

A Window of Opportunity

Wendy Marks - May 2020



photo by Susan Spector

Our lives seem taken over with survival these days, as we take unprecedented measures to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe. I'm being responsible and doing my self care and social distancing, but want to take a moment to step back and look at the opportunities the virus is providing us.

In this article, I'm trying to see a big picture, as many of us are taking stock. In no way am I downplaying the anxiety and suffering of upheaval and lost lives. Every day I work with people who are sick with this nasty disease; I walk with it every day. But while the pandemic continues to take the headlines and determine our daily behavior, it also gives us a chance to look at the entirety of its effects.

Nature Rebounding

Recently I was sent an amazing video of animals walking the streets all over the world: coyotes, mountain lions, elephants; lions basking in the sun on the golf course, and even a monkey jumping into a swimming pool. (I think I like the monkey one the best.) Yes, this is all very lighthearted and amusing, but it tells us something.

We have continued to shrink animal habitats as we build and build. Perhaps, if we backed off a bit, we would be able to balance the animals' habitat with ours. Not that people are going to give up golf or allow elephants to stroll through their streets, but maybe we should think about the impact that humans are having on the global environment. We are pretty sure at this point that the COVID virus comes from animal transmissions. We are interfering with their habitat, and they with ours, in ways that never happened in our memories. Maybe we could find ways to allocate land to preserve more wildlife habitats.

Let's step back to a planetary level. We've seen the pictures of San Francisco without the smog, of people in India seeing mountains they haven't seen in decades, of satellite photographs of the earth without all the pollution. There is no way to contest that human isolation and limiting of commerce has begun the healing of the earth. In weeks, not years. Wow.

I know, planetary healing isn't as simple as that. We want to go back to airplane travel, long car trips, and most importantly we want to return to work, which often means commuting. We're also longing for consumer goods that require our factories to be operating.

So what's the answer? As I often say, "If I were Queen..." Well if I were Queen, I would begin by hiring all the unemployed and underemployed people to repair and build infrastructure. We'd strengthen our economy and strive to optimize transportation that is easily accessible. Ideally, we would do this in ways that minimize the impact on animals and the environment.

I'm not espousing a political point of view, but the way I see it, it's good for the economy to have the equivalent of a Works Progress Administration that would provide jobs, improve public transport, and provide wind and solar power everywhere. The WPA created jobs for millions during the Depression, and even included programs for educational and cultural enhancement. Out of great difficulty came purposeful work and improved communities.

Solar panels are cheap; there is no reason not to have them. Yes, gas is cheap right now, but environmentally it's costly. Can't all our next cars be hybrids?

Our spiritual, physical, and mental health require that we have a healthy environment in which to express them. Look at all the kids in the cities with asthma. I see them all the time, and COVID-19 is really hitting them hard. The prevalence of respiratory illness did not come from nowhere. So yes, this is a medical issue. But it is also a moral and spiritual issue.

Would all these efforts in any way guarantee that we don't have another virus like this and have to quarantine? Of course not. I once worked with a gentleman from Texas who was an ornithologist by training. He used to tell me in his lovely Texas twang, "Don't worry about the earth, Mother Earth is going to shake us off like a dog with fleas if we don't behave." I don't know about you, but I feel a little shaking right now.

A New Normal

We do have some choices, and before we all step back into "normal" life, I implore you to take this time to review what we might want normal to look like in the future. I don't think that means giving up a lot of things that matter. I think it means refocusing, recognizing the importance of protecting the world we live in, and cleaning up the mess that we've made.

Vaccines and treatments will be put into place, but, as my Texan



friend said, we need to behave more holistically on Mother Earth as we move forward. Let's use our pressure as citizens to get the government to set up programs that provide for cleanup, reforestation, use of alternative energy sources... you get the idea.

We have an opportunity to work together and truly make things better. This is a time when we are called to review our stewardship of the planet, and our place in it. We've been apart in little isolated capsules with plenty of time to think. So let's think. With so many brilliant minds, there are surely great ideas and initiatives that we can accomplish. Let's re-purpose ourselves.

Namaste,
Wendy