

Chapter 6

National Park Theory

ABSTRACT

Chapter 6 delves into the topic of regard. In order to begin the process of reconciliation with the planet, mankind must first ask what is wrong with his broken relationship with the Earth. If man's first date with nature was one of wonder and awe, could it be that man now takes his beloved nature for granted? Perhaps his silent partner would like a say in how she is regarded, and especially in how she is treated. If so, what can man do to get back to that first love and shower the weeping Earth with affection? It turns out that the national park system may point the way back to conjugal bliss.

INTRODUCTION

A human being is a part of the whole called by us "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty" – Albert Einstein

A lot of focus, these days, is about challenging human thoughts. Maybe it's time to challenge human feelings instead? After all, a thought is more like a feeling that just won't go away. So, why have everyone's feelings gone away? Why don't humans feel pity for their dying planet? They want a restraining

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order, then a divorce. They're fed up with Nature. It's like their first love has died, and humans can't seem to cry. Amy Grant used to sing about it, with memorable tunes like *Where Do You Hide your Heart?* and *Stay for a While* (Grant, Kirkpatrick, & Smith, 1986; Grant & Smith, 1984). Where *do* humans hide their hearts when it comes to their planet? Why can't everyone just tarry here a while, in this lovely garden, and watch the sunrise together? As the Reverend Billy Graham used to say at his big crusades in Oakland, "Your friends will wait, your buses will wait." The Earth seems to be saying, "Don't give up on me. These moments are precious. Every moment matters. Stay for a while, and sip a cup of coffee with me, your green-eyed bride—before you hurry off to wherever it is you need to go. You and I can watch the Sun come up together, and just chat for a while."

In this chapter, the reader will explore why humans have lost their feelings for their beloved world. The Earth was humanity's first love, but now its feelings have died. Imagine nobody is giving up. Imagine the planet and humanity are going to see a marriage counselor and find out what went wrong, and see about fixing this relationship. The human species is going to find its awe again (Keltner & Haidt, 2003), and get back that very first love (Gould, 2011). But how, the reader may ask? How can anybody fix this?

The authors have a theory. It's called *National Park Theory*. In a nutshell, it posits that when two people are still new to one another, their time together is like a gift. Each feels like a visitor to the other, and each is like a National Park the other has come to visit. Both are in profound awe of their surroundings—and Time seems to stand still. But all too soon, when the two get to know each other too well, when their once amazing surroundings become too familiar, one of them begins to feel like he *deserves* the other. Something dies inside—a thing called gratitude, and a thing called awe. Too often, he begins to see the one he loves as his property, instead of being so grateful for her he can barely speak. She leaves. When time at home is no longer rare or special, it is taken for granted; perhaps it is time to remember how special home used to be? This author is fortunate to live right next door to a National Park; it reminds him never to take Her for granted, and to be grateful for a home, every day.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND FINAL IMPRESSIONS

First of all, what is missing in this relationship? *Regard* is missing. Mankind used to love Nature; now he acts like she is in his way. Love begins with regard,

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