Control or Surfing; Fear or Trust

We, modern man are afraid. We live in a country that tells us to be afraid. Afraid of terror — an abstract concept, not even 'real'. Afraid of bad people, dangerous people who want to kill us. Nameless, faceless others, but often enough shown in pictures to make the connection: brown faces, beards, turbans, 'Muslims'…. We no longer hesitate to arrest, capture, put away in prison, people who we suspect might, perhaps, possibly be terrorists.

But we've been afraid for a long, long time. Afraid of what we think of as 'the chaos of nature'. Afraid of what we don't understand. Weeds, pests, diseases. We invented all manner of sciences to study these unknown dangers. We know a lot about weeds and pests and diseases, and keep learning more every day. Nevertheless that does not allay our fears, we need control. Antibiotics, a word that literally means 'against life'.

At the same time, in another mode, we say we cherish life, not aware that we are talking about an individual human life span. The word 'life' rarely is used to mean *all life on earth*, which includes pests and diseases.

One could conclude that we value individual human life very much above all life on earth (or in the universe for all we know). We think of ourselves, humans, as above and separate from all creation. The Bible suggests that the Creator created humans as a sort of cap stone, the reason for which the rest of creation was created. Created in the image of God. God-like, and so everything is less important than we are.

That is a very difficult thought to grasp, because being alive, we must eat life (plants, animals) to survive. We need the earth to survive, to stay alive. How then can we do such destructive things to the earth as blowing up mountains to get some coal that we burn to make electricity, particularly when we know full well that burning coal pollutes the atmosphere all around the planet — more than plants and trees can sbsorb.

We cannot disconnect ourselves from all creation, although we may think we can. Science fiction authors have told us in great detail how we could survive on other planets, and survive in space on the way to other planets. We could only do that by carrying a small earth ecology with us, or 'terraforming' another planet, which means making it like earth.

To me that says that the earth and humans, humans and the earth, cannot be separated. We cannot be apart from all life, we are part of it.

That word Life, meaning all life on earth, is not broken in small segments as individual lives are — from birth to death — but one continuous stream of energy. I think of tapestry, where strands of multi-colored threads are interwoven, interconnected. Where, when one strand breaks off, there are always other strands to continue the stream. That Life, with a capital L, has no beginning (or a beginning far, far back to almost the beginning of this planet) nor does it have an end (except of course for when the sun eventually implodes and the earth will be cold and dark). Each of us is a tiny thread of that shining stream of Life with a capital L.

But I know, I understand, that my kind of logic does not convince. Some of us think of our own uniqueness, our specialness, and we cannot imagine not being all that special. It is sad to see that when we think ourselves as something unique, invaluable, that brings with it the need to protect that specialness. We think we must control all that is outside of us. Our lives become a never-ending effort to hold back the shadows we see in the corner, the terror of night, every imagined danger of Nature. And so we have made the planet unnatural.

There are other ways to live a good life, you know. Let me tell you a little story.

Once I picked up a hitchhiker, a young Frenchman. This was in the Philippines, and he was returning to the airport to go back home. He was a banker in Paris, he told me. Worked six months, and the other six he searched out new surfing spots. When I looked doubtful he shrugged his shoulders. Well, maybe not six months. By law all Frenchmen have six weeks paid vacation, I add another six weeks unpaid to that, and perhaps another month. Of course the world is full of surf, and surfers tried every new spot. I told him that my sons were avid surfers, they too had traveled to new spots. I had watched them for years but had never been able to stay on a surf board myself. I did not really understand what surfing was about, I told him. I imagined that surfing was what many sports were about, "conquering nature." Like climbing mountains that had never yet been climbed, like running, ice skating, and…

"Oh no, no," he said. "It is the opposite! It is feeling, sensing, the many energies of the wind, the water, the ocean swell, the slope of the ground, the kind of sand on the beach, and perhaps the phase of the moon. Surfing is feeling more than anything else, fine tuning the perception of these energies and how they interact. The perfect path is the one path through that wild concert of forces. No, no, not conquering, but working *with* the forces of nature."

For the first hundred thousand or more years of our being a species (humans, homo sapiens) we lived within and belonging to nature. Intimately and intensely sensing the energies, the forces of nature, adapting to nature as we found it, finding the one path by working *with* nature. In surfing, when you work *against* the immense forces of the ocean, of water, or wind, the wave will smash you with your nose against the sand — or rocks if you choose the wrong spot; people get killed that way.

Couldn't we learn to live the old way again? *With* the flow, instead of always being afraid and therefore having to control. Controlling is a very tiring job, and gets harder the more we control. Do we really believe that we are safer by having every bottle of anything closed with at least two different closures, having everything we buy packed in plastic, double plastic, with a third kind of seal? Are we really safer by that hour of being searched, X-rayed, taking off our shoes, taking out all fluids from our bags, before being allowed on a plane? Does it make us feel safe to have insurance on insurance? To double the police force but allow all citizens to carry weapons? Do we feel better knowing that there are at least sixteen agencies in our government that spy on spies, listen to our telephone conversations, make copies of our email and text messaging?

We're putting ourselves behind bars when we are so afraid.

I've never learned surfing, but I like the explanation the Frenchman gave. I like flowing with the chaos of nature, finding where the path is, where the energies drive me. There is nothing so wonderfully rewarding as letting go. It takes trust, trusting in what is.

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