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Environmental grief so great

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A few days ago I went on to Huffington Post to find that the lead story was about the effects of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill on baby sea turtles. I never got to the article. Instead I stared at a sea turtle that had been doused in oil and was now fighting for its life. Then I did what I have worked hard to avoid as I've followed the coverage of the spill: I wept. The grief was unbearable as I gazed at the tiny creature, a wondrous manifestation of God's creation.

I called a friend, Daniel Schwartrz, who teaches environmental sociology at the University of New Mexico. I asked him if the kind of grief I was feeling was widespread. "I know friends who can no longer look at photos of oil soaked pelicans, the grief is so great," he said. "If you believe in the sanctity of life, which I do, you have to go beyond human life and look at the beauty of creation and of the evolution of life...then you see that these beautiful creatures are dying unnecessarily due to human folly."

Daniel went on to speak about the larger picture: the potential for the extinction of still more species as a result of the oil spill; the loss of diversity of species; the link between toxic oceans and global warming; and "a political system that is ossified and is unable to act in the face of environmental crises."

And environmental crises brought about by humans will not end without a "paradigm shift" or a "new cosmology," he said. Such a shift would allow us to understand our relationship to nature and to technology. Reflecting on the attempt to drill into the ocean floor, Daniel said, "We are imperfect human beings. Imperfect human beings cannot make perfect technology. Accidents are the norm. They happen every day."

A paradigm shift would help us examine critically our relationship to fossil fuels. Drilling for oil in the Gulf is part of "a quest for black gold" that verges on "madness," Daniel said. Americans look to oil to sustain our lifestyles--and to sustain our wars, he continued. "British Petroleum , BP, is the major supplier of oil to the U.S. military."

He too struggles with grief at the sight of animals who are doomed as a result of the Gulf travesty: "It's extremely painful because they're all innocent. What have they done? We (animals and humans) are all connected," a realization that only makes the pain worse, he said.

I can only hope that our pain does not turn to numbness or apathy. I think of all the people whose lives were dependent upon fishing, or upon tourism in once beautiful beaches. And I think of the baby sea turtles. Somehow we have to take a stand.

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