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An Ecology of Resilience

Participatory Adaptation

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If you were to walk into a fun house of mirrors in an amusement park, you might find your physical body transformed into a range of images—each mirror reflects a different image of your body. In one instance you are tall and narrow, and in another mirror your image is short and stout. But these images are purely an expression of a mirror reflection of physical human forms. Beyond the image of the human form lies a vast wilderness of others who continue to shape human identity and our senses of community.

A turn of the cheek reflects the mirror image of other animals—we smell, see, taste, hear, and feel their presence. We dream of other animals, and we take on their roles and habitats in performance, in the masks of rituals, in the dress of dances, and playground games. The image in the mirror of human identity embodies these others. Without these others we are less human. Resilience is a collaborative effort that necessarily includes other plants, animals, and insects. Resilience requires knowledge of the ways and patterns of the natural world. The soils shape the farmer's hands; the sea influences the mind and knowledge of the fisher; a river's bend drives the wild salmon to swim upstream; we listen to the early morning bird songs and know that it is springtime. The evolution of the human genome is shaped by a process of interaction and interplay in a world made up of a multiplicity of otherness. Accordingly, human evolution has long been a product of co-evolution, interdependence, and reciprocity.

Thinking ecologically requires a particular depth perception and re-

spect for intuitive knowledge gained from wildness. The famous historian of the West, Wallace Stegner writes, “Wildness can be a way of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.”¹ Or as the nature writer Barry Lopez notes, “The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of the exterior landscape; the shape of the individual mind is affected by the land as it is by genes.”² Recently philosopher David Abram also refers to the insights gained from participating in the natural world: “A good way to start thinking about nature, talk about it. Rather talk to it, talk to the rivers, to the lakes, to the winds as to our relatives.”³

Resilience requires a foraging soul, and recognition of the nourishment of the soil that grounds the soul. We need to dig into the depth of our souls, to search for a metanoia of spirited action with others, to find a new path that can spark a brilliant response to our crisis of earth and spirit. The cultivation of love and compassion in our daily lives and in our respective places is a foundation to forging an ecology of participatory resilience.

NOTES

1. Stegner, “Wilderness Letter.”
2. Lopez, *Vintage Lopez*, 86.
3. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 225.

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