Animal Loss and Spirituality

or

Current Topics in Multispecies Relationships:

Loss  | Mourning  | Meaning
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What is Spirituality?

• Think about what this means to you...
• Invite you to turn to neighbor and share your meanings
• What did you learn?
What is Spirituality?

• Awareness in the moment
• Interconnection
• Whatever helps you become the person you long to be, and build a life and world based on universal flourishing for all life
• Guides us to an orientation to the “all” or “other” and away from daily ego concerns

How Does Religion Relate to Spirituality?

“I’m spiritual, not religious.”
Lived Religion

• Descriptive and not proscriptive
• How people carry out and practice their religious beliefs on a daily basis
• Encompasses the tensions, the ongoing struggle of definition, that are constituted within every religious tradition and that are always present in how people choose to act. Practice thus suggests that any synthesis is provisional.

What Does Religion Say About Multispecies Communities?

Questions Arising in Loss... Religious and Spiritual

• To what extent do animals merit worth/compassion?
• To what extent do human animals merit worth/compassion?
• What meaning do we make of suffering, human and nonhuman?
• What meaning do we make of the life/death cycle?
  (do all good dogs go to heaven?)
A Story

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Compassion fatigue, refers to a gradual lessening of compassion over time. Sufferers can exhibit several symptoms including hopelessness, a decrease in experiences of pleasure, constant stress and anxiety, and a pervasive negative attitude. This can have detrimental effects on individuals, both professionally and personally, including a decrease in productivity, the inability to focus, and the development of new feelings of incompetency and self doubt. – www.compassionfatigue.org
Looking for Meaning After Loss

What does it mean to be human (to be me) and what is our (my) response to this understanding?
More Questions in Loss

• What's difference is there between humans and other life forms?
• In the death of an animal, what is our/my role, guilt, responsibility?
• Are we humans somehow wrong and animals aren't, or vice versa?
• Other?

Loss of An Animal
How do we deal with guilt, shame, regret?
Reasons for Hope:  
A Spiritual Journey

Perhaps I have subconsciously lived my whole life trying to assuage that guilt. I have tried to assuage some of the guilt we all must feel, for our inhumanity to man and beast alike. And, with the support of all people of compassionate and loving heart, I shall go on trying until the end. And the end...will be the beginning.

- Jane Goodall
These issues will never gain real favor... until we acknowledge the obvious truth, that humans are mammals, and therefore animals. Until we stop referring to humans and animals in separate terms, these goals will never be achieved.
– John Sundberg (JAVMA 234-12)

Scientific revolutions must be matched by equal development in human revolutions — Houston Smith
New tools guide one to know immense inner world...

- Human behavior
- Psychology
- Human cognition
- Emotive patterns
- Religions/Worldview
- Ethics/Values
- Experience
- Identity

New tools guide one to know immense outer world...

- Human history
- Cognitive ethology
- Anthropology
- Ethno-ornithology
- Ecology
- Human nature
- Human systems
- Gosh, everything!

Evolution of Emotions
Limbic & Cognitive Networks

Widespread Grief of Biodiversity Loss

- Emotional costs of ecological decline – anxiety, despair, numbness, grief, a sense of being overwhelmed.
- Solastalgia – “pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault...a form of homesickness one gets when one is still at home.” – Glenn Albrecht
Widespread Resources

• Biophilia – “innate tendency of humans to focus on life and lifelike processes” – E.O. Wilson
• Soliphilia – “the love of and responsibility for a place, bioregion, planet and the unity of interrelated interests within it”

Cognitive Ethology

• Emphasizes observing animals under more-or-less natural conditions, with the objective of understanding the evolution, adaptation (function), causation, and development of the species-specific behavioral repertoire” - (Tinbergen 1963).
• Many behaviors are “virtues” (traits) that humans and nonhumans share
• Looking at behaviors and shared traits with other people and other species helps us include their needs in ethical deliberations, and be open to inner resonance we feel or share with others
Responding to Loss: Modeling

Responding to Loss: Chaplaincy/Pastoral Care/Counseling
To connect to values, affirm bonds, rewire brain based on bonds of affection (love) and emerging world view

- Deep listening
- Guiding questions
- Arrange memorial services, burial
- Spiritual practices
- Guide to resources
- When is grieving for nonhuman animals “pathological?”

Spiritual Resources

- Earth Centered Spiritualities
- Journal
- Support groups
- Meditation
  - Visual - Tarot cards
  - Silent
- Poems
- Other?
Integral Practice
A Spiritual Resource Centered on Relationships – Inner and Outer

• Encouraging intersubjective resonance and skills
• Interpersonal skills
• Intrapersonal skills

Integral Practice in Multispecies Relationships

**Experiences**
Experiencing your emotions and thoughts as you encounter animals

**Culture**
Resonating with the mental activity around you, involving you and animals

**Behaviors**
Observing intentional behaviors around you – using the five senses to observe the world

**Systems**
Patterning the intentional ecological and behavioral systems around you.

*Leads to Action*

What are you and animal thinking, feeling?
What goes on between humans and birds?

Observations, study, 5 senses
Patterns, systems, action

Further Information

- Websites
  - Interfaith Council Humane Leadership
  - Wings of Compassion (Avian Loss and Grief)

- Books
  - The Souls of Animals
  - Pet Loss: A Spiritual Guide

- Animal Chaplains
  - Emerson Institute – Animal Chaplain and Humane Studies

• Websities

• Books

• Animal Chaplains
FEEDBACK

• Any “wow” or “aha” moments?
• How help you do what you do?
• What do you want to hear more about?
• What might we change to make it more relevant, clear, or helpful for you?
• Will you change anything you are doing based on this presentation?