



Ancient Law of Hospitality, by Thomas Berry

Perhaps our greatest resource for peace is in an awareness that we enrich ourselves when we share our possessions with others. We discover peace when we learn to esteem those goods whereby we benefit

ourselves in proportion as we give them to others. The very structure and functioning of the universe and of the planet Earth reveal an indescribable diversity bound in an all-embracing unity. The heavens themselves are curved over the Earth in an encompassing embrace.

Here I would recall the experience of Henry David Thoreau, an American naturalist the mid-nineteenth century who lived a very simple life with few personal possessions. At one time he was attracted to the idea of purchasing an especially beautiful bit of land with a pasture and a wooded area. He even made a deposit. But then he realized that it was not necessary to purchase the land because, he reasoned, he already possessed the land in its wonder and its beauty as he passed by each day. This intimacy with the land could not be taken away from him no matter who owned the land in its physical reality. So indeed that same bit of land could be owned in its wonder and beauty by an unlimited number of persons, even though in its physical reality it might be owned by a single person.

Such was the argument of Mencius, the Chinese Confucian writer who taught the emperor that he should open up the royal park for others, since it would be an even greater joy to have others present with him, just as at a musical concert we enjoy the music without diminishing, but increasing, our own joy as we share it with others. So too for those in the Bodhisattva tradition of India, where those such as Shanti Deva, in the fifth century of our era, took a vow to refuse beatitude itself until all living creatures were saved. For only when they participated in his joy could he be fully caught up in the delight of paradise.

It has taken these many centuries for us to meet with each other in the comprehensive manner that is now possible. While for the many long centuries we had fragments of information concerning each other, we can now come together, speak with each other, dine with each other. Above all we can tell our stories to each other.

Tonight we might recall the ancient law of hospitality, whereby the wanderer was welcomed.

--Thomas Berry, in '_Evening Thoughts_'

