



RNDM Earth Community

“We are One, We are Love”

March, 2011

“Let ours be a time remembered for awakening a new respect for our earth and all her inhabitants, for one another, for ourselves and for our common destiny.” (RNDM Congregational Chapter, 2008)

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LET'S STOP FEEDING THE ELEPHANT!

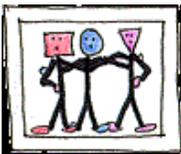
Recently, several members of the Building Committee had a lunchtime conversation with Mark Burch, who is known for his work in the area of Voluntary Simplicity. His books include *Stepping Lightly: Simplicity for People and the Planet*; *Simplicity: Notes Stories and Exercises for Developing Unimaginable Wealth*; and *De-Junking: A Tool for Clutter Busting*.

So that the fruits of this conversation could reach out to a wider circle, participants were asked to share an insight they heard in Mark's reflections that touched, inspired, challenged... These follow.

“I was struck by Mark's sharing of how he came to his primary life's work of “simple living”. Already involved in a number of causes for justice, he came to see his specific way more clearly through the metaphor of an elephant. Much of his work involved cleaning up after the elephant, and he glimpsed a way of addressing what goes into the elephant rather than what comes out. For him, that way was facing head on the blatant and subtle messages through which our culture bequeaths to us our primary identity – that of “consumer”. By evoking and manipulating human desire, a consumer culture gets us buying stuff, whether we need it or not – and it is this mindless consumption that contributes to the devastation of the planet, the suffering of its peoples, and the destruction of its many species. At the heart of simple living is a deep prayer life, which enables us to discern not only who we are, but also what we deeply desire, and to live in the joyous freedom that we are and what we have is ‘enough’.”



“I appreciated Mark telling his own story of the struggle to keep hope alive! I found his analysis insightful.... look at what we are feeding the elephant rather than continuing to clean up after it! The need to be mindful of how our desire “for the more” is manipulated by a consumer culture...not easy since we are so immersed in it... and how a mindfulness practice (contemplative prayer) can strengthen us for discerning choices for life. “I have set before you, life or death. Choose life....”



“While it might be heroic for some individuals to live more simply and defy the demands of our addiction to consumerism, a collective demand that manufacturers take responsibility and initiative in changing our cultural mindset by changing how and why they produce products will shift the political and economic mindset that is destroying the planet. The environmental catastrophe must be addressed from the collective psycho-social economic level (questioning the assumptions of our culture) or individuals will simply collapse under the weight of thinking that if they just try harder to be good environmental stewards everything will be alright. I was struck by the need to keep moving from an individual effort to a collective consciousness about the planet's dire situation. The work of changing collective consciousness belongs to the life-long commitment of individuals-gathered-together, willing to engage the challenge while letting go of attachments to outcomes. This requires a practice of mindfulness and a different kind of “seeing” which is its fruit.”

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“For me there was a synthesis of a lot of different ideas: the idea of living simply, yet abundantly, by separating ourselves from the lure of the consumer culture and its advertising which blurs the line between needs and wants; the idea of mindfulness as a part of trying to live an ecologically sound life--not the mindfulness of religious tradition but seeing what is inside oneself; the idea of building community as a way to be mindful in the broader sense and bartering services in the community or sharing items rather than numerous people owning the same item. If the government isn't doing what we want, it can be done at our local community level.



I kept thinking of the Japanese aesthetic in the home where there is no clutter and only one item at a time on display – perhaps a piece of porcelain or anything lovely or interesting. This way there is an appreciation of that object which would be lost if it were simply one item of many, thereby losing its beauty and impact. This vision in my mind seemed to fit in with the mindfulness theme. Ecology – mindfulness of self – community. These are all interconnected and necessary for the future of our beautiful planet and humankind's place on it.”

I liked Mark's wisdom on discerning our desires with a spirit of compassion and love and the process he suggested to do so: recognize that desire is not always my friend, it can be my enemy; discern those desires that are part of life and those that are not; discern those desires that are authentically from me and those that come from somewhere else (e.g. advertising); ask myself (and research if necessary) how acting on my desire affects others—workers in the factory/industry that makes the item I desire, other people trying to live, the planet. Once I have put my desire through this discernment process, the frivolous desires fall away and a “spirit of insight and authentic need” drives the process, not the consumerism that I have absorbed through my culture.

That which moved me and which stays with me, most clearly, is his rising each day, lighting his candle and praying: give me hope; give me hope. Our earth is in distress and “hope” is a decision, a choice. I want hope to reign among us and to move us to be all that we are called to be and to do.



DID YOU KNOW?

There is an 'Ice Watch' program in Canada. Their records indicate that most sites are experiencing earlier thawing dates, signalling a warming trend in spring, particularly in Western Canada. If you would like to become a citizen scientist by observing freeze and thaw dates and submitting your observations to the Ice Watch program, log on to www.icewatch.ca.

TIPS FOR GREEN LIVING

To avoid excess plastic packaging, use a saved mesh bag from home to package your produce; ask for butcher paper at the deli counter; take your own containers to the bulk store—most will be happy to pre-weigh your vessel before you fill it with cereal, nuts, raisins, etc. (From *Ecohollic Home* by Adria Vasil)

**If any of these articles have stirred a response in you, please share your insight at
GreenSistersTalk@yahoo.ca**