

The Gift in the Shadow of Climate Change

How do Humans Heal a World?

Heartbreak is a Necessary Beginning

To an observer, the world can look extremely dysfunctional. Humankind seems mired in violence and hate, in political posturing and warmongering; people who are supposed to be people-of-faith make “illegitimate” and make “other,” those whose beliefs are different; greed and corruption seem to be running the world and we brace ourselves daily against terrorist attacks like those in Paris and more recently, Belgium. As if that’s not enough, we are bombarded with concern for the environment and climate change.

With everything already in chaos, we are afraid to admit to ourselves that the planet may be dying even though we suspect there’s truth in it. It seems that we feel the distress on some level whether it’s conscious or not. We can’t wrap our minds around the idea that life on this planet, which includes human life, could cease to exist. We flee in terror from our feelings in order to avoid pain and having to comprehend annihilation. The mind simply cannot embrace the truth for there can be no evacuation—*there is nowhere else to go*.

As we gasp for breath and ache for hope, we long for relief from the massive personal and collective suffering and for the magical appearance of a path to new life. We yearn for a mythical rise from the ashes and deliverance to a new beginning, a new way of being in the world. We pray for a savior or wish for a superhero to lead us out of this mess. “He” is us. “She” is humanity. Yes, “we are the ones we have been waiting for;” it’s not just some New Age platitude.

Every human ego has a shadow side and a bright shadow, which are often in conflict with one another. The ego is the infantile self that demands attention, has tantrums, believes in entitlement, manipulates to get its own way and demands more, more, more and thinks ‘it’s all about me.’ The human bright shadow is the part that connects the ego to the heart and to all sentient life and thus the whole of existence. Bright shadow demonstrates human brilliance and compassion. It reveals most evidently in the midst of tragedy. Give humans a disaster showcasing the suffering of others, and watch the bright shadow emerge and shimmer in those who have the wherewithal to act. It is the noblest of all the kinds of love for it is born of compassion. It is eminently “soulful.”

Soulful or Soulless?

“Soulful” is the natural state of the human being; we come hard-wired for compassion. (Goetz, 2010) We know whether something we are doing is soulful or not. Our body telegraphs to us in unmistakable messages about what is nourishing and soulful and what is life-depleting, harmful and soulless. When you suggest something to your body by holding it in your mind or speaking it, the innate body messaging

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was spring of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us...”
Dickens—*A Tale of Two Cities*,
© 1857.

tells you whether or not it's soulful. You can access and observe it by giving your mind/body a choice. For example, if I asked what is more soulful—spending Saturday volunteering at your local animal shelter or going to the casino? Or what is more soulful—going to the fast food restaurant for dinner or

Soulful or Not Soulful-shadow or bright shadow?

Fossil fuels or solar and wind or alternative fuels?

Chemicals or natural substances?

Processed food or organic?

Genetically altered seeds or natural seeds?

Cavalier treatment of animals or humane husbandry and farming?

Corporate or home-grown/entrepreneurial enterprises?

Bottom line profits or compassionate business practices?

Valuing profits or valuing people?

Chemicals and pesticides or nature and organic farming?

Bullying the Earth or cherishing the Earth?

the family making homemade pizza at home, and you temporarily “embody” each, your body’s wisdom tells you clearly what is soulful. When the message is subtle, you need but “listen” more carefully: what is more soulful—roller-blading in the city park or a walk in the forest? Use your imagination to try it on; the body *knows*.

Soullessness is destructive; it turns the human spirit dead and hardens the heart. Soulfulness is good for you; it nourishes and brings the human spirit to life—it leaps inside.

The body summons pain in the face of something that’s not soulful, or when we use only the intellect (head stuff) to examine something instead heart stuff. Discomfort is the price for ignoring that high inner wisdom. Ignore it and watch ease disappear, tightness

or tension settle in, or aching, shortness of breath, physical pain, mental anguish, regret, poverty of spirit and eventually opportunistic illness...

There are those who stand for goodness, human rights and justice tempered with kindness and compassion and who reflect the basic goodness of humanity. They “do the right thing” simply because it is the right thing to do. (The body knows it feels, and is, soulful.) When they stand up, they give others permission to do the same. Then there are those others ignoring the caution messages; they like to make the world in their own cynical image. Does cynicism feel soulful? How about optimism? Hope? Which would your body rather carry?

Making soulless choices can become habit so that one uses wealth, power and influence to bend the world to a selfish ego and its will. There are those who devalue humans, life and the planet. Practicing habitual soullessness brings people to a place where they have nothing to lose. When there’s nothing to lose, anything goes. Then people cavalierly cross thresholds without considering the outcome or consequences. They hide from themselves and deny the impact of non-soulful action on the world and in the future. They deny their own shadow and what comes with that denial, is the impulse to project it onto others. To justify treachery.

Greed crosses a healthy threshold; making war is a threshold; invasion, occupation and colonizing is a threshold; Auschwitz was a threshold; Sarin in the subways of Japan was a threshold; slavery; Apartheid; genocide; Hiroshima...

All thresholds humans crossed... but so is the moon landing! So is the establishment of the United Nations; the rise of the Red Cross, international



humanitarian law, human rights and the rules of engagement; Doctors without Borders; the Hospital Ships Hope, Comfort and Mercy; Mediation, Diplomatic Intervention, Reconciliation, Reconstruction, Peacekeeping and Peace building; the International Space Station...

Human capacity for destruction (employing the shadow) is equalled by a capacity for sweeping humanitarian compassion (bright shadow in action.) Humans acting from compassion are capable of super-human mobilization and stunning accomplishment. Observe them in a tragedy or natural disaster and watch the miracles happen.

When it comes to the environment, the natural state of the world and climate science, runaway shadow in pursuit of wealth, militarism, greed, colonialism and consumerism, has unbalanced our world. The unchecked abuse of the natural world and nature's benevolence have recklessly brought us to a precarious place some are concerned, is irreversible. We have arrived at the tipping point; "here" is another threshold. Only this time the stakes are very high.

Integrating the "Other"

We live in a world of duality, where we use opposites or opposition to determine our position. If it's not down, it's up, if it's not in it's out; if he's not like me—he's "other;" friend/enemy; for/against; life/death; make or break; all or nothing. The world is meant to be in balance, not at one or another pole of a spectrum. The feminine and masculine polarities are present inside each human, for each human is inherently born with both. These polarities are active too in the collective of humanity. They constitute spheres of existence—the (micro) human and the (macro) world. The world has, for the last few thousand years, leaned heavily into the shadow side of the masculine—the warrior archetype has been prominent and dominant: conqueror, machismo, macho, warrior, hunter, war-monger. And the feminine micro and macro archetypes have been underemphasized. So, with feminine and masculine principles imbalanced we have made quite a mess of things.

"The true feminine brings a deep wisdom rooted in trusting one's intuition and heart. It is a passionate, creative, and life-giving force. The true feminine supports deep heartfelt nurturing of all creation and the passing along of traditions from one generation to the next."

"The true masculine is characterized by confidence without arrogance; rational thinking without a need to control; honor without a desire for war. It provides stability, strength, and courage in an ever-shifting world." - Arkan Lushwala, Indigenous Leader & Ceremonialist

We humans must end polarization and integrate both poles of dualities. We can observe our tendency toward shadow and at the same time acknowledge our bright potential. Behind shadow become active in the world is its opposite pole. A great deal of shadow shows up in the world as violence. If we could see the shadow through Alice's looking glass, we'd find bright shadow waiting to be expressed.

Bright shadow shows up in compassion, empathy, generosity, magnanimity. Acknowledging and embracing shadow can actually lead us to the light in human bright shadow. To illustrate: the nuclear age was a time of despair, anxiety and nail-biting for individuals while the world collectively teetered on the brink of destruction. Doom over-"shadowed" the global landscape and hung in the air. The arms-race insanity, once past denial and faced squarely, found humanity with the inspiration and momentum to come together to work out a solution. The superpowers (formerly acting out of the ego's shadow) found a way to compromise and so drafted treaties and weapons decommissioning plans (bright shadow

Ways we bully the Earth:

- Irresponsible environmental stewardship
- Exploitation of the Indigenous
- Mismanagement of land, oceans, water, air
- Greedily hoarding earth's resources that belong to all, not to those who wish to conscript them as commodities and commerce alone
- The skewed and exploited economy
- Climate change
- Artificial agriculture and food production
- Political indifference or the abuse of influence
- The treatment of animals
- Land grabs and mismanagement
- The collective psychic disconnection and denial
- The moral vacuum in business and commerce
- Racism
- Double standards
- The rising phenomenon of a spiritual vacuum
- The abuse of authority and power
- The trampling of human and civil rights
- Slavery
- Conflict
- Gentrification
- Terrorism
- Genocide
- War...

engaged) Without that threat of annihilation, the superpowers and the world would not have come together to work out a peaceful co-existence.

Sound familiar? *Humanity, in order to save its planet and therefore itself, must come together in unity not just to peacefully co-exist, but to continue to exist.* It will take moving out of the shadow into the light of bright shadow to pull it off. This new threshold—a tipping point that demands a new way of being in the world requires that we look at our choices and ask: which of these ways nourishes the soul of humanity in the collective? Which way makes the human spirit shimmer? Which complements faith in humanity, in the future? (That will save the world.)

To come to choices which showcase the brilliance of humanity, we may summon the innate wisdom each of us carries. You and I already have it; we already know it. You can observe: what makes your body tense? Which choices feel right in your body? Which way of being deepens your breathing and makes the breath fuller? We can continue arguing with our innate *knowingness*, but then the collective loses. Trust that the body

wisdom discerns what feeds the spirit, what nourishes the soul; and it knows what depletes them. A twinge isn't just a twinge; it's a message from your deep inner knowing.

We can feel the urgency; we feel the creeping infection of shadow. Have you noticed that people seem inordinately fearful, angry, easily annoyed, behaving out of character—often violent? They are turning inward and self-protective. Does it feel as if our culture is careening out of control with runaway greed, colonization and consumerism? People know what's going on because they feel it in their bodies. That unease becomes evident in the prevailing sadness and collective melancholy surrounding the lack of stewardship of our precious planet.

The Gift in Grief

In hundreds of discussions with people about the environment, every person revealed themselves to be in one of the stages of grief that Doctor Elizabeth Kubler Ross identified in the dying. Denial, fear, anger, overwhelm, helplessness, hopelessness, resignation... are all part of the process of grief. Grief lives in our shared consciousness, in our breath. On some level, *we know that we know that we know...*

Denial of climate change may bring temporary relief from the overwhelming deep grief in letting the truth sink in, but it's not healthy nor will it fix things. Grief invades our bodies even when uninvited and unwelcome. We can sit frozen bracing ourselves against reality or collapse into hopelessness. Or we can

mobilize. We can fight with shadow or **shadowbox** with the feelings that paralyze us or we can demand change and take action.

How do we thaw our feelings and free up that energy to mobilize? We courageously walk right into the feelings, allow them, deeply experience them in order to pry loose their grip on us. We can release that pent-up energy with movement. If you're moved to tears—good. Tears release the sadness! Movement loosens and releases feelings. Whatever the feeling, go boldly into it and allow its humanness to shake you awake. Embrace your vulnerability, your brilliant *humanity*. Feel it fully, allow it to move and to move you. Movement is medicine. Dance your anger; dance your fear, your sense of failure. Let your body express it.

Cleansing the toxic sludge you have accumulated in your internal ecosystem is self care and compassion. Allow your heartbreak—nothing softens the human like heartbreak. That heart you hardened is brittle; allow the soft vulnerable animal to feel and move the body. Then fortified with human compassion, you can put love from that same heart into action—share information, come together, join something, create a community task force. Invite people to your living room for a conversation. Ask them to feel with you, get them to move, inspire them to action. Leave behind your part of the problem. Become the solution instead. It's going to take our collective bright shadow to counter the darkness we find ourselves in. We, together, have unconsciously created the world we now inhabit; it's time to awake and consciously create a new one. To mobilize compassion, we need to mobilize the deep love we

already feel but have mistaken for grief—love for self, for others and the planet.

Together.



Sources:

Goetz, Jennifer L., Dacher Keltner, and Emiliana Simon-Thomas. "Compassion: An Evolutionary Analysis and Empirical Review." *Psychological Bulletin* 136, no. 3 (May 1, 2010): 351-374. ERIC, EBSCOhost (accessed March 28, 2016).

Quote by Lushwala, Indigenous Leader & Ceremonialist from “Do These Two Forces Exist Within You?” by Nick Polizzi Arkan

“One Wordsmith” Barbara Kaufmann “writes to simply change the world.” Writer, filmmaker, artist, minister, nurse, healer, spiritual advisor—trained conventionally with a Management Degree, trained unconventionally and ordained in seminary, alternative healing disciplines, Spiritual Emergency and shamanism, she dreams out loud of “a more humane narrative on the planet.” In pursuit that more human narrative, Barbara founded and is editor, contributor and steward of “Words and Violence,” a 600 page compendium of resources about bullying in all its incarnations hosted in the Education Section of the Charter for Compassion International. She writes for a variety of publications including The Charter for Compassion and Huffington Post. Lifelong activist, leader and citizen diplomat, she believes in communication, connection and agency through the arts. Lawrence University Dean of International Students once called her work in the arts “art in service to humanity.”