

## **Day One: The Great Disconnection ...**

### **How We Forgot Who We Are**

There is a story modern civilization tells itself, and it is a story of ascent. We rose from the soil, learned to stand upright, learned to reason, learned to dominate our environment, and in doing so became fully human. The past is cast as primitive. The future is framed as escape. Nature is something we survived, not something we belong to.

This story comforts us. It justifies our excess. It frames destruction as collateral rather than consequence. But it is not true ... or at least not complete. And what it leaves out has cost us dearly.

For most of human existence, survival depended on intimacy. To live was to know the land ... not abstractly, but bodily. Wind patterns mattered. Soil mattered. Water mattered. Migration followed seasons, not borders. Life was not divided into sacred and secular because everything carried weight. A successful hunt was not only sustenance, it was relationship. Death was not failure, it was transformation.

Among the San peoples of Southern Africa, the earth was not passive ground beneath the feet but a living field of memory. Footprints were read as stories. Movement itself was a language shared between human and land. Among Aboriginal Australians, the Dreaming did not describe a distant mythic past but an ongoing present ... the land itself was alive with ancestral presence, and to walk it carelessly was to wound history.

These cultures were not naïve. They were precise. Their spiritual frameworks were not escapism ... they were ecological literacy encoded as meaning.

The break began when surplus appeared. Agriculture allowed storage. Storage allowed accumulation. Accumulation allowed hierarchy. Hierarchy demanded justification. And justification produced cosmologies that elevated some above others ... humans above animals, men above women, rulers above the ruled, and eventually “civilized” people above “savages.”

Land ceased to be kin and became property.

Empire formalized this rupture. Roman roads did not merely connect cities ... they carved dominance into the earth. Forests fell not because they were needed, but because conquest demanded visibility and control. Rivers were redirected. Mountains were mined. Life was reorganized around extraction rather than reciprocity.

Religion, too, changed shape. Early animistic and earth-centered spiritualities emphasized balance, cycles, and humility. But as empire grew, so did the need for divine endorsement. Gods ascended into the sky. The earth was demoted. Dominion replaced stewardship. Creation became something given rather than something shared.

This is not an indictment of faith itself, but of how faith was bent to serve power.

The Enlightenment sharpened the separation further. Reason was elevated as the defining human trait. Nature became mechanism. Descartes split mind from body, subject from object. The world became something to analyze, dissect, and master. This produced extraordinary advances ... but it also introduced a fatal abstraction.

“Man” stood outside the world, looking in.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau sensed the danger. His “natural man” was not a call to abandon civilization but a warning about what happens when social complexity outruns moral grounding. Civilization, he argued, did not automatically produce virtue. In fact, it often produced alienation ... a condition where humans were surrounded by others and yet profoundly alone.

Henry David Thoreau did not retreat to Walden Pond to escape responsibility. He went there to remember it. He stripped life down to essentials not because simplicity was purity, but because excess had become a form of forgetting. Walden was an act of resistance against a society that had mistaken motion for meaning.

And yet the machinery accelerated.

Industrialization completed the transformation. Work became divorced from outcome. Food became unrecognizable. Time became segmented. Human beings became units of labor. Nature became resource. Distance grew ... from soil, from consequence, from one another.

Today, we live inside abstractions. We eat food grown by people we never see on land we never touch. We drink water from pipes whose sources we cannot name. We experience seasons through screens. We mourn ecosystems through headlines.

The psychological toll of this disconnection is now impossible to ignore. Loneliness is not a personal failure ... it is a structural outcome. Anxiety is not individual weakness ... it is the nervous system reacting to a world that no longer feels coherent or safe. Depression is not simply chemical imbalance ... it is grief without ritual.

Many Indigenous traditions understood grief as communal and ecological. Among the Haudenosaunee, decisions were made with the seventh generation in mind ... not because of abstract ethics, but because the future was understood as alive and present. To act without regard for what came next was not only irresponsible ... it was immoral.

Albert Camus described the modern condition as absurd ... the human longing for meaning confronting a silent universe. But perhaps the universe was never silent. Perhaps we simply stopped listening. The absurdity may not lie in existence itself, but in our refusal to participate in it.

Ecological grief is not separate from personal despair. They are the same wound viewed from different angles. When forests burn, something ancient inside us recoils. When species vanish, a word disappears from the human story. When land is reduced to numbers, people are reduced to functions.

We cannot solve this crisis with better branding or cleaner technology alone. We must confront the deeper truth ... the environmental collapse we face mirrors an internal collapse of meaning, belonging, and humility.

We did not just lose connection to nature.

We lost connection to ourselves.

And until we face that honestly, every solution will remain incomplete.

We cannot heal the planet until we admit this ... the wound is within us.

## **Our Disconnection**

We did not fall from the world.

We were not cast out.

We walked away ...

quietly,

with pockets full of clever little tools

and mouths full of new names for old things.

Once, the earth knew us by our footprints.

Once, the river recognized our thirst.

Once, the wind spoke our childhood names

and we answered without fear.

We said thank you

before taking.

We said forgive us

before cutting.

We said may this be enough

and we meant it.

Now we say this is mine

and call it progress.

Bless the hands that once knew how to listen.

Bless the eyes that once read the sky like scripture.

Bless the feet that understood the long memory of the dirt.

Bless the breath that remembered

it was borrowed.

We've been taught the world was silent.

That stone was dead.

That trees were furniture waiting to happen.

That water was a resource  
instead of a relative.

So we learned to conquer what once carried us.

We built walls where there had been songs.

We built engines where there had been patience.

We built clocks and forgot the seasons  
were already keeping time.

And something in us broke ...

not loudly,

but the way bones break under snow,

the way animals go quiet

before a storm.

Bless the elders who warned us.

Bless the stories we were too busy to hear.

Bless the languages we allowed to starve.

Bless the children who still feel the ache

but do not yet know its name.

Because this loneliness we wear

like a second skin

is not new.

It is ancient ...

the grief of forgetting

who we belong to.

We tried to replace belonging with ownership.

Tried to trade reverence for efficiency.

Tried to solve the mystery of living

instead of bowing to it.

We called the earth it

and wondered why we felt so alone.

But the old prayers are still breathing.

In the dirt under our nails.

In the way fire still asks for care.

In the way water still forgives

until it can't.

May we remember we are not above the world

but within it.

May we remember that breath is a treaty.

May we remember that every meal is a ceremony.

May we remember that the land does not need us to save it  
but it does need us to stop pretending  
we are not part of its body.

Bless this forgetting ...  
not because it was good,  
but because it can end.

Bless this moment of recognition.  
Bless the ache that wakes us.  
Bless the long road back to listening.

And may we learn again  
to walk gently enough  
that the earth recognizes us  
when we return.