



Deeply Engrained Patterns...

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Our patterns of relation seem to be a blend of habits, conscious choices, and deeply engrained patterns that can, for many and for the most part, remain largely unconscious.

We can imagine ourselves as creatures with an inner universe – full of tissue, breath and bone; feeling and sensation; emotions and ideas, images and memories. This inner universe comes to life through the rich interweaving of relationships, exchanges, actions, and interactions with the world around us. This outer world includes, of course, the living creatures we meet, whether they are similar to us, or not. This outer space includes all of the natural world that we can observe, and all of the natural world that we cannot see, sense or measure.

In this day and age, in pockets of concrete and metal, silicone and plastic, it can be easy to forget that we are a part of this natural world – that all of this is, in fact, the ‘natural’ world. It can be easy to forget just how dynamic it all is. And it can be easy to assume that we know a great deal more about these three worlds – the inner, outer and intra – than we do, because our knowledge can seem so substantial, and what we do not know remains invisible, beyond our perception.

We could describe the skin as a type of membrane that serves as a primary interface between these worlds. But our intake and outflow of air, water and food are also ways of communing with our world, and serve this function too. Our senses penetrate, and translate these worlds of inner, outer and intra-being. As we dive deeper into embodied experience, taking a somatic plunge, awake and observing, searching for nothing in particular, we might discover a particular universe brought into being through this shared experience of living. This applies to the human world, but I am thinking here less of the human world, and more of our relation with the air, the support of the earth, and how they too move with us, around us, above and below us – and through us.

When we shut our selves off from sensing the presence and being of the other, we are, in a very particular way, denying the existence of the other. This can be seen as a form of violence. And while there may well be a time and place for this kind of defensive state, to only ever feel “I” when we touch, and not “other,” not “we,” is the kind of deeply engrained pattern that corrodes our capacity for connection, and sets us adrift in a vast sea of deep and dissatisfying loneliness.

My supposition, at this moment in human historic time, and through the lens of the western industrial world (as it permeates the fabric of our larger world), is that the cultural strains of industry and individualism move us in ways that contradict our need to connect with one another, and to connect with and be a part of our world. We might find ourselves running in perpetual search of something we believe lies just ahead, or become senseless and unfeeling, or end up contorted in knots of fear and pain, anger and mistrust. It is a fast-paced world in



which it can be very challenging to ever really feel 'at home.' Perhaps one benefit from the restriction on our movement during this period of pandemic is that we must settle into place for a moment the best we can.

Our shared ideas of the world shape our patterns of living and being, and whether real or illusory, they have tangible and potent ramifications on our lives and on the world we bring into being together. Over the centuries, we have allowed our discomfort and our fear to betray the most precious and vulnerable aspect of our being: our need to care for one another. I have in mind the word prem, which is one of almost a hundred Sanskrit words for love. Prem refers to universal love, which I see as coming from a generosity of heart.

Allowing our discomfort to distort our capacity to love is a profound betrayal – a self-betrayal – that applies on an individual and social level, certainly. But for me this also applies in relation to the Earth herself – the Earth as a living system that has welcomed and nourished life for millennia upon millennia.

I saw an old film once of one of the first anthropological encounters with Native Americans. The film showed these people dancing, their feet stomping on the ground. The patterns of movement seemed no different than what I have seen on other films of Native American dance, but the contact of those feet as they touched the ground was unlike anything I have ever seen, before or since. These were tender feet, and it was undeniable that each step was made with full awareness and gratitude for the presence of the earth beneath them. Those feet were in direct communion with the earth with each step.

To “walk gently with feet that listen tenderly,” to sense the impact of our steps upon the earth and sense the earth herself beneath us, this seems to me a first step in taking responsibility for our weight upon the planet. In waking to this ongoing relationship between self and the living system we are a part of with each step we take, in practicing this type of tenderness for our world as we move through it, I trust we will deeply engrain new patterns of relation that remind us we are never alone, are always supported, and have more than enough love moving in us and through us to live lovingly.

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