

## CPA Climate Crisis Digest - Jan 2022: Becoming Lost



*Photo Credit: Ricardo Gomez Angel via Unsplash.*

'In order to find your way, you must become lost.'

Bayo Akomolafe remembers this advice from his ancestors. He insists that we need 'to fall down to the earth and listen.'<sup>1</sup>

Becoming lost, as we enter the new year, how do I learn to listen to the earth?

### **The pain of avoiding pain**

Before confronting the truth about Anthropocene ecological damage, I was at times lost in the systemic belief that I am separate from nature and love. Awakening from my climate bubble,<sup>2</sup> letting go of the belief that I am safe in society is a grave loss. Eco-awareness leads to a kind of homelessness. The Great Unravelling is painful<sup>3</sup>. Colonialism is a gaping wound that breaks open my heart for all the world to enter. All the world is reflected in each of us, from an alchemical perspective, 'as above, so below.'

Ecological damage is born from the human desire to avoid pain. When my inner top-dog and under-dog<sup>4</sup> battle, I am lost in the pain of avoiding pain<sup>5</sup>, in splitting<sup>6</sup> and projection, prejudice and domination. I am lost in thought, as the Dalai Lama described people of the Global North; lost in the virtual reality of self-identity.

Arnold Bessier, in coming to terms with his disability, developed the Paradoxical Theory of Change<sup>7</sup>. He proposed that to move forward I must first acknowledge where I am. But where is the map for ecocide?

In Buddhist terms, life arises spontaneously, birthed and dying to each moment, a constant letting go. There is such temptation to throw ground beneath my feet, as Pema Chodron<sup>8</sup> says, to make myself feel safe. But life is free-fall. No parachute for the journey of falling down to the earth to listen. No map.

## The wisdom of youth

The voices of young people and children are leading the way when it comes to eco-awareness. So, I look to my own childhood for inspiration. Recall the views that I dropped to fit in with society, as I emerged into adolescence. Gradually, I let go of my experience of the natural world.

In childhood, compassionate curiosity was the connective tissue of my universe. Born into the privilege and security of a European family, a sense of wonder sat at the heart of my infant body. Feelings, dreams, colours, textures, sounds and aromas intermingled in the kingdom of my home and garden. But slowly I learnt to mistrust this body, objectify it. Through painful lessons I learnt to measure myself to find the shape<sup>9</sup> in society that I could fit into. Through labelling and separating myself from the world around me, I learnt to be me.



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And now I'm in the process of unlearning all of that. Learning again to trust my body and animal instincts<sup>10</sup>. As a child, I intuitively knew that everything is one. Brought up a Catholic, I was told that God was everywhere. He was also a person, you could see his portrait in all churches, an old white man with a beard. How is he in my porridge? What happens to him when we boil the kettle? I was dismayed to think that he might be in the bathroom, staring up at my naked buttocks from the toilet basin. God weighed up my sins. I only hoped that he didn't know Father Christmas.

As a child I hadn't realised that the God my parents spoke of might be the spirit that infused all of life. Although in childhood I was often in communion with the world around

me. There were no words, no this and that, only space and texture, colour and light, sense and feeling. My ego was servant, not master. There was openness and deep listening<sup>11</sup> .

## Interbeing

Now and then this perception returns. In Wendover Woods, sloping green hills, swaying branches, curling leaves. Bathed in the forest, muscles relax. Feet drum the path. Catch sight of a deer. She turns her head. Breath held, she twitches, wide-eyed. The gift of her! A pigeon flits through branches, leaves shimmy. Startled, the deer bolts. Brown smudge of coat blends into ferns, white tail streaks through dark green. I gasp, feel the impulse in her chest shooting forward. Heart pounds, legs speed, head dives beneath branches. She is gone. I am back in this human body, with the stillness of trees. The forest and walking, no me or the world outside. Limitless space, a lovers embrace, the intimacy of being.



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Back home, navy rainclouds unleash a gentle rain. The garden's thirst is quenched. Terrace bricks gleam red in the twilight. Soft pitter-patter of raindrops rocks the leaves like a lullaby. Eyes close into a catnap. Swooning into a hall of mirrors, I sleep and dream. A woman carries a petri dish that contains a miniature garden. Exotic flowers and angel wings grow beside a minute lagoon of turquoise. The woman plucks ornamental grasses and offers a fresh clump to me. I swallow and wake refreshed. As below, so above.

'Joy and woe are woven fine'<sup>12</sup>. Blake's words recall the vibrant emotions from infancy. Boundless rapture and sorrow infuse the air. Nothing to do with me or mine. The same joy and woe surround you as you read this. Life's caress. Can we dare to speak of it?

Baby steps. In the forest and in the dream, receiving and being. I want to talk with you, have conversations where we don't prop each other up, but fall down to the earth to listen. To acknowledge our interbeing with all of life. Whoever I am is inconsequential. But what I

am is entwined with the more than human world<sup>13</sup>. This life we share is everything. Can we lose the pretence of control, lose ourselves together and meet in the realisation of this?

**Halina Pytlasinska** - an integrative, humanistic-transpersonal therapist, counsellor, trainer and lecturer. She is currently helping to set up an Eco Division within the BACP to support members in responding to ecoanxiety and the ecological crisis. <https://www.creativespacecounselling.com>

## References

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RWfad60fmM&t=1828s>

<sup>2</sup> Weintrobe, S. (2021) *Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis*, London, Bloomsbury. Sally Weintrobe coined the phrase 'climate bubble' to describe the disavowal and denial of ecological emergency.

<sup>3</sup> Macy, J. & Brown, M. (2019) *Coming Back to Life*, Gabriola Island, New Society Publishers. Joanna Macy outlines three phases of human response to the ecological emergency: Business as Usual, The Great Unravelling, The Great Turning.

<sup>4</sup> Perls, F. S., (1969) *In and Out of the Garbage Pail*, Bantam Books, Houston.

<sup>5</sup> Laing, R.D. (1969) *Self and Others*, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

R.D. Laing coined the phrase 'pain of avoiding pain'.

<sup>6</sup> Klein, M. 1928 Early stages of the Oedipus conflict, In *Contributions to Psychoanalysis* New York: McGraw Hill, 1964.

<sup>7</sup> Fagan, J. & Shepherd, I. L., (1970) *Gestalt Therapy Now*, Santa Barbara, Harper Colophon.

<sup>8</sup> Chodron, P. (2003) *When Things Fall Apart*, London, Elemental Publishers

<sup>9</sup> Mary Oliver, in her poem *Trilliums*, describes not finding a place in the peopled kingdoms shaped like herself.

<sup>10</sup> Abram, D. (2010) *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. New York, Random House. David Abram acknowledges a wholistic perspective that emanates from human's animalistic nature.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RWfad60fmM&t=1828s> Eriel Tcheckwie Deranger describes being taught to listen to nature when tracking with her father.

<sup>12</sup> Erdman, D. V., Ed. (1988) *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, New York, Random House.

<sup>13</sup> Abram, D. (2011) *Becoming Animal*, New York, Vintage. David Abram first coined the phrase 'more than human world'.