

THE BEAR

Some weeks ago an adult black bear walked through the park across the street from my house. The place he was crossing is an open field bordered on one side by dense forest. From the view through the trees on my lawn, it looked for a few moments as though he was in his natural environment. He looked majestic, in command, peaceful, and completely at one with every molecule of life that surrounded him (there were no people in the park at the time!).

Watching him I had a marvelous feeling of awe but it quickly became mixed with a sense of the surreal. He was headed to the swing sets, the shiny metal slide and the bright red and yellow jungle gym. The whole scene suddenly became all wrong. He was so out of place, so away from home, so NOT in his natural



environment. Yet his composure never changed as he strolled along. He still radiated that sense of peaceful at-oneness as he crossed the street by the tennis courts and headed up the path in the direction of the mountains. I hope he found his way home.

I haven't seen him again but I remember him every time I look over at the park. The extreme clash of such a natural being in such unnatural surroundings has made me think about how important it is for all of us to be in the "right" environment - that being the one in which we thrive. We all need a place where we feel at home, where we are welcomed to be who we are and supported to develop and grow.

This has not been, and is not, the reality in many people's lives. We have a long, long way to go to overcome the human injustice that we carry out to prevent one another from being at home in the world. We still have to collectively heal our

individual pain – the main thing preventing us from nurturing and supporting one another. Many struggle, sometimes against seemingly insurmountable obstacles, to find their way home to that place of belonging, in themselves and in the world.

If the surroundings you have been exposed to in your life have not fed your sense of being at home and you have not found the place in which you thrive, there is hope, because you can. The bear finds his way because his instinct leads him. He knows how to listen to it and he follows without question or doubt. You have instincts too – your intuition, your inner voice. That voice constantly says, “I belong.”

How does the bear find its way back to its den? How do the birds know which way to turn when they migrate thousands and thousands of miles to their seasonal homes? It is not like a hunger drive that tells them when to eat. It is a mysterious inner knowing of where home is and how to get to it. It pervades all of nature, and we, being part of nature, have it too.

How do you know to pick up a brush and paint or to restore a classic car and learn every one of its parts? Why do you have an enormous library of comic books? Why are you fascinated by the structural make up of things? How is it that you never tire of listening to your grandmother’s stories of the olden days? Why do you think you might like to go overseas and teach for an aid agency? Why do you like red shoes and cherry orchards? It’s the same thing. We know. We’ve just forgotten how to listen, or we’ve never been taught how.

From babyhood on, all of us encounter distress that throws off our signals as we try in the best ways we know how to meet the demands of life. This is like interference and consists of all the things from tiny to huge to overwhelming that disrupt our natural state of relaxed joyfulness. Sometimes it is so strong that there is no choice but to cope with it by learning to live with it. This is how we begin to lose contact with our signals and go off course, but it does not mean we are condemned to a lifetime role as victims of circumstance. We are prevented sometimes from being in the place we want to be on this Earth. But nothing can stop us from being the person we want to be.

Getting back home begins with healing the effects of the distress that has most impacted you. As you do, you learn how to discern between interference and genuine signals. You learn to identify interference and you learn to recognize its effects. Then one day you realize that even if you cannot put a stop to it, you have the ability to control the effect it has on you in healthy ways. As this is happening your signals are becoming clearer and clearer. You learn to listen for them. You learn to listen to them. You hear that knowing in you that points you toward home and guides your way.

Like the bear, you follow it.