

CHRONICLE 14

Talking to Myself

Recently a friend wrote to me and said, “Mike, I’m enjoying your chronicles. But couldn’t you be more specific and tell us what we should be doing about climate change?”

I’m not trying to tell people what they should be doing. That is up to them. But the question made me aware that I am not being clear enough about what I’m trying to do with these chronicles. So I had a conversation with myself that I will share with you.

Q. Mike, why are you writing these chronicles?

A. I’m writing them because I’m deeply concerned about climate change and our seeming inability to come to grips with it. Recent reports from the scientists indicate the seriousness of the situation. We must deal with it decisively to keep the average temperature from rising more than two degrees centigrade. If we don’t, we face disastrous consequences by 2040.

Q. So how do we deal with it?

A. There are many things we can do and we read about these every day in the papers or on line. But it’s not enough to just tweak our existing systems—our economic, political and legal systems—for these are what is causing the problems. I think the essential thing we have to do is change the way we think and feel about Earth. And create new systems.

Q. What do you mean by changing the way we think and feel about Earth?

A. In terms of thinking, we must come to realize that we are earthlings—part of Earth-- and what we are doing to Earth we are doing to ourselves. Unfortunately we tend to think of ourselves as completely separate from Earth. Though we know from our DNA that we have emerged from other species, we tend to think of ourselves as being at the top of all life forms. So we are somehow “in here” in our own bodies and Earth is somehow something “out there”.

Q. And about how we feel about Earth...?

A. It is not enough to simply change our thinking. We must internalize our awareness of our relationship with Earth. One name for this internalized awareness is an *Earth Spirituality*. This is the motivating force to work for change. Most religions around the world have this sense of their

relationship with Earth. For other people the spirituality will come from personal experience. For both groups this manifests itself in rituals or practices such as walking in the woods, listening to music, admiring art, reading poetry, Earth rituals and so forth. Whatever the source, the spirituality leads to a desire to help Earth care for itself.

Q. Mike, where did all this stuff about a relationship with Earth come from? Is it something you dreamed up or does it come from some other source?

A. It comes from two sources: from Indigenous cultures and from a movement called the New Cosmology.

Q. Which Indigenous cultures?

A. I spent almost thirty years working with Inuit and Dene communities in the Canadian Arctic. In their cultures, as in many other Indigenous cultures, they see themselves as part of Earth—some say “Mother Earth.” Their intimate relationship with the land is the essential element and the foundation of their cultures.

Q. What is the New Cosmology?

A. The New Cosmology is a new understanding of cosmology (traditionally the story of the development of the universe) that incorporates the story of Earth and the human into the story of the universe.

It is the brainchild of Thomas Berry (1914-2009), a cultural historian and priest of the Passionist Order, and Brian Swimme, a physicist (mathematical cosmology) teaching at the California Institute of Integral Studies. The development was strongly influenced by the insights of Teilhard de Chardin, (1881-1955) a paleontologist and Jesuit priest.

Berry and Swimme have developed a new vision of Earth and the Universe called the Ecozoic Era (“the home of Earth and living things’) that posits a *mutually enhancing relationship between our species, Earth and the Universe*. Fundamental to this vision is an Earth Spirituality.

Q. Do you have a basic approach?

A. Yes. My focus is at the community level. I believe that the changes must come from the bottom up, not the top down. I use plain language that ordinary folks understand. I do a lot of research and since I’m not a scientist I depend on writers who boil the science down in articles for ordinary folks. I also use stories, a lot of stories. They provide a context

for understanding because they relate to the personal experiences of individuals and families. This chronicle, for example, is a story about me talking to myself. (My close friends know that I often wander around the community talking to myself.)

Q. Final Question. Given the dire nature of climate change and scientific predictions do you have a sense of hope?

A. Yes, I do. We have a 2 million year existence as a species overcoming many challenges on this Earth. My hope is based upon my conviction that if we change the way we think and feel about our relationship with Earth our relationship with Earth will change. And as Berry has noted, this is one of those “moments of grace”. We have to take advantage of it.

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