportunity to do so. In particular I discovered a huge pot of boiling anger and rage. This seething fury was directed in general towards the prevailing attitudes of greed, exploitation and profit motive that appear to fuel our economy. Whether thinking about rainforest destruction, genetic modification of food, climate change or pollution, the specific targets of my anger seemed to be the corporations and governments involved in creating the policies and activities that result in environmental damage of whatever kind. I know these matters and the issues involved are hugely complex, and that there are unfortunately no simple 'instant fix' solutions. But I am talking about a gut level, instinctual feeling response,

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not a reasoned, rational and intellectual assessment. I found myself openly expressing these feelings with a heartfelt passion, commitment and vehemence that I don't often experience. I felt alive, empowered and connected to something much bigger and wider than myself.

A number of thoughts followed this experience. Is it easier, I wondered, to allow these powerful feelings to surface on behalf of the planet, than on behalf of my self? Is it safer to express rage towards the multinationals for their greed, exploitation and profit-at-any-cost policies, than towards my nearest and dearest for whatever reasons I might have to feel anger with them? This might be the standard psychological response. Perhaps it is easier to feel personally wronged, abused and disregarded by a corporation, less threatening to rail against the nameless and faceless where there is no risk of rejection or loss at a personal level. I wonder. Any of this may be so, but I truly believe that the feelings I experienced were really about these issues. I mean they were feelings elicited by and directed towards the attitudes and behaviour that has caused such damage to the environment, not just misplaced or projected personal emotions. Yet the feelings were deeply personal. I felt as if what they are doing to the planet, they are doing to me. In savaging forests they are savaging me. And the rage I discovered was my response, in that moment.

Is this the 'ecological self' that Joanna Macy talks about in her book *World as Lover, World as Self*? Joanna suggests that our feelings of rage, grief or sorrow about environmental destruction, far from being misplaced or a denial of personal issues, are in fact an appropriate and honest

response to the crisis that threatens our planet. Perhaps they are a natural expression when our personal identity extends to encompass other beings and the life of our planet as Arne Naess, the 'father' of the deep ecology movement suggests, so that the protection of nature is 'felt and perceived as protection of our very selves'. For me this sense has not come about from reading about ecology or from any notion that it is a 'good thing' to protect the planet. If I look back, it has always been there. As a young child I felt a deep connection with nature, and remember for example a particularly 'deep and meaningful' relationship with two silver birch trees in our garden! My love of travel is also an expression of my passion for the earth — I see it as a kind of pilgrimage, touching the earth in different parts of the planet where I dwell, where I belong, the planet that is my home and that I deeply love.

I could look at all this in terms of attachment theory. Was my gravitation towards the natural world as a young child a result of 'avoidant attachment'? A result of early separation trauma perhaps, or some ambivalence towards the world of human beings? Maybe so, in part. When viewed through the lens of systems thinking however, which sees that all forms of life and natural systems on this planet are inextricably connected and interdependent, far from being an expression of 'pathology' or 'disowned' personal issues and emotions it seems to me more pathological in a sense not to feel some kind of identification or connection — if not vested interest — with the earth and what happens to it. Could it be that it is precisely the loss, or absence, of this 'connectedness' in the lives and experience of many people, especially in our

urban industrial society, that is a root cause of so much malaise and distress? Have we somehow become disconnected from our source, or from our 'essential selves' in some fundamental but elusive way? I am left with a question about that, and the relationship between connection with the earth and connection with our deepest self.

I am not of course suggesting that if we all run around talking to sheep or trees that society's ills will magically vanish! But perhaps the 'environment', in its loosest sense, should be included and given a place at the table. This is perhaps particularly relevant in the field of psychology and psychotherapy which has tended to focus primarily on the individual psyche and personal difficulties, rather than on connections between the individual's experience and wider social, political or environmental concerns. There could be

parallels for example between the denial of destructive consequences shown by addicts, and the behaviour of our own society in relation to environmental problems; the issues are huge, difficult, painful to face and seem impossible to solve. Better to ignore it all and hope the problem will somehow sort itself out or just disappear.

This is why I am interested in ecopsychology. To me there is a clear and important connection between the professional fields of psychology/psychotherapy and environmental sciences/ecology, and also environmental activism. It is critical that the understanding and insight of each is able to contribute to the other, for the healing and wellbeing of both the individual and the planet. Ultimately, the earth can exist quite happily without us. We, on the other hand, cannot exist without the earth.

Thinking Class-Ecology

The Myth in the Domination of Nature

Patrick Henry

Our ways of thinking, in and out of therapy, are products which fit the requirements of our political society. It's easier to see with simple objects the way things are produced and fit requirements. Clothes, for example, have a particular style, are manufactured, transported and exchanged, and it's more obvious how

nature and humans are used in their production. Clothes fit habits and epochs, they have purpose and are part of a larger market of technological and economic stipulations and mores.

Seeing our own structures of thinking is harder. Like the production of clothes and other activities we participate in, words

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