

Persephone Arbour

Conscious Ageing - the grand adventure?

Turning Pages

A collection of comments on, and conundrums of – a well-lived life

5 Listening at Christmas

“Our own life is the instrument with which we experiment with the truth.” Thich Nhat Hanh

This quotation inspires the life I have attempted to live – experimenting with the truth. It took me many years to understand that, of course.

This is part five of a small collection of my writings, some old, some new. They contain musings on my life and the world within which I live it.

Listening at Christmas

This is the time of year when we meet each other, because of a revered and joyful tradition. However, it is not only tradition. Celebration of any kind has grown out of our human need to meet and connect with each other. Historic events and their celebration have gradually been created to give us the opportunity to connect with our hearts, joy and sense of connectedness. They are part of today's society – whatever belief system is behind them.

Celebration may seem totally inappropriate when we remember the amount of suffering in the world: the tragedy, the pain, the disenfranchisement, the ignorance, the greed, the politics of war and global recession. As individuals there can be a feeling of helplessness in the face of the catastrophe unfolding before our eyes.

It seems to me that we have choices. We can wring our hands, bow our heads in shame and hide away, we can join the fight against war and the money moguls - or we can start to hold out our hands in kindness towards anyone that comes in our path whether

they be rich or poor, lost, afraid, addicted or lonely. They maybe strangers, friends or family – it makes no difference. Whether the person in front of us is a refugee, someone who lives just down the street or a family member, an extra sense of awareness of our shared humanity can be expressed in many small ways.

I think that there has been enough fighting, enough bigotry and judgment. Whether we are judging political madness, commercial madness or social madness, the truth is that we are seeing a colossal global example of judgment begetting judgment, of fight begetting fight and greed begetting greed. Something fundamental in our global psyche needs to be given attention. To put it simply can we become aware of the need to listen to each other? Whether it's over the garden fence or on the other side of the world?

If we really listen, without our normal prejudice, conditioning or judgment, in the way that we would like to be listened to, then real communication happens. Not to win points or put forward suggestions – but really listening, eyes looking into eyes – then magic can happen. It is possible to hear that person, tribe, country – under the skin so to speak. It is possible to see our joint heritage as human beings.

We cannot ordain this, the government will not pass a bill ordering us to be more aware. It is up to all of us as individuals to find the place within our hearts that prompts us to be willing to experiment, to wake up. This holiday season is a good time to start with your family, your friends, your colleagues – even at the dreaded office Christmas party! Beneath all the glitz, glitter and commercialism are ordinary people with big hearts who just need a gentle reminder. Treasure the childlike pleasure in gifts and Christmas trees, and the lights and the cold winter nights. Treasure your memories and above all treasure yourself for having lived your life as fully as you have.

This end of year season is the time of the child-like. A sense of innocence and joy that is never lost, just covered up for most of the time. For that reason it can be one of the most important times of the year. So, listen to the singing, watch the soppy movies, meet your friends – do everything you can to consciously rekindle that feeling in your heart once more. Anything that leads you inwards to that place is worth doing. Drop the judgments about commercialism, emotionalism, habit, tradition and just DO IT, as totally as you can – and most importantly – start to listen!

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