

That One In The Mirror

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I wanted to change the world, so I got up one morning and looked in the mirror. That one looking back said, "There is not much time left. The earth is wracked with pain. Children are starving. Nations remain divided by mistrust and hatred. Everywhere the air and water have been fouled almost beyond help. Do something!" That one in the mirror felt very angry and desperate. Everything looked like a mess, a tragedy, a disaster. I decided he must be right. Didn't I feel terrible about these things, too, just like him? The planet was being used up and thrown away. Imagining earthly life just one generation from now made me feel panicky.

It was not hard to find the good people who wanted to solve the earth's problems. As I listened to their solutions, I thought, "There is so much good will here, so much concern." At night before going to bed, that one in the mirror looked back at me seriously, "Now we'll get somewhere," he declared. "If everybody does their part."

But everybody didn't do their part. Some did, but were they stopping the tide? Were pain, starvation, hatred, and pollution about to be solved? Wishing wouldn't make it so — I knew that. When I woke up the next morning, that one in the mirror looked confused. "Maybe it's hopeless," he whispered. Then a sly look came into his eyes, and he shrugged. "But you and I will survive. At least we are doing all right."

I felt strange when he said that. There was something very wrong here. A faint suspicion came to me, one that had never dawned so clearly before. What if that one in the mirror isn't me? He feels separate. He sees problems "out there" to be solved. Maybe they will be, maybe they won't. He'll get along. But I don't feel that way — those problems aren't "out there", not really. I feel them inside me. A child crying in Ethiopia, a sea gull struggling pathetically in an oil spill, a mountain gorilla being mercilessly hunted, a teenage soldier trembling with terror when he hears the planes fly over: Aren't these happening in me when I see and hear about them?

The next time I looked in the mirror, that one looking back had started to fade. It was only an image after all. It showed me a solitary person enclosed in a neat package of skin and bones. "Did I once think you were me?" I began to wonder. I am not so separate and afraid. The pain of life touches me, but the joy of life is so much stronger. And it alone will heal. Life is the healer of life, and the most I can do for the earth is to be its loving child.

That one in the mirror winced and squirmed. He hadn't thought so much about love. Seeing "problems" was much easier, because love means complete self-honesty. Ouch!

"Oh, friend," I whispered to him, "do you think anything can solve problems without love?" That one in the mirror wasn't sure. Being alone for so long, not trusting others and being trusted by others, it tended to detach itself from the reality of life. "Is love more real than pain?" he asked.

"I can't promise that it is. But it might be. Let's discover," I said. I touched the mirror with a grin. "Let's not be alone again. Will you be my partner? I hear a dance starting up. Come." That one in the mirror smiled shyly. He was realizing we could be best friends. We could be more peaceful, more loving, more honest with each other every day.

Would that change the world? I think it will, because Mother Earth wants us to be happy and to love her as we tend her needs. She needs fearless people on her side, whose courage comes from being part of her, like a baby who is brave enough to walk because Mother is holding out her arms to catch him. When that one in the mirror is full of love for me and for him, there is no room for fear. When we were afraid and panicky, we stopped loving this life of ours and this earth. We disconnected. Yet how can anybody rush to help the earth if they feel disconnected? Perhaps the earth is telling us what she wants, and by not listening, we fall back on our own fear and panic.

One thing I know: I never feel alone when I am earth's child. I do not have to cling to my personal survival as long as I realize, day by day, that all of life is in me. The children and their pain; the children and their joy. The ocean swelling under the sun; the ocean weeping with black oil. The animals hunted in fear; the animals bursting with the sheer joy of being alive.

This sense of "the world in me" is how I always want to feel. That one in the mirror has his doubts sometimes. So I am tender with him. Every morning I touch the mirror and whisper, "Oh, friend, I hear a dance."

Will you be my partner? Come.”