A

animalines is often asked if anything on the horizon brings us cause for optimism, and our response is resoundingly in the affirmative. We hear from increasing numbers of committed activists who are redirecting their energies from an organizational focus to assuming individual responsibility for making a difference. This greatly heartens animalines as it reflects a growing awareness that a movement is ultimately nothing more than the collective journeys of its members. If we as individuals are lacking in terms of what we have to offer of ourselves, then even the most noble of sentiments carries a hollow ring. Movements are not grab bags to fill our personal voids, but a privileged opportunity to give back to Nature what we have mercilessly taken from her.

The crucial question is what brings people to life-affirming movements? No human animal is without needs and frailties, and certainly movements provide ample opportunity for recognition, influence, and a host of other factors associated with altruistic endeavors. We are all nourished from the kinship of pursuing needs and frailties, and certainly movements provide ample opportunity for recognition, influence, and a satisfaction of giving, not the deliberative act of taking. This is why animalines refers to it as a metaphysical leap of faith; secular humanists call it justice; and still others apply a theological interpretation. There are no right or wrong paths to uncover this inner light, only varying degrees of illumination. Ultimately, the journey culminates with the realization that we are interconnected with not only everything we’re able to see, but also with the rest of the universe that eludes our limited vision. More specifically, it’s reclaiming and embracing the noblest dimensions within us that rarely survive childhood in this violent and avaricious culture.

It’s this inner journey that leads to the peaceful path we wrote of earlier, and this is the path that many activists are presently following and sharing with others. They are not “marketing” a formal ideology or organizational memberships, for they have tapped into their own life force which enables them to unconditionally share their bounty with others. Through transcending concerns of ego and other such manifestations of human frailty and folly, they have looked inward for direction and found answers previously known but long forgotten. Peace does not spring forth from external sources, but from liberated individuals practicing it in a manner that’s inviting and supportive to others yearning to share in that peace. Compassion becomes contagious when we create a nurturing climate that rekindles the life force within each of us.

We understand that many will find these views idealistic, and indeed some perceive all peaceful visions as utopian. For animalines, however, the quest for peace is fundamentally a vision of gentle possibilities, and it’s the passionate love of life and Earth that fuels this growing force in every nation on this planet. It’s not governmental bodies or organized movements that are leading the way, but the individuals we referred to who are embarked on a journey of the spirit—finding within themselves rich nourishment to share with others. Through this process of giving generously and unconditionally, they are planting seeds to heal the fragmentation and artificial divisions that Einstein described as human-kind’s “optical delusion.” Einstein so clearly understood what our troubled species has yet to grasp—the properties of the parts can only be understood from the dynamics of the whole, and the whole is all the organic and inorganic elements that comprise the symmetry and integrity of our fragile universe.

This integrated concept of wholeness cannot be realized externally, as it can only be found within the spirit of each individual. Children possess this unified life force in great abundance before the weight of socialization and fragmentation descends upon them, and for most adults it’s an arduous journey back to again experience the child’s spontaneous capacity for exploring, discovering and sharing. Tragically, many well-intentioned reformers tend to sanctimoniously lecture and chastise rather than sensitively convey the joy of their own journey, for they often have little to give themselves and even less to give others. Having lost connection with their own spirit, they’re unable to lovingly touch others. Adults obscure the simple truth and power of a child’s feelings, and in so doing deny their own essence. animalines recently received a note from a kindergarten class in Kirkwood, Missouri, which embodies the spirit and light of unconditional love—love that lies waiting in each of us. They write: Our teacher told us...you love all life because of the air and water and forest and grass. We want to help you in any way we can. We know you care about us. We care about you. We are your friends. We love you.

Edward S. Duvin is editor of animalines, from which this essay is reprinted. animalines is a program of The HSUS.