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inner wisdom coaching and retreats

Tears of the Earth - A Personal and Planetary Healing Activity

by Tamara Herl

If you're like many people, thinking about the Earth's ecological needs can leave you feeling sad and overwhelmed. Therefore, a typical response is to push these thoughts and feelings aside rather than talking about them with our families, friends, and co-workers. Ecopsychologist Joanna Macy says one reason we do this is because we don't want to cause distress in others by discussing the brutal facts. Yet, Macy says, we need to stop pretending that things are OK and find ways to acknowledge and integrate the deep anguish we feel about our earth. And the time to do it is now.

I raised two children in the 80's, and I know that kids back then were taking action to save the Earth. But now I am raising another child, and, when I look at the statistics, I know that we are not doing enough. By 1950, one-fifth of the Earth's forests had been removed. Does the Earth feel the pain as her forest skin is ripped away? Biologists now say that at least three animal and plant species are becoming extinct every day, and that this rate is much higher than anything we have experienced in the past 65 million years. Does the Earth cry out as her beloved children—the plants and animals—leave her surface, never to be seen again?

I am worried about the world my daughter will live in. Will she be able to experience the sweet butterscotch scent of the tall Ponderosa pines? Will she know the deep contentment that comes from walking in fields that are lush with grass and open as far as the eye can see? I feel a sense of despair when I think of how little we have yet accomplished. We have been hearing about these statistics for years, yet still the problems exist and even worsen. What will it take for us to wake up and respond to the Earth's needs? I think what is needed is for each person to learn to feel a deep connection to the Earth.

Forming this link may be different for each person. For me, the connection came as I grieved the loss of my dog, Cougar. At one point, I thought to myself, “I wonder if this is how the Earth feels when a species becomes extinct?” Scientist George Divoky, made his connection as he continued his 30-year study of Arctic seabirds and he began to notice drastic changes in the behavior of the birds that provide tangible proof of global warming. Andrew Lipkis made his connection when he was attending summer camp at age 15. There, Andrew learned that pollution was killing the camp’s trees and he became a crusader for trees. As a result of his efforts, 8,000 seedlings that were going to be plowed under were saved, and an organization called TreePeople planted one million trees in Los Angeles.

There are many resources available to help you feel connected to the Earth. The first is your time. Commit to spending some time in nature each day. Pick a special spot to visit regularly. Get to know it just as you would a dear friend. Visit this place in all types of weather and at different times of day. Celebrate the gifts of each season and the changes of the seasons.

Another resource are magazines such as “Orion”, “National Geographic,” and “Wildlife Conservation” They can help you become educated about environmental issues such as endangered species, the destruction of rain forests, and pollution. Many organizations such as the National Wildlife Federation and Sierra Club have websites that contain information about environmental issues and what you can do to help.

As citizens of this planet, I believe that we have an obligation to form a connection with the Earth. I feel compelled to share a few ideas I have developed about how we might do this.

Try the following meditation after first breathing deeply and becoming as relaxed as possible. Pause after each sentence to give yourself time to picture the imagery that is being suggested. You might want to tape record this and play it back for yourself.

Now create a representation of what you envisioned on a piece of black or white poster board on which a 6 ½” diameter circle has been drawn. Any mix of the following art supplies would be wonderful to use: colored pencils, markers, crayons, or paint; construction paper, scissors, and glue; felt and tissue paper; pipe cleaners; natural materials such as raffia, sand, dried leaves; seeds, etc. After you have finished, write about what you pictured during the meditation and/or about your drawing.

I have a collection of these circles, which I call Earth Circles, from people of all ages across the globe. Some have been exhibited in special art displays to honor Earth Day. I can envision people all across the globe creating Earth Circles with their families and church groups, and in school classrooms so that the “Powers that Be” will know that there are people all over the world who will no longer tolerate the way we have been treating the of the Earth.

My vision is that as we create these images and engage in dialogue, we will generate ideas to meet the Earth’s needs. I feel an urgent need to do this now—to use the language of art to speak for the Earth. Maybe the images will be a voice that will be heard. As ecopsychologist Sarah A. Conn says: “The earth hurts; it needs healing, it is speaking through us, and it speaks the loudest through the most sensitive of us.” Will you let the Earth speak through you?

If something other than Earth is longing to speak through you, I would welcome the opportunity to help you hear and act on the message!

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