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SEEING CLEARLY THROUGH
CRACKED LENSES

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Being whole or centered is often viewed as healthy and beneficial; one is at the heart of things as opposed to residing on the outskirts, being in the minority or appearing marginalized. Yet when looking at a worldview, when one's paradigm is centered on a fixed identity, a clear resonance of right and wrong, a concrete understanding of reality, a "consensus reality," one is often unaware of all of the things one does not know and, moreover, that there are so many things that one does not see. When one experiences many challenges to one's worldview, it often cracks this fixed reality, allowing one to open up one's awareness to larger perspectives. When our lenses of seeing are cracked, we have the opportunity to expand. A broken worldview fosters a more awakened and resilient reality. Experiences with racism, social inequity, ecological oppression and other forms of personal and collective trauma provide the keys for cracking our lenses, our worldviews. They are our modern day rites of passage and can birth an opening to individual and collective insight and healing. Within this chapter, the author identifies key concepts of worldview transformation in the light of social and ecological issues as well as other forms of trauma and traces her own journey as a woman of color engaging the ecological crisis.

Presently, the planet is in a state of crisis. To a large extent, we have finally accepted that global warming is a reality and issues of climate justice are paramount. Suffering across the globe extends to both our human and more than human communities, with the direct and indirect effects of corporate globalization, whether through species loss, pollution and toxicity, wide-scale poverty, resource and religious wars, violence against women and children, racism and other forms of social injustice, mental illness, addictions and spiritual loss. We are still submerged in an era that heralded mechanistic science and the objectification of nature, including people, religious dogmatism, patriarchy, colonization, genocide, enslavement and the large-scale consumption and accumulation of surplus. On a personal and collective level, there is a psychic numbing and apathy to what is occurring around us because it is too painful to behold, as well as a continual coaxing to believe that everything is perfectly okay. In essence we are a broken society.

Ecopsychology purports that the suffering of the planet and that of people are interconnected and both are calling for healing. Moreover, it claims people living under a globalized reality, where a corporate economic system rules, are for the most part ill, and this illness resides within the framework and practice of western culture, one that has separated its identity from the rest of the natural world and, as result, views the earth as a resource for human consumption.¹ Author and psychologist Chellis Glendinning² parallels two states of humanity that mark the boundaries of our transition from a hunter-gatherer society to one that is disconnected from nature. The latter is the original trauma—the moment human societies broke with their earth-based traditions in order to pursue large-scale agriculture, which led to our loss of wildness and a resulting domestication. Shariff Abdullah describes the ensuing culture as *Breakers*, those who are cut off from their earth-based origins and participate in the destruction of ecosystems and peoples alike. In contrast are the *Keepers*, those communities that are still living in harmony with the natural world and practicing their original traditions.³ Glendinning's first state, the *primal matrix*, aligns with the *Keepers*. The primal matrix describes the state of humans before they broke away from earth-based worldviews and practices and is made up of three dimensions: "a sense of belonging and security in the world, trust, faith,"

"a sense of personal integrity, centeredness, capability; the consciousness of I" and "the capacity to draw vision and meaning from non-ordinary states of consciousness."⁴ These can be summarized as the abilities to feel at home within the natural world, having a unique purpose in life and experiencing the numinous. The resultant movement from the primal matrix to the original trauma is that we, and particularly those of us enculturated within western society, are broken.

In accepting our brokenness, there is yearning for wholeness. The word *healing* is related to wholeness and the myriad of forms of present age healing work seem to center on returning to a sense of wholeness that leaves us well integrated, intact, seamless—held within a community of beings that stresses our basic oneness. Yet in the light of so many stories, histories, diverse cultures, worldviews and realities, it is unreasonable to assume we will reenter a collective state of healing that is based on a common, seamless view. Instead, wholeness and healing manifests when we honor our collective wounding and allow our brokenness and resulting stories and diversities to be seen and held. Abdullah introduces a third paradigm after the *Keepers* and *Breakers*, the *Menders*—a breakthrough of people who "choose to live as conscious integral parts of a vital, sacred planet"⁵ and "compassionately assist in the birth of a new way of acting in the world."⁶ In embracing our brokenness, I like to visualize the *Menders* as creating a worldview that is a bricolage of our shattered selves, unified through our interconnectedness with all of life and our commitment to respect this, yet with recognition that we join together through related, yet disparate journeys of brokenness.

Brokenness: The Dark Night of the Soul, Sacred Wounds and Disorienting Dilemmas

I am always caught by a well quoted line from Leonard Cohen's song *Anthem* that utters "There is a crack in everything: that's how the light gets in."⁷ The full stanza counsels:

Ring the bells that still can ring
 Forget your perfect offering
 There is a crack, a crack in everything
 That's how the light gets in"

The writer seems to advise that a state of perfection will never, nor should it, be reached. It is the cracks in our lives—our mistakes, misfortunes, breakdowns and other events that mar our sense of wholeness—that are actually gifts. Plotkin relates Cohen's stanza to a practice by Navajo weavers:

They say that perfection keeps Spirit from entering a thing. In their masterful weavings, they incorporate a deliberate irregularity, an errant line or color that looks like an unintended flaw but is actually a purposeful deviation called a "spirit line," the place where Mystery might enter.⁹

It is our cracks, our brokenness, that reorder our vision of the world, so that we may see more clearly, from a perspective that is much larger than our small sense of self. The songwriter's words invoke further meaning to me—we shall never reach states of perfection, nor shall we find the perfect model or system of explanation. Human consciousness is smaller than (what Plotkin refers to as) *Spirit* or *Mystery* and it is erroneous to try and find the full map. Instead we should choose to follow the path of encounter with challenge, learning to enter into the sacred and expand our consciousness, and act from this fuller view. This idea of being cracked, broken apart, dismembered is an ancient theme in humanity and goes by many names with current theorists such as *the dark night of the soul*,¹⁰ our *core vulnerability* or *sacred wound*¹¹ and *initiation rites*.¹² From a transformative learning view, these events are disorienting dilemmas which unjar our worldviews and, if successfully navigated, transform them to access greater degrees of connectivity with all of life and the fullness of our life paths. The essence of transformative learning is when an adult permanently alters her or his worldview. Elias adds that transformative learning "is grounded in a critique of the contemporary social world, a critique of the dilemma that industrialized nations have created for the planet."¹³

A several century old concept rooted in the Catholic tradition, *the dark night of the soul* refers to one's journey back to, for a religious person, God, and for a spiritual person what might be the sacred or numinous, the force that connects all things, both visible and unseen. It is labeled

dark, here meaning a painful, mysterious, solitary voyage, where one gets a temporary glimpse of the sacred which may result in "a profound abandonment depression"¹⁴ when perceiving this separation. Bache describes the dark night of the soul as an:

...advanced stage of psychospiritual growth reached by only the most committed spiritual aspirants...It comes after a series of lesser trials and just before final awakening into unitive consciousness. It is the final stage of a long spiritual process of increased purification in which one's identity as a discrete self is challenged at its core and eventually surrendered.¹⁵

He parallels this more traditional meaning and individual path with the collective suffering currently experienced by humanity as a result of our ecological and social crisis. This presents an opportunity for our common evolutionary development met through our response, seeing our separation from all of life, letting our separative paradigms die and rejoining in collective experience with one another and the sacred: "The more in-depth healing occurs when we learn to embrace our fragment- edness from our own wholeness."¹⁶

Plotkin uses the terms *core vulnerability* and *sacred wound* to describe our personal marks of suffering, our sense of brokenness which leads us toward our life calling.¹⁷ The core vulnerability is a specifically human phenomenon that is purposeful. This wounding occurs in childhood usually through a "pattern of hurtful events or a disturbing dynamic in one or more important relationships"¹⁸ and often sets the patterns of behavior for the individual. As, and if, one matures, this wounding is addressed and develops into a unique gift, something sacred, "a key to your destiny."¹⁹ There is a clear parallel with the dark night of the soul, but with a specific emphasis on wounding that occurs in our early years.

Similar to both the dark night of the soul and the sacred wound, Morrison sees both rites of passages and life crises as traumas which unjar consciousness. *Initiation rites* or *rites of passage* customarily transform one's ordinary life temporarily into that of "abject loss" in order to "set the stage for profound spiritual transformations."²⁰ Traditionally these have been facilitated ceremonially; however, trauma serves

the same purpose as it manifests as a deep sense of loss and disordering of one's life meaning. Successfully navigating these initiations, whether through ceremony or life trauma, results in a maturing of one's small sense of ego identity to connect with wider frames of self, or what is called a larger Self—an identity that connects with the sacred.

West African Dagara elder and writer Malidoma Somé also emphasizes that our life traumas are often our modern day equivalents of initiation rites, pointing out that while western peoples are often seeking rites of passages that mirror those of traditional indigenous societies, western rituals often actually lie in modern life challenges—the loss of relationships, jobs and loved ones, illnesses and other forms of crisis.

The serious troubles we face in life are nothing other than initiatory experiences... They are a necessary ingredient in the removal of whatever stands between us and our essential self. If tribal people reach this stage through formal rites of passage, other people may do the same differently. It is as if there is a natural pull toward challenges and ordeal in the interest of gaining inner strength and living a responsible life. Hardship and ordeal therefore initiate a change from within. One emerges from them with a profound sense of having undergone a radical education.²¹

Keeping with this idea of modern day initiation rites, there is a concept within the field of transformative learning called *disorienting dilemmas* that serves a similar purpose. Transformative learning focuses on the expansion of paradigms within adults and "is grounded in a critique of the contemporary social world, a critique of the dilemma that industrialized nations have created for the planet."²² A *disorienting dilemma* occurs when one has an experience that does not easily assimilate into one's current worldview.²³ It is a perplexing occurrence that is often prompted by some sort of trauma or loss, yet also through other events that prompt a questioning of how one makes meaning—one's worldview. A worldview or *frame of reference* is made up of two dimensions: a habit of mind and a resulting point of view. The habit of mind is how one makes meaning assumed from her or his culture and the resulting point of view is how one plays this meaning out in one's daily life.²⁴ One

might simplify these with the habit of mind correlating with patterns of thinking and the resulting point of view as actions. When a person has a disorienting dilemma, she can choose to ignore the confliction it brings to her current worldview or to alter her worldview. If she chooses the latter, this occurs through four possible routes: "elaborating existing frames of reference," "learning new frames of reference," "transforming points of view" or "transforming habits of mind."²⁵

With all of these, the transformation occurs through critically reflecting on one's initial assumptions—this is the key ingredient of worldview change. Through "elaborating existing frames of references" one might contemplate why and in what ways the disorienting dilemma confronted one's worldview, and by doing so begin to expand this to be able to integrate new information. The second possibility is to adopt a new worldview. This possibility is challenging as it is not simple to drop one's initial worldview and learn a new one—our identities come from deep rooted experiences inherited from our dominant culture and more locally situated subsets of culture. The latter two possibilities consist of changing one of the two dimensions that comprise our worldviews—through reflecting on our held assumptions and changing either our conditioned thoughts or actions.

It is important to note the danger of simply adopting a new worldview. Most people are not aware of their worldviews. Feinstein and Krippner claim each person is operating under a personal mythology, which is largely unconscious, and that "People often live their lives with very little awareness of the lens through which they are looking."²⁶ The notable transpersonal psychology and consciousness researcher Charles Tart claims, "The pattern of a state of consciousness deliberately maintains its integrity in a changing world,"²⁷ affirming that worldviews are often contained within fixed patterns. We like to think that reality is solid and fixed. Tart also introduces the terms "consensus reality"²⁸ and "consensus consciousness,"²⁹ where our worldviews come from our larger cultural conditioning which:

[W]orks to convince us that the acquired characteristics of enculturation are actually natural, so it can be very difficult to see these

things when we are in a state of consensus consciousness. Sometimes being in some altered state...gives us an alternative view that is like an outside perspective on yourself. Then you may see the conditioned, restrictive quality of consensus consciousness.³⁰

This altered state may come through many forms. The experiences of the dark night of the soul, examining a core wound and having a disorienting dilemma are all experiences that hold the potential to break and transform our worldviews.

While the classical definition of transformative learning holds critical reflection as a fairly rational process, grounded in one's everyday consciousness, Elias expands this definition to include unconscious dimensions:

[T]ransformative learning can happen through direct apprehension of an alternative framework of highly symbolic meaning, through the direct apprehension and appropriation of frameworks of meaning that emerge freshly from the unconscious. This process is described as discernment, an appreciative and receptive process that stands in sharp contrast with Mezirow's emphasis on critical reflection.³¹

Yet whether an individual has a disorienting dilemma that surfaces from everyday consciousness or a more transpersonal experience, in order for a transformation to occur the person must critically reflect on the experience.

Elias continues and outlines three conditions that are the results of the transformative learning process for the individual: (1) "a 'conscious I' capable of exercising critical reflection;" (2) an enlarged capacity for thinking that embodies holding dualities, is systematic and "perceives archetypes as partners for inner dialogue" and (3) being "a conscious creative force in the world" through an openness to perpetual learning and change. The transformative learner is continually reflecting on one's and society's assumptions without situating into a new, fixed worldview. Perhaps most importantly, the transformative learner is bringing the new levels of awareness to invoke creative change in the world.

By having multiple disorienting dilemmas, one becomes more comfortable with change through recognizing that there are larger realities within the world than those originally held. This process is known as the self-transforming self or fourth order consciousness, where one continually reforms the way one makes meaning to the extent where one moves beyond a self-centered perspective.³² Through this type of transformation, one develops the ability to understand the perspectives of others and to even hold multiple perspectives at once.

McWhinney and Markos relate the process of the "self-transforming self" to that of ancient ritual. They contend this process occurs in Learning III (LIII), where one "challenges the interpretation of experience, relations, and truth systems, leading to broad questions such as human life, world ecology, and relations to higher powers."³³ A person who unravels the assumptions of the dominant paradigm and embarks on finding more resilient assumptions and actions, transforming to a new paradigm, often finds oneself a "wanderer" traveling a solitary path. There is often danger that this person will seek refuge in a community or group with a different paradigm, yet this new paradigm quickly becomes close minded, steeped in a new type of dogmatism. A true "self-transforming self" never becomes stagnant. McWhinney and Markos claim that "commitments to openness create a continual LIII giving birth to sages, quiet wisdom, and perhaps a sense of the Tao"³⁴ or to:

[A] transcendent LIII mode, where the individual continues to question and lead others to explore beyond their habituated lives. This is an ultimate goal of transformative education: to live in perpetual self-renewal, reviewing the assumptions by which self and society are guided and given support, reflecting on and challenging their belief systems.³⁵

Off Centered Worldviews: Positionality, Border Pedagogy, and the Multicultural Self

Experiencing *the dark night of a soul*, a *sacred wound*, *initiation rites* or a *disorienting dilemma* are clear examples of how one's worldview is broken and one is presented with the opportunity to develop a larger perspective. While all of these, to some extent, emphasize a responsibility

to bring this larger perspective to the individual's actions in the world, their descriptions tend to focus on the solitary path and a unitive, universal consciousness. They are events that crack one's lenses of seeing reality, yet might be viewed as anticipated developmental episodes of the healthy life path. Moreover, they imply that the person experiencing the disorientation was previously immersed in a consensus reality, based on the accepted norms of society, and the disorienting event shifted the individual into a larger view. There are many individuals whose experiences are not centered within this consensus reality, what is identified as the common experience of society, by their backgrounds with differences of race, gender, class, sexuality, physical ability and other forms of distinction. Within our society, these are distinctions that have led to marginalization and disproportionate levels of power based on difference.

While marginalized peoples are generally at a disadvantage, in the context of worldview expansion, they often hold greater power through having experiences that cause them to question the mainstream. And moreover, with the acceptance that our current ecological and social crisis is caused, to a large extent, by the problematic western worldview, having an off centered worldview may be powerful in transforming the dominant paradigm. This seems particularly true when one holds an identity that comes from multiple intersections of race, gender, class and other distinctions that do not permit one to sit solidly in a single grouping. A person who has many experiences of identity that do not fit within the majority has, through critical reflection and action, the potential of holding an expanded worldview. Hence by being off center, one possesses power to shift the worldview to hold multiple, often conflicting lenses.

The concepts of *positionality*, *border pedagogy* and *the multicultural self* support this idea. *Positionality* is in sharp contrast to the stance of quantitative research and western tradition, which emphasizes being a distanced observer when looking at situations or assuming a position of neutrality. Instead, *positionality* accepts that we are situated in our lived experiences and that "lived experiences, particularly those of race, class, and gender, shape our worldviews."³⁶ This aligns with notions within

transformative learning, consciousness studies and constructivism which advocate that our worldviews are constructed by our experience and as a result are and always will be partial: "we take our way of *composing* reality to be *reality*. The great embarrassment or liberation of transformation itself is the recognition that what we have been taking as reality is actually only a *construction* of reality."³⁷ By developing the capacities to see our constructed reality through identifying and reflecting on dimensions of our worldviews, we move away from dogmatic, binary views and develop larger perspectives.

Similar to positionality, *border pedagogy* criticizes the mainstream western paradigm as an embodiment of fixed, binary dualities. We see this within our society through classifications such as rich or poor, White or Black, male or female, Republican or Democrat—categories which sort and divide and often signify higher and lower levels of power. Moreover, border pedagogy as well as positionality critiques the western paradigm for purporting a dominant view that is singular and exclusionary, based on views of the privileged.

Thus, historically, the privileged have often discursively subordinated less privileged groups by their flawed and often denigrating interpretations/representations and their assignment of universality and superiority to their own traits while marginalizing and ascribing inferiority to traits different from their own.³⁸

To address these dogmatisms, border pedagogy encourages learners to see the spaces in between and beyond fixed identities, to work with the edges where "Borders are hovered over, crossed and criss-crossed."³⁹

The *multicultural self* is the ability to identify with multiple, different human groupings. Anthony speaks to the need to learn the multicultural stories of diverse peoples as a means to shift away from the dominant western worldview that is based on whiteness.⁴⁰ He claims, "The multicultural self represents the capacity for empathy with many people and cultures, and also with our capacity for empathy with living."⁴¹ One develops the capacity for holding multiple perspectives through experiences of engaging with diverse peoples. Bennett brings an approach that

allows one to first identify one diverse perspective and ultimately move into a self-concept that integrates multiple perspectives. His training model moves from stages of denial where one has had no exposure to cultural differences to the final two stages of adaptation and integration where the self is first able to emotionally relate to one diverse worldview and finally can integrate multiple diverse worldviews into one's self-identity to such an extent that the original self-identity or worldview is transformed, the self is flexible and exposure to differences no longer results in conflict to one's worldview.⁴²

People who are already situated in marginalized groups often have a "multiple consciousness" and "are better able to perceive incidents from multiple perspectives."⁴³ When one holds an identity that already straddles multiple areas of difference, one is forced to hold an expanded worldview in order to integrate these disparate notions of self because "The other is not just a boundary that we cross from time to time; the other is always within us."⁴⁴ If a person who holds a multiple consciousness or multicultural self continues to develop an open worldview as more diverse experiences are encountered, she has the potential to evolve into a self-transforming self, one who perpetually learns and applies this toward social transformation.

In outlining various experiences and identities that expands one's consciousness away from the dominant western paradigm and pulls one to invoke transformative change, it is important to bring in *the ecological self*. Similar to the multicultural self, the ecological self expands one's small sense of identity to holding multiple perspectives, this time with the more than human, natural world. A root cause of the ecological and social crisis is the fixation on the needs of our ego exhibited by people living within globalized realities, particularly those within western paradigms. We have developed false selves fueled by "deep-seated but unacknowledged feelings of worthlessness and emptiness."⁴⁵ Despite having so many consumer goods, the fruit of globalization, we experience lack. Our separations from one another, from nature and from the sacred are the reasons for this sense of isolation. When we become aware of the damage we are inflicting upon the earth and start to change our worldviews through both our frames of reference and resulting actions, we

start to reconnect. The awakening to the ecological crisis is another form of a disorienting dilemma or the dark night of the soul. The ecological self helps to foster this process by moving from a small self or egocentric self to one that includes the perspectives of other beings within the living world.⁴⁶

If we bring together the concepts of these various broken identities and capacities for expanding our worldviews, our sense of self, a person who holds both a multicultural and ecological self, has immense power to see and act outside of our dominant worldview that purports social and ecological oppression and instead to move toward a life affirming paradigm. It is our experiences with broken selves, paradigms and worlds that crack our lenses, our worldviews and foster a new way of seeing and acting. It is through broken lenses that we may see most clearly.

Personal Fragments

As a teacher and academic, I find it is easier to speak about the larger patterns in the world than to focus on my personal story. In light of all of the suffering on the planet, my experiences seem benign. Yet I realize that my convictions are rooted with my life experiences and I have an interesting bricolage of diversity, life events, critical reflection and practice that may be useful to others. I have encountered many cracks to my worldview. What follows are some small fragments of my personal story.

There was a time, a state, in our childhood, when there was a vitality, a freshness, a zest, a longing for and loving of beauty that could make the earth a heaven. Light is a good metaphor for it, a metaphor that is literally true in some ways. Unfortunately, the light we once experienced gets covered over and seems lost.⁴⁷

By experientially exploring your core wound, you can render it sacred. Your wound holds a key to your destiny.⁴⁸

I am sure that everyone can remember the moment they felt as their most tragic, where one's safe reality was punctured, leaving a lifelong imprint of sadness. For me, this occurred during the first grade. In the early 1970s, just a few years after the passage of the Fair Housing

Act, which among other things barred discrimination in purchasing a home, my parents moved our family from the inner city Bronx to a new suburban community outside of Princeton, New Jersey. We were the only African American family and among very few people of color. My parents had moved us there to get away from the inequitable and often unsafe conditions of New York's inner cities. They had achieved the "American Dream," buying their first home, establishing a healthy family, and living in a safe community with "good" schools. I was an infant when we moved and my earliest years there seemed normal. I was an affectionate and curious child—making friends with strangers and always eager to chat about what I found interesting in my world. Entering kindergarten was an exciting time for me—more kids to play with, new things to discover. I delighted in that first school year. But something changed for me in the first grade.

Within the first few days of that school year, a group of boys started to bully me, causing me to cry each day, and continued the entire year. The first time it happened, I doubt they intended it to be a daily game. One of them told me that I was bad because I was Black. He said that I was not a real person. I can't remember what else those boys said. I just remember how stunned I was to hear this. It was as if I was told the worst secret—of all the kids, I was a freak, unworthy, did not belong. As a very sensitive and naive seven-year-old, I burst into tears. Those boys must have been shocked by the power they had over me. All I know is that they quickly became junkies. Each day they would tease me with their bigoted, cruel remarks until I broke down and cried. At first, it did not take much to break me. One or two hurtful words could do it. Later, they started using harsher words such as the "n-word." I remember one time, they brought over the only other kid of color in my class, who was East Indian, and informed me that he was okay because he had never been a slave. As the year progressed, their tactics got worse. The taunting became longer, often taking a large portion of recess time. About mid-way through the year, they started recruiting other classmates to help. There were days when I was chased and heckled by the entire class. Going to school was so horrible, I was so dismayed, so confused. By the end of the year, I had become a different child.

When I reflect on this experience, I can put it into the context of prejudice and racism and the post-Civil Rights issues the US faced. Clearly this was not the greatest injustice of the era, lots of kids are bullied, yet for a young child this marred my sense of safety and delight in the world. I also get angry that the adults that were present did nothing. With the exception of one teacher's aide that would sometimes come to my rescue during recess, none of the adults did anything. No one talked to my classmates or contacted our parents. I did not even tell my parents until much later in life. It was the first crashing of my belief in the world. The scarring left was a sense of isolation, a fear of not fitting in, being the other and the pain this sense brought. This wound does color my worldview and while I now view not ever feeling like I truly belong to one group as a gift, there will always be underlying pain.

The following year, my parents moved my older brother and me to a very diverse community and things grew better for a while. We had another three year stint as the only African American kids in Connecticut and then moved back to the diverse community. Yet I realize that the fixed identifiers such as Black and White do not hold strongly with many of my experiences. I identify primarily as African American and hold ancestral roots from Jamaica, Barbados, the Irish, Welsh, Scottish, East Indians, the Catawba and Cherokee. Most of the stories of my lineage are lost and those I do have are partial and often mysterious and sad. I am descended from the enslaved, the colonizer and the colonized. While my parents came from poor and working class backgrounds, I grew up in an upper middle class household and hold a certain sense of privilege. And while both my parents identify as African American, they have distinct upbringings, with my mother coming from a West Indian heritage and my father's parents coming from North and South Carolina. With the coupling of the economic background and living in all White communities in much of my early years, I often find that I do not fully fit in with my cultural peers—as if I missed some important social upbringings that I would have gained if I lived in predominantly communities of color.

Interestingly, it was during those early years that I had my first encounter with a wild place. One day I wandered off with my brother

and some of his friends outside of the planned, suburban community we lived in. I remember ending up by a small creek and something shifted for me—the patterns of square plots with the exact same houses with domesticated nature vanished and a new rhythm was revealed. From that time forward I was always drawn to wild places. In my mid-teens I had a peak moment when I was feeling extremely anxious about life and was sitting outside and everything simply started buzzing—the sunlight, the air, the surrounding sounds—and in that moment I first experienced peacefulness and contentment. By my mid-twenties I always lived on the edge of the forest and walking through the woods and being outside in wild places is where I feel most at home. I have had so many experiences in the natural world that have expanded my worldview and fostered relationships with living beings that I never knew were possible.

The first disorienting dilemma I recollect happened during my early teens. While in the transformative learning field disorienting dilemmas are typically experienced by adults, this was an experience that clashed with my worldview and caused me to change it. I was in my third year at summer stock, which was essentially a camp for the performing arts. This was my life passion—acting, singing, dancing and making costumes and sets. I was talented, but that summer I was frustrated because I was not getting any major parts in the productions we did. These were productions for children—*Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella* and all of the major female parts were for White girls. Then when we did *Peter Pan*, I, the only girl of color, was cast as Tiger Lily. On top of this, the adults were doing a performance which we assisted with as the chorus. The woman playing the lead could not project her voice while singing. The director had me go up on stage with a broom, sweeping in the background and singing to add to her voice. It was at that moment that I realized that there were never going to be parts for me. Even though I was talented, I was living in a racist world, designed for people who did not look like me, and if I wanted this to change I needed to go out in the world and do something about it. That is what drew me to social justice. Prior to that, I experienced racism in a much more personal context, rather than systemically.

After finishing high school, I attended a very prestigious liberal arts school and majored in International Relations as I, idealistically, wanted to heal the world. I received a very good education and much of the overt learning was seeing the wealth and privilege of my peers. It was a somewhat segregated campus with the majority of students of color choosing to socialize with the university's community of color. I found myself again one of the only students of color in the social groups I chose and the other students of color within these groups were similar to me—growing up in situations where they were often the only person of color. Academically, I learned about so many things—particularly the framing of domination from economics, histories of colonization, cultural histories, war, politics, the dynamics of race, feminism, ecofeminism and the rise of globalization. By the time I graduated, I was disillusioned with the state of the world. Eventually I went back to school to do a teacher education program that focused on multicultural education. I was particularly interested in serving underprivileged youth and held a strong critique of the disservice received by marginalized groups.

While I learned so much through focusing on multicultural education, even its most radical iterations did not address the ecological crisis. I was disheartened with the ideal that equality meant everyone having equal access to the “American Dream” that was essentially destroying the planet. During that time I was exposed to ecopsychology which, like social justice, held a strong critique of western civilization. Suddenly my love for social justice and for the natural world merged, specifically with my exposure to the work of Carl Anthony, who, along with Belvie Rooks, became two of my dearest mentors. I finally found my passion and felt seen and understood. This spiraled into so many directions and synchronistic events and led to the completion of two more degrees, becoming a professor and developing a strong voice.

Another disorienting dilemma that stands out strongly occurred during my early thirties when I began a doctoral program in the San Francisco Bay Area. For at least six years prior, I worked at a college in a more rural to suburban region of Arizona that was extremely White with less than a handful of culturally diverse employees and very few students of color. While I, for the most part, loved this community, I

had also had some deep experiences of pain surrounding racial ignorance, tokenism and a sense of alienation as the only African American woman. In contrast, the school I had just started was known for having diverse students and actively seeking to increase this. During my first intensive with the program, some of the students, who were getting close to graduating, presented their work. I attended one session led by an African American woman whose scholarship was on the experiences of African American women. To be honest, I do not remember the specific content. What I do and will always remember is that she opened with acknowledging each African American woman attending her presentation, which was most of the attendees. In fact there were probably twelve people present, all but one an African American woman. She acknowledged each woman by name or, if she did not know her, by "sister." She finished without acknowledging me. I froze at that moment in disbelief, confusion and shock. There was a deep sting and sense of feeling choked, silenced and invisible. Within tens of seconds or a minute, another woman spoke up and pointed out she forgot to acknowledge me. The presenter apologized and I could tell she meant it, but also that she did not realize I was African American. I burst into tears for at least an hour—from the shielding drops that periodically roll down the side of one's cheeks to bits of sobbing after the presentation. I was consoled by these sisters and was grateful to be seen and comforted, but the overall feeling was shock and sadness that I was so invisible. Most of the women had long braids or close cropped afros and wore clothing that seemed more cultural—flowing shirts and dresses in brighter colors, more tribal looking earrings, and many of the women had darker skin than I. After living in a community where I stood out as the only African American woman, I was stunned to *not* be seen as this in a group of peers of my same culture, gender and academic status. I was left with the sense there was no community or group that I seamlessly fit within. I was always to be on the edge, an outsider.

I must acknowledge that the disorientations I have shared thus far frame me as the victim—the recipient of some injustice. When I teach disorienting dilemmas in the classroom, I often tease my students that it is much easier to recall an incident where one was the person treated

unfairly, as opposed to the reverse or even instances where there was no perpetrator, just a causal clash in reality. Many of the cracks in my worldview have occurred through my own ignorance or through awkward, revealing situations. Yet I must admit it is the disorienting dilemmas that come with a touch of heartbreak that come most readily to mind. When we can pull apart and see our conditionings, learn to see those of others and start to work with those edges, a new level of compassion and understanding can arise.

New Vision: Seeing Clearly through Cracked Lenses

No one person has the horizons of meaning adequate to fully interpret any social situation, but this is not necessarily a bad thing; rather than being an argument for an exclusive representation of the other, it is an argument for the most inclusive possible representation of any group. The greater the number of interpretations, the fuller our understanding of others' experiences will become. No doubt, many of these representations will conflict with one another.⁴⁹

[N]o single unifying force in today's complex civilization is powerful enough to preserve cohesion amid the multiple of contrasting mythologies people are exposed to now.⁵⁰

Our world is diverse, complex, fragmented and experiencing extremely high levels of suffering. Our ecological and social crisis, which I believe is also a spiritual crisis, indicates a deep need for us to connect with one another, the living world and a sense of the sacred—the numinous. Much of our societies, particularly those nested within western, globalized realities, are holding and enacting worldviews which are destructive. We need to shift our paradigms so our lenses not only see the damage we are causing, but they also include the widest frames of life. So much of the control and order that has been created through western tradition has been to establish a singular worldview in order to exert authority and silence dissenting paradigms. While having a common story certainly creates order and common vision, if it is not based

on the truth of our diverse experiences, it is not authentic. By embracing the power of our broken identities, the cracks in our worldviews, as a means of enlarging our perspectives, we have the power of unifying in common experience through difference.

Notes

- 1 Davis and Canty, "Ecopsychology and Transpersonal Psychology;" Fischer, *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life*; Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth*.
- 2 Glendinning, *My Name is Chellis & I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization*.
- 3 Abdullah, *Creating a World that Works for All*.
- 4 Glendinning, *My Name is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization*, 20–21.
- 5 Abdullah, *Creating a World that Works for All*, 4.
- 6 Ibid., 87.
- 7 Clarke, "The Crack in Everything," 63; Plotkin, *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche*, 177.
- 8 Cohen, "Anthem."
- 9 Plotkin, *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche*, 177–178.
- 10 Wilber, "The Spectrum of Psychopathology;" Bache, "The Eco-crisis and Species Ego-death: Speculations on the Future."
- 11 Plotkin, *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche*; Plotkin, *Nature and Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*.
- 12 Morrison, "Trauma and Transformative Passage."
- 13 Elias, "It's Time to Change Our Minds."
- 14 Wilber, "The Spectrum of Psychopathology."
- 15 Bache, "The Eco-crisis and Species Ego-death: Speculations on the Future," 91–92.
- 16 Plotkin, *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche*, 27.
- 17 —, *Wild Mind: A Field Guide to the Human Psyche*; Plotkin, *Nature and Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*.
- 18 Plotkin, *Nature and Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*, 262.
- 19 Ibid., 262.
- 20 Morrison, "Trauma and Transformative Passage," 40.
- 21 Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community*, 278.
- 22 Elias, "It's Time to Change Our Minds."
- 23 Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*.
- 24 —, "Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformative Theory."
- 25 Ibid., 19.
- 26 Feinstein and Krippner, *Personal Mythology: The Psychology of Your Evolving Self*, 1.
- 27 Tart, *Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential*, 5.
- 28 —, *States of Consciousness*.
- 29 —, *Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential*.
- 30 Ibid., 16.
- 31 Elias, "It's Time to Change Our Minds."
- 32 Debold, "Epistemology, Fourth Order Consciousness, and the Subject-Object Relationship: Or How the Self Evolves with Robert Kegan."
- 33 McWhinney and Markos, "Transformative Education: Across the Threshold," 19.
- 34 Ibid., 29.

- 35 Ibid., 30.
- 36 Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, 3.
- 37 Debold, "Epistemology, Fourth Order Consciousness, and the Subject-object Relationship," 146.
- 38 Briscoe, "A Question of Representation in Educational Discourse: Multiplicities and Intersections of Identities and Positionalities," 27.
- 39 Cook, "Nothing Can Ever Be the Case of 'Us' and 'Them' Again: Exploring the Politics of Difference through Border Pedagogy and Student Journal Writing," 15.
- 40 Anthony, "Ecopsychology and the Deconstruction of Whiteness."
- 41 Canty et al., "Roundtable: Race, Environment and Sustainability (Part One)," 240.
- 42 Bennett, "Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity."
- 43 Briscoe, "A Question of Representation in Educational Discourse: Multiplicities and Intersections of Identities and Positionalities," 25.
- 44 Ibid., 30.
- 45 Kanner and Gomes, "The All Consuming Self," 79.
- 46 Naess, "Self-realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World."
- 47 Tart, *Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential*, xi–xii.
- 48 Plotkin, *Nature and Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*, 262.
- 49 Briscoe, "A Question of Representation in Educational Discourse: Multiplicities and Intersections of Identities and Positionalities," 35.
- 50 Feinstein and Krippner, *Personal Mythology: The Psychology of Your Evolving Self*, 7.

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4

INTERSECTION OF AN INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEW AND APPLIED NEUROPHYSIOLOGY

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When I gazed into the face of the Achuar leader/warrior/family man I saw such clear eyes. It was as if I were looking into a mass of brilliant stars in the unpolluted sky, deep in the Ecuadorian rainforest. His eyes reflected all that the Achuar had showed me of how they live as part of the forest, the animals, the water, the birds, dreams, and spirits. The children are confident, as they live in harmony with their surroundings. Able to articulate with words and body movement the care in which they hold each other and the natural world, for they understand that everything is interconnected, everything is sacred. The words of my own elders and leaders who taught me of the sacred circle in which the people, the earth/natural world, and spirit are all connected—that at the core, we are all of the same root. My knees buckled and tears of gratitude flowed down my face—it struck me that I was seeing in the Achuar leader's eyes what my ancestors may have looked like before. Before they were overcome by the insatiable hunger of others for more land, more resources, more control over the world, rather than seeking to live with the world.¹