



Diversity is Vital to both Ecosystems and Community Resilience

--Margo Adair & William Aal

Most of us have some aspect of who we are that has been looked down upon by mainstream culture. It may be our sexual orientation, religious affiliation, race, gender, class, disability, or other aspects. If we bring this part of our experience forward, we risk being trivialized, and locked out. Surviving contemporary norms usually means assimilating, that is leaving behind important parts of ourselves.

In order to reclaim our humanity, many of us have come together over the last few decades in groups, caucuses, and conferences of shared identity. We came together to share our stories and hear how others have been there too and we came to trust our own experience. In these separate spaces, we did not need to leave a part of who we are at the door. We got to be whole without having to explain ourselves. Many came to understand that these same aspects of themselves that have marked difference from the mainstream are, in actuality, gifts that enlarge humanity and illuminate ways society might come together in wholeness.

Now, the challenge is to call upon these gifts to create a new cultural force where we can be authentic, weaving different perspectives doing things in different ways. It is when we embrace difference that our horizons expand. We need to resist the pressure to regress into hiding parts of ourselves, to resist the all-too-familiar habits of “passing.” When we make our particular differences invisible, it only puts the dominant norms back in control. *We are called to step up because it is the very aspects of our experience that we have had to leave behind that are the ones that will get all of us through.*

Our organization, *Tools for Change*, has been doing alliance building trainings for many years. Repeatedly, certain dynamics show up that obstruct the creation of truly multicultural contexts. The more assimilated we are, the more we tend to think of difference as the problem. When someone raises an experience that they had as a member of their social group, it is often met with: “We are all human, let’s not focus on our differences.” This makes people have to split themselves in order to be accepted into the fold. They have to cut off a key aspect of their experience if they want to get along. Social inequities crisscross through all of our relations, by acknowledging them without assigning guilt or blame; we invite our different stories into the room.

When we create contexts that invite history, heart, spirit, values and vision into the heart of what we do, get to stand in our full humanity. Then trust and community can be. These are the aspects of our humanity that have been taken out of public life in the process of assimilation. They are relegated to the “personal”-- read extraneous to decision making. When we bring our full selves into the mix we make power together.

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