

Reclaiming Ourselves and the World

This morning I attended the funeral of the daughter of a friend of mine. I grieved along with hundreds of people who were there. The one who passed was a 15 year old high school student. She was intelligent, she cared about others and the world, and had a rich social life and a caring family. She spoke about her plans to travel, to learn about and experience other cultures and then to return home. The news of her death came to me yesterday. Had there been an accident? I was as shocked as everyone to find out that the cause of her death was that she took her own life.

Somehow this young one had been able to present a certain picture of herself to others -- and possibly to herself - that despite the struggles that we all go through, she was basically OK. She was not. Something inside her believed she could not ask for the help she needed to be lifted out of the darkness.

There is no culprit in the loss of this young one. Nobody can be blamed for her death, including her. What we can do is to deeply grieve for the loss and to try to understand what we can learn from her short life. When the last grains of earth were shoveled on to her gravesite I looked around. There were hundreds of people - including me - who allowed themselves to let go of shame and appearance to openly feel grief. People hugged each other and wished each other well. There was an understanding beyond words. There was a willingness to grieve together. We found our way back to the heart.

Perhaps the most important healing I received being at today's funeral was confirmation of the fact that it is essential for us to become intimate with what we feel we must hide: our grief and our shame, our loneliness and confusion, as well as our joy and our beauty, our wisdom, our kindness and our passion for life. As we do this we encourage others to do the same. And we find a way to contribute to a world that at times seems shattered and broken. We can use this short and beautiful life in a way that is fully human.

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