

Hearing Those We Do Not Listen

We live in an interdependent reality. What we do affects all. Yet the Western culture of individualism denies the truth of this reality. When Westerners make decisions, we consider only how the decision will benefit us as individuals, the rule of capitalism. Within the multitude of daily choices we make, Westerners do not include in their decision-making process the concerns of others, life, and the Earth.

We do this because of our wrong view that Earth, life, and others exist only to benefit us and for us to use as we will. How much life and the Earth cost measures their only value. Our courts deny the agency of other beings to determine for themselves what they want to do with their lives. We live in a culture that denies the sacredness of life.

Those on the sacred path of Earth Interbeing know better. We know other being experience pain and suffer from how we treat them like objects. All life learns, makes choices, and communicates. Our wellbeing depends upon the wellbeing of all life on Earth.

Yet knowing that does not stop us from making decisions which do not serve the best interests of the Earth Interbeing. We still consume foods that rely on the horrific abuse of livestock. We still mow our lawns that have extirpated all the native plants and other beings that once lived there. We still own private property. We drive miles to fulfil a whim. Without much thought of all the harms that went into their manufacture or from their disposal, we buy more stuff.

In making choices about what we consume or own, Western-minded people on the sacred path need to overcome our wrong views. That means making choices that go beyond how a purchase advantages us. We need to listen to the voices of others, life, and the Earth.

We sometimes listen to the voices of marginalized people, and some of us seek out those products that do not embody slave labor, exploitation, land dispossession, and hazardous and oppressive working conditions. Many oppressed workers have organized themselves into fair trade groups that identify products made or grown free of these harmful practices. Opportunities abound for us to engage directly with the oppressed people to learn how they suffer and how we can compassionately respond to their suffering.

But how do we listen to the voices of other life and the Earth? Plenty of organizations claim they represent the interests of the Earth Interbeing, but we do not know whether they do as they do not communicate with the Earth Interbeing either. Western people have separated themselves from other beings for so long that we cannot even imagine other life having a voice. Because we do not participate in a decision-making process with other beings to determine how to further life on Earth, we end up imposing our self-serving solutions upon the Earth Interbeing.

Indigenous people ask another being for their consent in the taking of its life to feed people. What would it feel like for another being to give Westerners that consent? We have a long, long history of taking from the Earth Interbeing without any intention of reciprocating. The Earth Interbeing knows us as thieves. Yet if we want to live as interbeings within the sacred Earth Interbeing, then we do need this consent to affirm our knowing their sacredness and to respect them as equals.

However, we do hear loud and clear the Earth Interbeing's cries of suffering. Species extinction accelerates. Habitats disappear. Poisoned waters. Overflowing and leaking landfills. Climate change. You can add your own horrors. Certainly, we can understand their suffering as a very clear message.

Through our choices, we can choose to compassionately respond to the suffering by changing ourselves, by reducing how we cause the suffering. We can add furthering life on Earth to our calculus of choice-making. How we decide to live our lives could include wanting what we already have, growing some of our own food, not buying new things, transforming how we live in ways that benefit all life and the Earth.

Until we stop harming the Earth Interbeing, we cannot know the language of mutually interacting with life in ways that furthers life on Earth. Once we refrain from harming others, life, and the Earth, we recover our unity with those from whom we have separated ourselves. In the process of doing that, we will learn how to speak Earth Interbeing fluently.

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