

In *ClearCut – The Wages of Dominion*, I attempt to use the voice of a magnificent Western Red Cedar that had been growing in place for some sixteen hundred years before succumbing to the same ClearCut that the rest of our planet has become.

I returned to this stump over and over for three years as I prowled the ClearCuts that surround the remnant temperate rain forest in the Olympic National Park in the making of this exhibition. It became a place of refuge, a place where I felt I could open and receive instruction.

It was a place of authority, a place I could trust, and I felt at home there regardless of climactic conditions of the moment, usually inhospitable. I needed to make some sense of the cultural mindset underlying what I have come to experience as a crisis in our current human condition.

The guided meditation that accompanies the photo exhibition is both a record of my spiritual journey in ClearCut, and an invitation to join me up on that cedar stump and share in that experience. The photographs present a visual narrative that parallels the written one. Neither is more important than the other; rather they cover the same emotional trajectory from differing sensory sources. The visual is more visceral, while the verbal is more cerebral. Together they illuminate and amplify each other.

The simple question I came with to the absent forest was this: what kind of cultural mindset is it that can allow this brutality of *ClearCut*?

The same mindset, I am inspired to learn, that can allow the brutality of our identity politics of today, the brutality of homelessness in the face of obscene wealth, the brutality of our teaching factories and healing factories and science factories and food factories.

The same mindset that seems to have guided human history since it has been recorded, the mindset of eternal war, of struggle for power, for resources, for slaves, for subjugation, for hegemony. This is who we are.

I am this too. Meditation in *ClearCut* brings home to me the reason why we are in the condition we find ourselves today, and with it, the possibility of a way forward.

What is the source of this inhumanity? The poignant stumps cry out to me in clear, passionate terms: ***Dominion***. Our origin story in Genesis even makes it explicit: *And God blessed them and said unto them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that crawls upon the earth.”*

Rule over them. It is all ours for the taking. Some of us, the more aggressive ones, exploited that attitude; some of us resisted, powerless. The rest of us went along with the gag, allowing us to reach *Endgame*. We now face mass extinctions. Weather patterns that once conspired with nature to allow our nourishment to flourish now threaten our very lives. We have climbed far out on an evolutionary limb and seem intent on sawing it off behind us.

What has not been quite so easy to discern is the follow-up lesson: that I personally can no longer indulge myself with illusions of exceptionalism. I cannot continue to stand outside (above) my culture and blame everything and everyone else for the destruction while still enjoying the fruits of civilization: my daily hot shower, toilette paper, a ready source for my gas tank, my fridge, my IRA, my Social Security, a roof over my head and roads to drive anywhere I want to go. Gathering with friends in the coffee shop...

Complicity has been a hard nut to swallow but has been revealed to me to be a path towards hope. For without the acceptance of my personal complicity in my culture I remain severed from humanity, safe in my delusion of supremacy - above it all – a serious and debilitating perpetuation of the offense.

But complicity is only the starting point. It only shifts the blame away from others onto oneself, resulting in guilt. Although blame and guilt are not destinations in this meditation, they are important omens informing us of a needed course correction.

Fortunately, there is another, more productive response to the knowledge of our participation in the crime of being human. That response is remorse. In the meditation we spend some time finding our way to contrition, because for some of us it may be a new path, unfamiliar, and difficult to find our way.

We press on to the discovery of an urgent message our mother - the living planet Gaia - has been trying to deliver to us for generations: that the evolution of human consciousness must continue beyond dominion into *communion* if She – if we – are to continue receiving the gift of life and passing that gift along to our children and grandchildren.

And it is in the depth of our contrition that a nuclear surge of irrepressible life-force is released, rising in our central nervous systems to empower our growth. The same force that powers the conversion of a seed into a sprout, that powers a bee joining its swarm in search of nectar. Subtle at first, barely discernable, but gaining in strength as we nourish it and come to cherish its presence.

It is the same force that can raise sap 300 feet from the roots to the topmost needle of this very cedar. Spirit arouses, scattering fear to the four winds and rendering our lofty perch of judgement uncomfortable. Spirit leads us by the hand back into the circle dance of life.

Spirit also facilitates forgiveness - of ourselves foremost - but of each other too, and those we once in our hypocrisy held accountable. Once forgiven, we are free. Free to relinquish our entitlement and take up our rightful place in a biosphere in which all species have their just and essential roles in an evolving, symbiotic system imperfectly designed but still hard at work to better sustain the needs of all species.

Without that force activated in our life, our headlong pursuit of the conquest of nature continues, unabated. A fool's errand, a mockery of the divine, as we pivot helplessly in the wind on a spire of arrogance.

Empowered by it, we catch a glimpse of the swarm, and experience the imperative to join in the search for our own nectar – atonement and reparation. We join with our fellows - pioneers already on *the path of making things right* – and together, we dedicate our lives to the reparation of everything that lies broken at our feet.

The path of making things right. We imagine what that might look like. For ourselves, for us as a country, for us as a species...

We revisit briefly our most recent *unimaginable* cultural victories: the bomb, the moon, abolition, suffrage, gay marriage... and come to understand that outside of the sun, our own imagination is *the most powerful force on earth!* Imagine now the possibility of a thousand other such things we have the power to manifest in our pursuit of reparations *on the path of making things right.*

For starters, how about luring enough engineering power away from the silliness and addiction of replicating our social systems on the internet to build a fusion jet engine, hah?

Let's swarm.