Deep Humanity - *What has been lost? How can we regain it?*

What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another." - Mahatma Gandhi

A Story

I had the good fortune of visiting the Hazda, a hunter-gatherer tribe living in northern Tanzania. Our group visited them on two occasions for only a few hours each visit and were encouraged not to bring cameras. Just one for the whole group - it was suggested that we be "with" them instead. The location was close to the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania where some of the oldest human remains have been found within Africa, and this area of Africa in particular becoming known as the birthplace of what we call modern humans. So here we were, sitting with this group of people who speak one of the oldest know human languages being with and observing them.

Socially, they appeared as any other humans I have seen. Kids running around from one adult to another, men living one role, women another role, kidding each other, showing off – some things about humans have apparently never changed. They own basically nothing. The group has maybe a single cooking pot between them, families and individuals living in "disposable" grass shelters hardly large enough for them all to sit in, the men each have a knife and a bow and some arrows. They have elders, but no one is "in charge".

As a somatic observer, I have attention to how they are moving. They seem to glide across the rocky landscape that as westerners, we struggle to keep our balance. We saw explicit examples of their connection to their environment. No, connection is not strong enough. They are the environment. They live the trees and bushes. They are one of many of the biological species that roam the forest. Separate them from their natural environment, they struggle to survive.

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As a group, we have spent the previous three weeks living in the African bush, and learning from our group's biologist how and why everything works together and thrives so well. We have been in and around the Serengeti, a landscape that hasn't changed for probably several hundreds of thousands of years – I am sitting with the Hazda and I am hit with a moment of elasticity. In that moment, it seems like time has stretched into the distant past and simultaneously revealing the present. I feel a deep grief - "Oh my God, what have we done?!?" and at the same moment - "I am really glad I don't have to live like this".

This activated the question in me about what we, as humans, have lost as a modern, technological culture that may be contributing to our blatant disregard for the natural world. Where once we lived the connection to the natural world, we live isolated - entombed within our homes, cars, and office. Let's turn on the TV and check the weather!! instead of going outside. How did we get here? What is the antidote?

History of Separateness

If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things. - Rene Descartes

Separating ourselves as a species from the natural world has been a long slow process. Some of it inadvertent, some purposeful. Consider the Hazda. We once all lived this way. We lived in small bands and families, bound together for survival and evolution. There was no "religion" then. The connection to life and spirit was life itself. Appreciation of the gifts of the natural world was given in ceremonies, songs, and stories. This was the fabric of life, and interconnectedness was not an intellectual concept as it is for most in the western world, but a living truth. In no way do I want to create the illusion of a utopian or perfect existence. Death and disease were always close, lack of food and water not uncommon, and then there were disruptions from neighboring bands and tribes. It is the deep connection to aliveness and life that I am speaking into. In the next few paragraphs I will suggest the high points on the road to our separateness.

Things went through a big change with the advent of – civilization, about 10,000 years ago. Agricultural practices changed leading to the ability and

willingness of populations to be stationary. Larger and larger groups of people living together necessitated a very different social organization – laws, specialties of work, new gender roles; and religion.

Agriculture began to affect shifting of roles. Until we became stationary, women were often the main connection to the plant kingdom. Knowing what can and cannot be eaten, where and how the food lived to assure perpetuation of the family or tribe, herbs and plants for medicine. When men began to be hunters AND plowing the fields, etc., roles began to change, as did the connection they lived to the natural world. What was important for the production of food, therefore the well being of the community, began to shift.

One of the next big steps in separateness was the invention of the alphabet. This happened around 400-500 BC. As in the case of the Hazda, language was based on the needs on communication for survival and social necssities. As with all indigenous cultures, the names of things related directly to that thing. The names for animals sounded like the sound the animals make. Landmarks and landscapes were named for what they looked like or for the spirits they held. Nothing was ever named for a "person". As written language developed, it started as picture representations of reality (hieroglyphics) – and this use of "representations" begins one of the bigger separations. The next step in language is the Hebrew language (pardon me as I am not an expert here). Without vowels, this written language is like an interim step to the next level – the use of Greek and Roman alphabets, and since, the modern western languages in use today. The earliest forms of alphabets took symbols of the pictorial Phoenician language, and arbitrarily used them to represent sounds. We no longer connected to life around us directly, but thought and spoke about it as representations of the direct experience.

Also, the entirety of Scandinavia, east and west Europe, and most of the Mediterranean areas at one time lived an earth-based, nature-based way of life, even with the advent of kingdoms and royalty. Ceremonies and spirits related to all living things having it's own energy or spirit. At about 1150 AD, people migrated and invaded from the eastern steppes into Europe - people used to living in wide open spaces, pastoral with herds of horses and other animals. They brought with them a deep connection to spirits of the sky, related to their dependence on rain and weather. The clash of these cultures

eliminated some earth based cultures, blended others, and a few were able to fight off the invaders and maintain themselves. For people other than the more elite, this "new" orientation was one of the beginnings of sky-based spirit, or god, taking the focus away from nature and earth-based orientations.

Religion has played a big role in shifting and in some cases eliminating practices and the culture of an earth-based paradigm. Purposefully, the Vatican, in a major power grab across the Mediterranean and Europe called the inquisition lasting from the 12th century through the 14th century, exterminated up to a million practitioners of earth-based wisdom, the vast majority being women. Declaring a doctrine of "dominion over animals", the Vatican and other religions set humans apart from the natural world and somehow superior to other life forms, setting up a situation that allows the needs of humans to supersede the needs of other life forms. This superiority is deeply embedded into western religion and culture.

One of the strongest factors of separation in modern times occurred at the time of the Renaissance (14th century – 17th century) and the Enlightenment (17th century). To alleviate the suffering of several centuries of war as the result of over active emotions, the Enlightenment came into being. As necessary and valuable this was and is to all humans at the time, we are paying a price. Plato (350 BC) put forth in his writings that the highest human ideal was "logos" or ideal thought. Descartes built upon this with his notion of rationalism, which is the view that "regards reason as the chief source and test of knowledge". Another major blow to living a felt sense of all life, and living knowing from your heart, not your head. It seems ironic that the system designed to offer humans a look at "truth" is the same embodied orientation that builds doubt into our cognitive functions. We are trained cognitively to doubt and question all things, and use that same skill to find truth. Is it any wonder so many people live a life of self-doubt?

To be clear, it is important and valuable to fully utilize our cognitive skills and potential. It will also serve to learn our thinking self is a part of a bigger whole called "being human."

Deep Humanity

Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."
Howard Thurman

Deep Humanity suggests a return to a lived sensibility that is mostly lost in the modern western world and mindset. It is a return to an awakened state of being that opens us to a deep connection to ourselves, as well as a deep connection to all life around us. Some might ask why would we want to live like "that"? The way they do in the African bush? But I don't think that is the important question. The important question is why we would want to live a disconnected life? Disconnected from our self, from each other, basically disconnected from life itself; disconnected from what it is to fully be a *human* being. We know the conversations about how some current technologies are actually separating us from each other rather than really "connecting" us. It is not the technology, it is the way it is being used. It is a symptom of a process humans have moved with for several thousands of years. Most people don't "choose" a disconnected life, it has been thrust upon us.

As individuals, Deep Humanity offers us a place of aliveness from which to be in the world. Being close to ourselves, we are in touch with and feel our longing and desires for purpose, for being the self we are destined to be in the world. This self-connection moves us, sometimes demands, that we do our own personal work to be able to serve in the world in the fullest way. What would it be for you to feel your place in the world as a human being? To know and live your connection to rest of life in the natural world? How might you live your life differently if you could feel a deep knowing of how your actions affected all life?

Now consider a community of people living from a place of Deep Humanity. This community could be a spiritual community, a social or political community, or a small town. This could also be a business or organization, populated with people who are not only concerned about themselves and their families, but live in the bigger concern of the care and concern for the well being of all life, which is, ultimately, care for their own lives as well. In this environment, there is collaboration, connection, willingness and desire to be in relationship, seeing and accepting others for who they are, a passion

for personal development, and a sense of service to something greater. Don't get me wrong. I am not saying this doesn't exist now, I am suggesting we can take it further and deeper, bringing this way of self-organizing as a constant in our lives. Parallel to this in organizations are the skills of efficiency and effectiveness, communication, accountability for self and others – basically running a good business. The mission of organizations run this way could ultimately include the rights of life, recognizing all life has the right to exist.

Deep Humanity is a choice, and not necessarily an easy choice. It is a choice based on sensing, feeling, and experience and can sometimes defy or confuse our thinking mind. To live Deep Humanity is to awaken and embody lost and sleeping aspects of our humanness; to realign to what our senses are telling us, of how the wisdom of the body is informing us every moment of every day; to connect to our dream state as a way of learning who we are; to live our experience of our lives in the moment; to live and embody the aliveness that we are which connects to all other aliveness around us.

In a pragmatic sense (did I really say that?), by accessing our Deep Humanity, we can learn and feel fully who we are as a self. We can more easily accessing our longings and purpose, finding direction for our lives; more easily be able to make choices about interfacing with the rest of the world; open a deep sense of belonging to the human race; create value in the world aligned to our deepest purpose; and, find peace in our relationships with other by being able to see others clearly and acting appropriately by choice.

Practice: Coming Alive

People always say what we are looking for is a meaning for life…I don't think that's what we're looking for. I think what we're looking for is the experience of being alive. - Joseph Campbell

Connecting to Our Sensory Experience

Go for a 45 minute walk. It will be best if this can be done in nature, but not absolutely necessary. Do this without talking, even if you are with another person. While doing this practice, note how consistent you are with your ability to stay connected to your senses. How quickly do you go back to your thinking? The ability to shift and focus attention is a gift and a practice, and we build that muscle by using it. At the end of this practice, what did you learn?

Take the first 10 minutes to allow yourself to presence yourself in your walk. Notice what is around you, pay attention. For the next 10 minutes, put your attention into your **hearing**. What does it sound like where you are? Note if you are judging the sounds as good or bad. For this practice, allow sound to come to you. What is the nearest sound – it may be your own footsteps. What is the furthest sound?

For the next 10 minutes, walk noticing what it **smells** like where you are. Allow the aromas to come to you. Be curious. Is there a background scent? How do the scents around change as you walk?

Next, notice **texture.** For these 10 minutes, touch what is around you. What is the texture? What is the temperature? Allow the textures to enter into your system, into your hands.

Have a piece of fruit with you. As you walk, allow yourself to eat some of the fruit with 10 minutes of full attention on **taste** and texture.

Now **vision**. I suggest this last as it the sense we use most directly and intentionally. For the next 10 minutes look for detail; look for background. What do you see? When you pay attention this way, what are you seeing that you don't usually see?

Once you have completed this circuit of sensing, notice yourself – narratives, feeling/mood, and sensation. How is your connection to yourself different from the time you started your walk? How is your connection outside of yourself to the rest of life different than when you began?

This practice supports being more directly connected to your experience of your life and the life around you.