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 a common dream with brothers and sisters, but such nourishment should occur naturally from the intrinsic satisfaction of giving, not the deliberative act of taking. This is why animalines derives such encouragement from those who are embarked on a journey of the spirit, for they realize the capacity to give to others is directly proportionate to their own continued growth and evolution.

The capacity for giving generously of ourselves is critical to our ultimate success, for outreach efforts depend upon creating an inviting climate which appeals to a broad-spectrum audience. Animalines is not suggesting diluting either principle or message, but even the most radical vision must be presented with kindness, tolerance, and a willingness to embrace people at whatever point in their journey we find them. Individuals travel at different speeds and in different directions, and rather than self-righteously judging their progress, we should be painting an inviting portrait of the many paths to peace. The critical element is motivating people to embark upon the quest, not predefining the route or destination for them. Many of our friends believe animalines is indulging in romanticism when we write of unconditional regard, but charity is the music of the soul, and those who 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 and 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.