

An Urgent Wake-Up Call to Live More Simply, Harmoniously, and Respectfully

In the first article on simplicity I explained how Native American prophecy was fulfilled in 1993 when a delegation representing the indigenous peoples of the Americas addressed the *Cry of the Earth Conference* at the United Nations. As directed by Spirit, the Native leaders declared that a long-predicted time of purification was already under way. They called on us all to heed The Creator's original instructions to the indigenous peoples and voluntarily return to living in simpler, more respectful, and more harmonious ways. The prophecies warned that, should we choose to ignore this message, erratic weather patterns, earth movements, starvation, violence, and war would occur with ever increasing frequency and intensity. Judging from daily news reports, we have not adequately heeded their call.

My purpose is to reissue that call. I'm asking each of you to voluntarily commit to live more simply, more respectfully, and more harmoniously—more in line with The Creator's instructions. You, *as an individual*, must choose how you will respond. Your lifestyle changes will have a positive affect on your life, the lives of those around you, and the earth upon which you live. Also, any changes you make will help prepare you to pass more gracefully through the increasingly challenging times ahead. It's my hope that you will make that commitment, and that these articles will help you to envision and to implement it.

Part III: Five Steps to Living in Harmony

I spend at least a few minutes on my porch after breakfast every day I can. The first thing I do is greet the sun. It helps me put things in perspective. Our sun is 93,000,000 miles away, and yet it's still so brilliant that I can barely glance at it. From that astounding distance, it warms me, lights my day, and sustains the life I see around me. The perfect harmony of the relationship between the earth and sun is just one instance of the universal symphony being played out in matter, space, and time. I can just as easily witness it in the trees and plants in my yard, the breeze and clouds overhead, or even the systems of my own body.

Being in harmony involves playing a part in a larger whole, responding to a shared rhythm and melody. Masami Saionji, Co-Chair of the Goi Peace Foundation, speaks of a time in the distant past when we humans actually felt the resonance issuing from the universal source. Gradually, we became more fascinated with the physical aspects of life. We began to focus more on our own material creations and, as a consequence, became separate, egoistic, and competitive. Eventually, we forgot that we ever had the ability to feel that resonance.

To reestablish that connection, we will have to reverse the course of events that brought us to this point and restore the missing harmony to our own personal lives. In order for us to do that as individuals, it will require that we reduce our fascination with the material world, minimize our personal egoism and competitiveness, and eliminate

our personal sense of separateness. Here are some initial steps you can take to bring yourself into better harmony.

Step 1: Accept what is

It is impossible to harmonize with something—or someone—that you deny or resist. It doesn't make sense to resist or rage against changes in the weather, the seasons of our lives, the unkind behavior of another, the loss of a relationship, or an illness. Nor does it make any better sense to rail against politicians, economic conditions, environmental problems, or even the pending earth changes. Resistance will only make your adjustment to any stressful event more difficult. It will delay your recognition of the problem, keep you from taking any necessary actions, and make it harder for others to offer support. Accept what is—no matter what that is—and move forward from there.

Step 2: Trust

Trust requires a giant leap of faith. The major reason we spend our time worrying about the future instead of remaining solidly fixed in the present is that we are afraid. We are afraid that things won't turn out as we hope, or believe they should. We feel personally responsible for the outcomes. In other words, we don't trust.

It's important to understand that trust is something you offer—from your side. It isn't necessary that you understand the "whole"—what it is, how it operates, or why

it operates the way it does—before you trust. It is helpful to realize just how few really important things in your life you actually control (the radiance of the sun, the beating of your heart, the love of others). To trust is to accept that everything is unfolding as it should—even if it doesn't look that way from your limited perspective. Trust is the belief that when you take that leap of faith you will fall safely into the arms of an embracing universe. That trust will allow you to let go of responsibility for outcomes beyond your control...and relax into your life.

Step 3: Stay in the present

Years ago, Ram Dass counseled us to “be here now.” To be present in any moment, all you have to do is to stop thinking—period. Stop thinking about what you did in the past—no replaying or regretting. Stop thinking about what you have to do in the future—no anticipating or worrying. Ironically, you even have to stop thinking about everything right in front of you—no analyzing or judging. Once you stop your thoughts, you become a still point in the middle of the storm. You open yourself to the flow of intuition and inspiration that can guide you in ways your mind simply cannot. Once you become quiet enough to hear it, that guidance can help you know the course you should take to navigate your way through these uncertain times.

Being present is a skill that you can learn with practice. *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* presents an Eastern approach to training the mind. Eckhard Tolle offers a

straightforward Western version in *The Power of Now*. In his book, *Peace is Every Step*, Thich Nhat Hanh points out that any activity can serve as a mindfulness training opportunity—walking, doing the dishes, or even answering your cell phone. The activity itself is not the practice: The practice comes in emptying the mind while doing the activity.

Step 4: Reconnect with Spirit or Life Force

If you remove yourself from outside pressures, draw back your attachments, and still your mind, you naturally reconnect with the “whole.” That is the state of *being*. The goal is to abide in that state all the time, but for most of us that’s still a challenge.

Fortunately, you can return to that state easily at any time, and in any situation, using a simple Tai Chi practice called “going empty.” To go empty you sink your energy from your head—where most of us carry it all the time—to what is called the “one point” just below your belly button. You can imagine your energy flowing like water into a pool at the “one point” if that helps. When you go empty, your vision widens, the world slows and quiets, and your response becomes intuitive.

One of the easiest ways to shake off cultural influences that make you feel out of harmony is to go into nature. Ideally, you go to a beautiful, remote spot with a long view. However, you can accomplish much the same thing by taking a quiet walk in a park—even sitting on your porch. Nature constantly hums the melody and taps out the

rhythm you're searching to find. Harmonize with the natural things around you to recapture that lost beat.

You can prompt yourself to reconnect throughout your day. Surround yourself with objects and art that remind you of your place in the whole. A small sea shell, a rock from the desert, a wildlife photograph, or a Buddha—anything meaningful to you—can all be useful reminders. Bring those things into your home and workspace, and use them as touchstones.

Step 5: Consider the good of the whole

We live in a very individualistic, competitive, and often combative culture. It's common for people to behave in self-protective and self-serving ways, ignoring the effects their actions have on others or the world around them. You'll have to conduct your life in a very different manner to establish and maintain harmony.

Before you take any action, expand your frame of reference to include the larger consequences. Consider how your action will affect your family, your community, your nation, your world. To the best of your ability, consider how your action will affect the whole, and act for the good of all.

Part IV: Eight Steps to Living Respectfully

Several years ago I had an experience that totally changed my perception of the world. I was meditating with a group of people at a retreat when, suddenly, something

shifted and I experienced myself dancing beside a fire, moving to the deep, resonate beat of a pounding drum. I looked down at my body, and I was dressed in beaded buckskins, moccasins, and a bone breast plate. A single eagle feather dangled in front of my right ear. I had somehow “slipped” into the life of a Native American warrior.

For a brief period of time, I experienced life as that warrior experienced life. I felt extraordinarily alive, and I pulsed with a life force I’ll call fierceness. I also felt a profound sense of relatedness—with my tribe, with Grandmother Earth, and with the Great Spirit. I stood solidly inside the circle of life and felt respect for all things. I came away knowing that I had experienced something that we desperately need to remember and apply, especially now.

Step 1: Honor the one Life Force in everyone and everything

Hindus meet each other with the greeting, *Namasté*. In essence, it communicates, “The Divine in me recognizes and acknowledges that same Divine in you.” You have to look past the outer form and limitations of a person or life form to see the Divine. But, once you recognize that reality—the reality of oneness—it is impossible not feel respect for another living being—impossible! If only in your mind, greet everyone and everything you meet with the greeting *Namasté*—*I see the light of the Divine in you*. Bring everyone and everything back inside the circle. If you do, you’ll discover that you’ve stepped back inside it, too.

Step 2: Look past labels

You have to look beyond all labels, surface differences, and appearances to recognize an individual instance of any form of life, whether it's a person or a tree. As a child, everything and everyone was new to you—fresh. Over the years, you learned to name people and things and to place them into categories. Like most of us, you probably began to see those labels and categories instead of the actual person or object in front of you. Drop those old beliefs and judgments. Look at everything and everyone you encounter as if it were for the very first time—through new eyes. You'll be amazed just how vividly alive everything and everyone becomes again—how worthy of your respect.

To see past a label you apply to someone, spend time alone with that person away from the usual context of your relationship (e.g., office and co-workers). Outside your usual roles and context, you'll find that it's much easier to get to know him or her as a person. Another good way to move beyond judgments you hold toward people is to cooperate with them on a common task. Working toward a shared goal can quickly and naturally change the nature of relationships. Also, travel is great way to undo beliefs you hold about other cultures, races, or nationalities. Once you see people in their natural cultural settings, you'll find it much easier to understand them as individuals.

Step 3: Be compassionate

I was once told that we are here to learn about limitation. Dealing with limitations is certainly a significant part of life on this earth. We each have our own set of personal physical, mental, and emotional limitations—genetic and historical handicaps. They make our lives challenging and difficult enough, but to make matters even worse, we are constantly confronted by the limitations of others. Their limitations can be painful, frustrating, and even infuriating.

If your goal is to be respectful, then you have to develop understanding and compassion for other people's limitations...as well as your own. Understanding and compassion can only come through the acceptance of those limitations. Start with the basic assumption that other people are doing the best they can—given their limitations. Realize that you are also doing the very best you can—given your own limitations. Remember, growth and change will only happen *after* the acceptance of limitations.

Step 4: Forgive

Before you can offer respect to someone who has harmed you, you have to forgive that person. That can be very difficult, especially if you've been badly mistreated. You may harbor a desire to punish or to hold the person accountable for the hurtful action. But, hanging on to those feelings is like continually taking doses of poison and expecting it to kill the other person. You tie up your own energy and impede your own growth and forward motion.

You must also be willing to forgive yourself before you can offer yourself respect. You cannot change your disappointing past actions, but you can begin again. Once you begin to move forward, self-respect will follow naturally. Forgiveness is the first step toward a new beginning—toward bringing yourself back into harmony.

Forgiveness is an important part of the attachment release process I mention in Part I of this article. The forgiveness step of that process involves looking back on the person you need to forgive—from your current vantage point in life—and recognizing his or her limitations at the time the hurtful event occurred. Forgive the person—not for the hurtful action—but for having the limitations that caused them to act in a hurtful way.

Also, look back at the person you were at the time the event occurred. Recognizing your own limitations at that time, realize that you, too, did the best you could—given your own limitations—and forgive yourself.

I outline the entire attachment release process (including the forgiveness step) in an article titled *Releasing Attachments*. You can find that article on my website (www.circledancer.com).

Step 5: Listen to other perspectives

One of the best indicators of respect is the willingness to honor another person's point of view. As a psychologist, I regularly worked with couples. When arguments

occurred, each person would try to impose his or her view on other...without being willing to hear the other's perspective. Soon, they would be angrily fighting about how hurt and disrespected they felt. By then, they would have lost sight of the initial disagreement. The mutual disrespect was much more damaging than the issue that sparked it.

I was always amazed how quickly the tension would subside once the two people felt they had been heard—and felt respected. They didn't have to agree with each other—although surprisingly often they did. They just needed to acknowledge what their partner thought and felt. Always invite the other person to tell you their perspective—and honor it—before you present your own.

Step 6: Think and speak positively about others

It is an undermining and disrespectful act to speak, or even think, negatively about another person. Your thoughts and words are powerful creative forces in this world. They have an impact on the person you speak about, on the person you speak to...and on you. Use your creative powers wisely. Use them to respect, include, inspire, and uplift other people. Help them to rise above any limitations you may recognize in them to reach their potential. Support them and be their advocates with others. They will benefit from your kindness, and you will feel much better about yourself.

Step 7: Reveal yourself

Perhaps the ultimate show of respect is to reveal your true self to another person. We seldom do. We play roles with each other instead: social roles, family roles, and job roles. It takes a fair amount of courage to come out of hiding. When you reveal yourself to someone you are honoring that person, whether they recognize it or not. You are giving them one of the greatest gifts you have to give.

The revelation can be something as simple as telling someone a true preference, rather than agreeing with his or hers. It could be as difficult as telling someone a truth about yourself that you've never admitted. It could be as daring as telling someone they have hurt you, or as bold as acknowledging to someone that you love her or him.

Step 8: Respect the other person and yourself at the same time

One of the most difficult skills to master is the skill to respect another person and yourself...at the same time. Often, it seems you must do either one or the other. Before, I mentioned that you should listen to the other person, but you should also ask to be heard. I encouraged you to reveal your true self to the other person, but you should ask for the same in return. Respect should be reciprocal.

Conclusion

I am reissuing The Creator's call that we live more simply, harmoniously, and respectfully. It is my deepest prayer that you will choose to answer that call. In this

article, I have presented a set of concrete steps you can take to bring your personal commitment to life. I hope they help you on your way. Gandhi said that we must be the change we wish to see in the world. The future is entirely up to us as individuals. This world is in your hands now—good hands.