

“Earth Day: Many Paths to Hope”
The Green Sanctuary Committee
April 26, 2020

Nurture Your Soul, Heal Our Planet
Fritzie Nace

There is a principle in wholistic healing that says, “When I listen to the still small voice within, to my soul, I can become aware of what I need in order to be well, to be healthy, to be in balance, to be in right relation to the world. When I don’t listen, I become agitated, anxious, frustrated or confused. And if I continue to ignore the wisdom of my body, my heart, my soul, then I get out of balance. I may become ill or have an accident. Eventually, my soul speaks in a language that can’t be ignored - something happens that makes me stop and listen. To find health and well-being, I must listen to that still, small voice within, my soul, the wisdom of nature, and live my life accordingly.”

What is the Soul? What is it I must listen to?

Since we’ve been on quarantine lockdown, I started reading “Nature and the Human Soul” by Bill Plotkin, a psychologist who has worked with people for over 30 years primarily through guided nature journeys. He has found that the more familiar with and comfortable in nature a person is, - the more a person experiences all living and non-animated aspects of nature as soulful beings to be respected, the more they seem to know themselves and who they are meant to be in the world. Plotkin calls this “knowing one’s Soul”. He describes the Soul as

“each person’s unique place or niche in the Earth community, - not our place in the human village (as identified in terms of vocational roles) but our place in the greater web of life (as identified in terms of nature-based metaphors, human archetypes, - such as the Explorer, the Wanderer, the Apprentice or the Master - or other mythic or poetic images). This niche, this conversation, this truth, this image, is not primarily cultural or merely human; rather it is ecological...”

Plotkin purports that we find our soul, our unique niche in the world through our relationship with nature. This work is done when we give ourselves the opportunity to listen deeply, to discover who we are in the interconnected web of life, to discover our unique gifts and how can we offer them to the world. He calls this “Soulcentric or Ecocentric” development and maturation, when we know our place in the Earth community, when we own and embody our unique gifts and take responsibility to share those gifts with the world.

How do we find a soul-centric life? Plotkin points to cultures that have lived in close connection to nature, who recognize that all living and non-living beings have gifts that help make the world work through an intricate process of reciprocity and respect. A mature person and a mature society operates from an understanding of its place in the natural

world, for it is through, not only taking what we need with respect and deep understanding, but also through offering our own gifts to the world that we find and create balance and health both personally and as a species.

So, if we go back to the principle of Wholistic Health that I spoke of earlier, the Earth has been telling us for a long time that it isn't feeling well, it is out of balance. Most of us are well aware of this, painfully so.

Joanna Macy, a 90 year-old seasoned environmental activist, author and Buddhist scholar, talks about the 3 stories we are living in our time:

The first: **Business as usual in industrial growth society** – where we need to make more and consume more for a “healthy” economy

The second: **The Great Unravelling of Living Systems** – mass extinction of species, environmental degradation and severe climate and ecosystem disruption

And the third: **The Great Turning**: the opportunity for and work towards a shift from Industrial Growth to Life-Sustaining Society

As a culture stuck in an ego-centric adolescence, she says, we have ignored the messages from nature because we have been unequivocally absorbed in our own entitled efforts to feel good; to **do** more and **produce** more with our cleverness and ingenuity, propelled by the hope that we may get rich in the process. We are compelled to satisfy of our whims because it is all so accessible and we don't have to take personal responsibility for the impact that these possessions, experiences, destinations and indulgences have on our environment **and** the disadvantaged. **We have become disconnected from the sources of our consumables, from our souls and the soul of the planet.**

The more we ravage the Earth, disrespect other species and so many of our human companions, the louder the messages of warning have become. As Joanna Macy says, we are now in the time of The Great Turning. The coronavirus has become that illness, that crisis to stop us in our tracks, literally requiring the “unessential” aspects of our ego-centric culture to be placed on hold.

How long will we have to take a break, to slow down our frenetic pace of daily life, to stop our normal patterns of functioning in order to emerge transformed?

As we sit in the midst of this coronavirus pandemic, we have the gift of an opportunity as a human community to reflect, to listen to the still small voice within and to learn from nature. What are you hearing from your own still, small voice?

What are we learning as individuals, as a society, and as a worldwide community? How will we come out of this drastic change in daily life? Will we hurry back to all that got us

here in the first place? Or, will we take this crisis as the dangerous opportunity it is to reflect on what we are willing to change – NOW and going forward? What do we need to do differently in our lives? How can we reorient ourselves collectively to find a healthier balance in a reciprocal relationship with the Earth and with each other?

The Rev. Cindy Davidson, Board Chair, UU Ministry For the Earth invites us in her Earth Day letter: “...to join (me) in listening closely to the stirrings of your heart, to be mindful of protecting the tree of life on which we too bloom, and to lift up your voice. May your voice be one that breaks climate silence and lifts up our ability to make drastic changes in our daily lives and society when the stakes are high and the need to do so is crystal clear. May your voice be one of many that create climate justice by highlighting an ethic of community care, the needs of frontline communities, and careful attention to inclusive, collaborative practices that address the nuances of specific place-based and community challenges. “

This pandemic shows us clearly that nature knows no human -defined borders, that humanity is but a part of the interconnected web of life. May we find our soul as a species, may we mature beyond an ego-centric culture to a soul- and eco-centric humanity, and own our responsibility for a respectful, reciprocal and loving relationship with our Earth community.

May it be so.

Confluence

Lindy Brown

“The river would have a foul smell emanating from it and along the shore would be frothy foam. There was no aquatic life to speak of. Enka Fair had a fish derby and they would stock the pond because there was no fish for the kids to catch. After school my friends and I would go downtown to get a vanilla coke at Randle’s and we would often stop by the river, throw rocks at the water. Sometimes the sheen of the river was blue, sometimes green, sometimes red and orange. These were not the colors of nature, but the brightness of something man made...oil floating on the surface of water you see a rainbow color, the Aberjona had that kind of sheen, unnatural. The water often appeared sludge -like in thickness, very heavy with particulate. It was nasty. No one ever wanted to fall in, we thought you would surely get sick.” This memory of the Aberjona in the late 60’s and early 70’s was recently shared with me by my friend and neighbor and long-time Winchester residence Jean Daily

Between mid- April and June for the past two years I have visited particular sites along the upper Aberjona each week to check for herring. My journey begins across the street from the church by the fish ladder at the Center Falls dam and goes north on the path around Mill Pond. The Mystic River Watershed Association want to find out if the Alewife Herring and the Black Backed Herring both small (silvery fish will find their way to their spawning grounds in the Northern Aberjona after being hindered by dams and terrible pollution for over a hundred years.

I follow the river closely on my bicycle and imagine the herring's upstream migratory journey something its species is compelled to do each spring, something they have done long before any humans lived here to witness them or net them in a weirs at the falls. I pass masses of the brilliant yellow daffodils edged by many plastic cups and straws floating in the water. The river takes me to the new culvert designed to assist the herring in their migration north. But here at the high school playing fields the river disappears! From here it is not easy to track the Aberjona down, for it has been engineered over 4 centuries to suit our human needs, first for livelihoods of fishing, then the tanning and currying of leather and more recently to create space for parks, playgrounds and schools. The Aberjona a vestige of the once mighty pre-glacial river that carved out the valley of Winchester, is now a maze of engineered channels that take the river underground in many spots.

So much of the river is inaccessible and hidden from view.

At the Cross St. bridge the water from the snow melt and heavy spring rains is very wavy and full of reflections. Will I know a herring if I see one? I watch the water with anticipation week after week and the only fish I have seen is stationary carp, with its "whiskers"! It is quiet in Davidson park. It's just me, the river and whatever else may be living along it. I start thinking about the herring's journey of many miles coming from saltwater ocean through the busy Mystic River, Mystic lakes to the Aberjona. Quite a challenging journey with riverbanks edged with power plants and factories, highways. The lower Aberjona was lined with factories too, beginning in colonial times, and then with 21 tanneries by 1865 and continuing into the 20th century. Over the centuries engineering created safer drinking water but allowed for more industrial development with the problem of seeping solid wastes that left both land, water and water sediments contaminated.

It is difficult to face the deep wound of the Mystic River watershed and the devastation to its ecology.

Often I have wanted to ignore or turn away from its filmy waters. Having experienced the joy of paddling fishing or swimming in wilder, cleaner rivers it is has been hard for me at times to see the beauty of the Aberjona. But these wild rivers are not where I live. Here is the Aberjona.

Week by week there still were no herring, but the more time I spent walking along the river and looking into its waters the more life I witnessed there. Over time the birdlife changed with the coming warmth and insect life bringing migratory birds: warblers, orioles. Their migration is timed with the hatching of insects beginning in April, just as the herring come with the warming of the waters and abundant zooplankton. On a June day the river moved slowly and sunlight reached into the water where 2 snapping turtles could be seen in an easy float on the river, downy poplar catkins filled the air, purple phlox and white campion bloomed along the path. 3 baby ducks paddle out of the reeds with an adult pair. What beauty and bounty the search for the illusive herring had brought me.

Still my records showed 0,0,0,0...from each site, until one day in early May I saw a quick few silver flashes near the Washington St. Bridge. Could it be? I was pretty sure, and later on it was confirmed that yes herring were spotted by other monitors the same day, the first herring in the Northern Aberjona in a century!

Terrible damage began in this ecosystem 7 generations in the past and it is now beginning to heal in small ways. May the love and care, close attention and data begun 50 years ago continue for 7 generations hence.

What Can One Person Possibly Do?

Sue Doubler

I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about a dilemma that's been consuming more and more of my thoughts and energies.

Increasing I'm finding the destabilization of our climate overwhelming and wondering . . . What can any one of us possibly do that will make a difference?

Recently, Christina Figueres (Fi gar uz) the 2016 Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, spoke at UMASS Boston.

During the question and answer session following her talk, a student asked –"I want to help, but what could I possibly do as one person that would make difference?"

Figueres, whose life work has been to bring nations together to address the climate problem, responded, "Help to reduce GHG emissions locally –focus your efforts on yourself, your family, your neighborhood, your community.

Why does one person's actions at the local level matter?

1. You see, the actions of our friends and neighbors change our sense of what's possible. When we see electric cars on the streets of our own town, we begin to think about electric as a viable option our own next car.
2. The actions of our friends and neighbors are valued. They carry weight.
3. The actions of our friends and neighbors are contagious. When my next-door neighbors added solar to their rooftop, I begin to explore the possibility for my house.
4. And, the everyday actions of family members and those we love silently register and stay with us over time.

As a child, I loved visiting my Great Grandmother's home in southeastern Ohio. In the middle of summer, southeastern Ohio is incredibly hot and humid, but my Great Grandmother's home was always a comfortable, cool escape from the oppressive heat. You see every day she lowered and raised the shades depending on where the sun was. In the morning, when the sun was in the east, the shades on the east side were drawn, at midday the shades to the south were drawn, and in the afternoon, the shades to the

west.

This simple action happened every day. Now, many years later, I find myself doing the same thing. The passive cooling my Great Grandmother created by simply pulling shades is lovingly remembered and re-enacted three generations later.

The small, caring actions we take on a personal level with family, friends and community are noticed and remembered.

We need to trust that every action we take in our homes and in our community to care for our environment matter and will make a difference. Why? Because they will matter to those around us today and to generations to come.