

When I do not think, and only listen, one drop of rain upon the roof is myself.
—Dogen Zenji

INTRODUCTION

There seem to be more and more people embracing the view that nothing less than a major shift in consciousness is needed if we are to survive the environmental, economic, social, political, and moral crises we face. This is often expressed as an evolution of consciousness and a new relationship with the Earth and each other. Unfortunately, the discussion typically ends there, with no suggestions for how to catalyze and cultivate the shift.

Stepping into the territory of root causes and how to most meaningfully respond is the focus of this book. For me, this project is greatly simplified by the understanding that there is a single root cause underlying not only the collective crises confronting us, but also much of our personal suffering. That cause is the illusion of separateness: the belief that we as humans are separate from each other, from other species, from the Earth, and from our spiritual essence.

One of the key consequences of that illusion is the widespread violence that permeates our world. It makes sense doesn't it, that separateness lies at the core of all the wars we wage, the wars we fight against ourselves—our bodies, minds, and souls—against those we love the most, against those we come into contact with in our day-to-day lives, against people in other countries, and against the Earth?

With that understanding in mind, it becomes clear what we are really up against and how we can respond if we really want to address our predicament at the root level. My own exploration of this terrain has led me to four cornerstones for moving beyond separation and violence: mindfulness, nature-based practices, interpersonal skills and tools, and a restorative approach to activism.

Mindfulness is the orientation that ties the threads together and creates endless opportunities to experience interrelatedness in our day-to-day lives. Integrating mindfulness into life in this way results in a spiritual practice that improves our personal health and resilience; restores our relationship to nature; adds depth and authenticity to our relationships with other people; and brings more peace, justice, and sanity to the world.

What we are after here, ultimately, is psychological and spiritual development leading to an expanded sense of self. As the sense of who we really are widens, we begin to see through the illusion of separateness simply because it no longer fits reality.

Stepping beyond the limits of ego into our true nature, we find the clarity and compassion that form an organic and unshakable foundation upon which we can build a nonviolent future.

We get there not as a final destination, but as a process. We co-create a better world through how we live our lives each day, through our intentions and choices. A joyful dedication to ongoing growth and maturation is the price of admission.

In my own experience, working with the principles and practices outlined in these pages has moved me from operating on unconscious autopilot with a lot of anger and resentment, to a place of inner peace and empowerment. It's humbling to reflect on the fifteen years I spent as an environmental campaigner—on the press releases I wrote that blamed and shamed the very people I was supposedly trying to influence, on the unconsciousness, insecurity, and self-righteousness that seems to characterize those years.

I feel compassion for that young man who didn't know any better. I recall that there was nobody who took me aside to say, "Look, blaming and shaming people will just make them more defensive. What you really want to do is build a relationship with them. You don't have to like them but you have to respect them as fellow human beings. Here are some things to think about and work on...."

I don't think my experience is all that unique. This inspires me to share some of my story and the key insights that have so dramatically changed my way of being in the world and improved the lives of the people I've worked with.

A Path of Restoration

The peacemaker path—the way of active peace—described in this book is, ultimately, a path of healing and restoration. As I've talked about the importance of restoration over the last several years, it's clear that it's a concept that resonates with a lot of people. In the original Latin, *to restore* means "to make firm again." Many of us have a natural feeling that we could use a little firming up.

In the context of this book, references to restoration are intended to exude a sense of renewal and empowerment; a healing vision for ourselves and the world. To fully grasp the ideas presented in these pages, it's important to be upfront and clear about a key assumption I make.

Running through the book like an unseen source of groundwater feeding a spring is an assumption and belief that we as human beings have a spiritual essence; that we are, ultimately, spiritual beings arising from a great mystery. The words we use to describe that mystery, such as God, the Divine, Great Spirit, or the sacred, are not what matters. What matters is the felt sense of something greater than ourselves. You may not feel it or believe it, or you may think about it very differently, that's fine. It's quite a paradox that something so beyond the personal is, at the same time, so personal. Feel free to attach meanings that make sense to you with all the concepts presented in these pages.

The assumption of spiritual essence is provocative in the context of restoration because it assumes that we are already blessed and beautiful and whole just as we are. And one might ask in response, "What is there to restore in that case?"

Whenever a philosophical question like that comes up in this book or elsewhere, I invite you to turn toward your own experience. Do you feel like there is something to restore, some room for improvement in the way you treat yourself and others? Do you have a longing for more peace and ease, more happiness and joy? Do you feel the limitations of a belief that you are separate

from other people, other species, and the Earth as whole? If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, that is your own invitation to restoration calling you. And because you won’t get to qualities such as peace and ease and non-separation through force or other acts of will, having some kind of a path to follow can keep you on track.

My own journey on the path of restoration began with the vulnerability that was exposed when my marriage broke apart in 2005. In hitting that low point, my defenses eventually came down and my mind got quiet. In that surrender I saw that something needed to give, needed to change, and that saying “yes” to that process was the key to my future happiness.

Once on the healing path I got involved in restorative justice, and this is the second reason why the idea of restoration features so prominently in these pages. Restorative justice grows out of deep indigenous roots and it continues to be practiced in many native communities. In the days before courts and prisons, tribal peoples developed sophisticated models of justice grounded in relationship and interrelatedness.

Rupert Ross, a Canadian judge who worked extensively in native communities, wrote a book that captures the spirit of aboriginal community justice. In *Returning to the Teachings*, Ross describes models of justice where the goal is teaching and healing, not punishment.¹ In these community-based processes, all those affected are involved in getting at the root of the problem, which can include patterns of thinking and abuse that go back generations.

According to Ross, the goal of these justice systems is to reestablish harmony and repair relationships at the personal, community, and spiritual levels. It is understood that punishment cannot achieve that. The threat of punishment closes off honest communication just when it is most needed. Punishment will usually create more shame, and it’s often shame and low self-esteem that set the stage for the harm in the first place. In this view, it is believed that jail and other forms of intense punishment take already unbalanced people and move them further out of balance.²

The beauty and effectiveness of these indigenous models of healing have inspired the development of alternative ways of addressing crime within the mainstream criminal justice system in North America and around the world.

Outside of native communities, what we call restorative justice is not practiced in such a holistic way, but there are important similarities. These include the recognition that crime is a violation of people *and* interpersonal relationships and it creates an obligation to repair the harm to the fullest extent possible. The goal is repairing the harm, not punishment, and offenders, victims, support people, law enforcement, and community representatives are all directly involved in the process.

As a restorative justice facilitator and program coordinator I saw how “RJ” put so many of the values I was longing for into practice. I also saw myself in the various “offenders” I was working with and wished I had such a process available to me when I was lost and harming myself and others. I feel lucky to have experienced first hand the many ways restorative justice contributes to the healing and transformation so needed throughout society.

The restorative vision offers hope and guidance for personal and social transformation. It's a process and a practice and the goal isn't perfection, but an expanded sense of self—an understanding, not as an intellectual concept, but as a felt experience that we are not separate from anything.

With an expanded sense of self come many capacities that will serve us well in the challenging times ahead. These include the ability to stay open, to see clearly, and to respond to situations with greater intelligence and integrity.

Healing the relationship to self through mindfulness, to the Earth through nature-based practices, to other people through interpersonal skills, and to the world as a whole through service and activism are areas of restorative practice with the power to transform consciousness *and* social systems. This walk we are about to share together on the path of active peace aims at nothing less than ending the insanity and violence that pervades our lives and our world.