

The Ocean of Aliveness
An Allegory of Human Experience

I want to share a piece of my heart with you. That's the way this story moves in me – as an expression of my aliveness, and my deep understanding of how we can all share the living energy of being human and deeply connected.

I'd like to start with an invitation to just listen, closing your eyes if that is alive for you, and keeping them open if that suits you better. Just experience what the world's telling you – let the world speak for itself. Hear the sounds all around you, and feel what it's like to be sitting on your chair, your sofa, or wherever you are, without stories, without judgment – just letting the world speak for itself. Listen.

Imagine what it would be like to live in this world every day. To be in this space where experiences float over you like water, like a vast, salty ocean. Notice the buoyant water, floating you on the surface in a comfortable way, waves rocking you with a gentle motion. Imagine you have such a connection with this space that even when the wind comes up, and water comes in your face from the sky, and waves wash over you in a way that might not really be entirely comfortable, you can always come back to this warm, buoyant ocean, just floating there.

Can you feel it? Can you feel us all being rocked with such gentleness? It's like being held in your mother's arms.

Become aware that beneath this loving, living ocean lies the powerful, solid earth. It grounds us and holds us together, as water on the surface and people in the water. Feel what it's like to be held with such care, without the earth ever asking for anything in return. Contemplate that generosity, that openness, that giveaway.

Notice what it's like to be still, to let the world speak for itself as we're held by the earth and this vast ocean, and welcome into your awareness your habitual patterns of assigning meaning, telling stories, and making judgments of everything you experience. You can imagine these things as part of this world, too, like a rocky island that rises up out of the sea. When you get to a place in your ocean where there's something happening that you just can't sit with any more, it's like climbing out onto this rocky shore to find meaning. And you do this over, and over, and over – this is how you learn to relate to the world, through these stories you make up about your experiences. These stories are rich, and they're powerful, and they contain many grains of the truth contained in the living ocean. You get so attached to that pattern of climbing out on this rocky shore and searching for answers, building safe walls between you and your direct experience of this world, and your life, and the people around you.

Sometimes you might find bits of what you think is meaningful, like pebbles scattered on the beach. You value meaning and understanding so much that you start picking up these pebbles, putting them in your pockets, and carrying them around with you. Once in a while, or maybe quite often, you'll find something that really, really seems vital and true, that you really want to believe completely. Maybe this belief gives you comfort, and maybe it just seems like it's going to help make everything OK. This is like a big boulder that you lift up on your shoulders and carry around. You do this again and again, throughout your life. Looking for meaning, you accumulate these burdens, and you don't know anything different. That's the way you've learned to experience your life.

Every once in a while, these storms that you experienced while floating in the ocean come ashore, and the rain falls upon you. Sometimes it's a gentle rain, and

you enjoy it, and you think “oh this is lovely, I love this, I never want this to stop.” That’s another rock you put in your pocket, this attachment to things that you love so much. As seductive and beautiful as this seems, it’s another burden you carry around.

Sometimes the storm comes with wild violence, and the wind blows, the thunder crashes, the rain comes down, and it’s cold and uncomfortable. And you want to push it away and say “no, I don’t want this rain! I just don’t want to have it.” This too is another rock you pick up and stick in your pocket or hold on your shoulders.

As you experience these storms, you notice a compulsion to assign value to these things you experience. You discover it’s like climbing a mountain, up this path that’s steep and rocky, and it’s hard going. It’s so hard because you carry these rocks, these burdens, you’ve collected down on the shore. Not only that, you end up gathering MORE rocks on your way up this path.

Finally you come almost to the top, and you notice the path splits in two, and there are two peaks on this mountain. You realize that if you’re to keep going, you’ll need to choose one or the other, and you discover the idea of right and wrong – good and bad – like and dislike. You use these two peaks to divide your world in two – you could call it the “Mountain of Right and Wrong.” You choose one peak or the other, and reaching the top can be like climbing out of the rainstorm of uncertainty into the clear air of righteousness. But when you look down all you see are clouds, and you can’t even see that beautiful ocean any more. You’ve forgotten where you came from.

Maybe your particular idea of right and wrong has to do with some interaction with another person. This can be like looking out across this vast gulf

where there's nothing but rain clouds underneath you, and you see someone else, over there on his or her own mountain of right and wrong. Or maybe it's your whole family, or your community, or the whole world. You might try to communicate, but the only way you know how is by shouting – “I'm right!” “You're wrong!” or “You're right” “I'm wrong.” You get so attached to that, and you and the other person can't hear each other because you're both shouting.

Imagine what it's like to live this way, drenched to the skin in cold rain that you just didn't want to experience. Your pockets are full of rocks, rocks are strapped to your back and carried in your arms and even on your head. You see only darkness and hear only the shouting of people on their own islands that are so far away from you. Does this seem familiar? Is this the way you want to live?

Imagine that one day, something shifts for you. Maybe you've made your way back down to the beach from this mountain, and you're in a space where you have some openness. You notice that crystal ocean and remember “hey, wait a minute, there's more to life than running up and down this path that I've dug into the ground, six feet deep – there's more to life than that – there's this beautiful ocean out there. I wonder what it's all about.”

As you're pondering this ocean, a sudden rainstorm comes – it might be cold, it might be warm, it might be gentle, it might be hard. You find a way to just experience it directly, letting the world speak for itself. And you notice these rocks in your pockets, and on your head, and on your shoulders, and you think “wow! I carry such a burden.” You notice some great tenderness and compassion for yourself, and for these burdens. They are so heavy and painful and yet so precious – they have meant so much to you. With this awareness, you're able to take these burdens down and cradle them one by one, treasuring

the beautiful things they represent in your life. And then you lay them down, back on the shore. One by one, until maybe they are all gone, and you notice the rain is still falling on you. You realize that even though it might hurt, there's some joy in just experiencing this rain without story or judgment.

You notice that the water is starting to accumulate in little puddles, in little rivulets. Look, here's this path that you've trudged up so many times, and now it's turning into a stream, a dancing and chuckling ribbon of flowing water. And that water is going somewhere. You have this curiosity – “hmm...what might it be like to just lie down in this beautiful stream, and see where it goes?” This curiosity might also be really scary, and you might long to pick up your rocks again and feel more secure, more steady. You might even do that, gathering up your pebbles, rocks, and boulders, and running back up your well-worn path that is now a slippery stream.

This might happen again and again – once, twice, a dozen times – until one day you realize it's time to try it. It's time to surrender yourself to this stream, and just let go and see where it takes you.

So you just lie down in it, throw your arms up, and lift up your feet, and off you go. It's like being on the world's wildest roller coaster and log ride – the bumpiest ride you've ever experienced. After a while, you begin to notice there's something different coming up – you can hear the crashing of waves, and smell the salt air, and you sit up, open your eyes, and see that you're heading for this tall cliff. You have a sudden sense of tightness in your chest, and all your fears come up, and you want to grasp onto the shore and stop, but it's too late! You're committed. So with one last burst of courage, you let go completely and just

surrender as you go over this cliff, falling through the air and salt spray, finally splashing into this warm, loving, living ocean.

And you bob to the surface with this amazing clarity – “wow, this is where I came from. This is where I want to be.” Can you feel yourself back in that cradle, back in those waves, being rocked gently as in your mother’s arms?

Looking around, you notice this rocky shore nearby, and this huge mountain with dark clouds at the top and well-worn paths leading from the shore up into the roiling grayness. You feel a lot of gentleness and compassion for what you’ve created there, knowing that it’s part of you. You realize it’s always going to be there – you can always climb out, gather your burdens, and go up and check out that mountain. You realize you’ll probably do this a hundred times – a thousand times – countless trips up those habitual paths. And every single time, you can drop your burden of rocks, lay yourself down in the stream, and come back to this ocean.

You can even swim over to the islands of other people in your life, and maybe get their attention and invite them to come join you in this ocean. They may be really surprised to hear a voice from below the clouds, having only heard shouting from other mountain peaks in the past. They may be very resistant about trying out what you’re asking them to, and even if they try coming into the ocean, they may only stay for a few minutes before climbing back out on their own rocky shore. Over time, they may stay longer and longer, and perhaps someday everyone you know will join you in this ocean.

Rocked as in a mother’s arms, experiencing life as it comes. Letting the world speak for itself – hearing the wind, feeling the rain, and noticing what happens when you let life flow through you. At peace; still.