

Are Emotions the Magic Key to Solving Our Global Problems?

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Seven years ago I began the heuristic inquiry portion of my doctoral dissertation on emotions and global environmental problems. They say a good dissertation is a done dissertation, and I'm glad to share that chapter of my life closed a few years ago. Since COVID-19 began, however, I keep spiraling back to the beginning of that chapter. I keep asking myself, has anything changed? What are we actually doing here and why?

The brutal reality we must all accept is that we do not know how this is going to play out. The polarization of opinion on the ecological and social crises facing our planet seems to be more split than ever. The dichotomies we have created inside of our mind are rotten to their core. We've forgotten how our judgments of others limit our own ability to show up for the enormous tasks ahead.

The challenge with our existing narrative around global ecological and social problems is that it leaves us feeling powerless to create change in any meaningful way. This is a problem.

The evidence of our collective pathology is abundant. We've been watching the tension build for decades, perhaps longer. It is clear from the research on this topic that cognitive information alone is insufficient to foster the kind of deep and lasting change we need. The kind of change that returns our species to harmony with the natural cycles of Earth and the mystery of our place in the larger Universe.

The future, especially in my home state of California, is objectively bleak. People are dying, the state is hemorrhaging money, great forests of ancient Chumash and Tongva lands are burning, our lungs are filled with smoke, and our hearts are filled with grief.

Perhaps your emotions are different than mine, that's okay. The range of emotional experience around these issues will vary across individuals and cultures. But the research is clear. Most people feel a combination of helplessness, hopelessness, anxiety, fear, despair, irritation, sadness, and grief about global ecological problems.

It is important to remember that this is normal.

Before society can collectively break through the despair, rage, and suffering caused by our global problems, individuals across the planet must accept the unimaginable gravity and immediacy of the crisis. Denial of this very point is encouraged everywhere we look. This denial is a function of the values, beliefs, and assumptions that govern our dominant society. The beliefs that teach us we are separate from that which we experience around us.

I know I am preaching to the choir here. But I also want to remind you that your acceptance is a moving target. Once attained, acceptance comes and goes, just like all the other human emotions.

We must begin to actively look in the mirror and ask ourselves what we are afraid to admit. If we truly desire to create a more harmonious relationship with Earth, we must start with our Self. Why? Because we are one.

You are not separate from the Black Lives Matter movement, nor are you separate from Extinction Rebellion, or Deep Adaptation. You are also not separate from white supremacy, climate denial, and the practice of destructive corporate and governmental policy.

What inner dialogue can you begin to challenge in your own life? Are there policies and practices at your workplace that should change? Who do you need to organize to make that happen? Make a plan, get louder, refuse to take no for an answer.

This is our only Planet. Are you an Ecological JEDI? If so, how are you going to use your powers today?

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