

Building OurSelves, Recognizing and Building Our Communities

By Susan Guerra,
writer, facilitator, co-founder of the *Esperanza
Peace and Justice Center*

In Lak'ech, Tú eres mi otro yo. You are my other me.

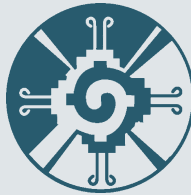
Si te hago daño a ti, If I do harm to you,

Me hago daño a mi mismo. I do harm to myself

Si te amo y respeto, If I love and respect you,

Me amo y respeto yo. I love and respect myself.

— Mayan precept quoted by poet/playwrite *Luis Valdez*



How are we going to respond to the present dismantling of civil rights, human rights, environmental safety, public health, to societal fragmentation, lies about our separateness, the constant lies about government as we have known it? Anger and fear are our first responses. Then how do we follow up?

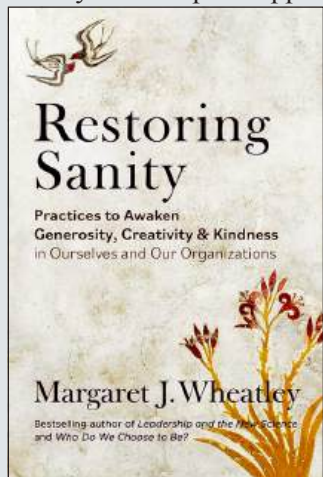
The threats to democracy we see today have evolved over decades. Ideologically, we have been indoctrinated to think that “If you really want it, you can do it!” “Just do it!”. This message is valued because we are led to think that this is what individual freedom and strength is. Failure is then the individual’s responsibility.

Community support and the need for collaboration is seen as weakness. People are shy about asking for help. Yet, we see that when catastrophe hits, an entire community shows up in support and aid to each other. This is the paradox we inhabit.

The ideological indoctrination goes against our natural inclinations of belonging and community sharing.

We are indoctrinated to think that for a government to be efficient, it is considered and measured as if it is

Restoring Sanity: Practices to Awaken Generosity, Creativity and Kindness in Ourselves and Our Organizations by Margaret J. Wheatley was published on March 19, 2024 and is available in paperback from Amazon.



a for-profit business. But we are not encouraged to realize that government is a way to organize the overarching social, economic and political needs for a nation’s democratic health, its ambitions and its people’s well-being. Our taxes pay for this investment in people and is thereby an investment in a nation’s status of peace and public health. This can not be profitable but regulated through our representation in government, our policies and laws.

At this moment in time, we can ask ourselves this question, asked by Margaret Wheatley, organizational and leadership consultant, “*What is mine to do?*”.¹

In an interview about her book, *Restoring Sanity*; (bit.ly/restoring-sanity) Margaret Wheatley, states there is a cycle in life’s evolutionary processes, and we, at a time demanding reflection and review, then regenerate what we see as a way for transformation of the conditions which we would like to change.

She believes there is a danger in being addicted to hope. Hope creates a hinder or gap between our realistic discernment of present conditions and the dreams we may have for the future. In a way, we can easily get lost putting our energies in a wishful future while reality takes over the predominant schemes governing us.

Considering the global systems and structures of how water issues, food poverty, education, housing, social inequity are treated at the global scale, these are beyond the scope of influence most people have. She is optimistic though, as she calls the work which is done in local communities as “*Islands of Sanity*”. This is where people make the biggest difference and have a strong sphere of influence.

Our mirror is in the world and cosmos surrounding us.

I refer to Mayan thought, and in common with many indigenous people, who believed/ believe, life is cyclical. Most importantly, they believed / believe, that there is an intersection of the earthly and spiritual realms, and that all beings and things have souls. This belief is called *animatism*. This includes the belief that humans as well as animals, plants and even rocks have souls and are also subjects of feeling or consciousness or display intelligence. We can learn from each other that our time on earth is not separate from the existence of the cosmos and all beings.



The prayer inauguration of *Todos Agua II* with music by Azul Barrientos, Ceiba Ili and Julián Herreros Rivera of Chile took place at Brackenridge Park on Saturday, March 15, 2025.

The Mayans encouraged *Reflection*, and this can be useful in the present political moment. Practicing reflection and silence, aid us to stay grounded in the chaos of changes. Moments of solitude are rare for most of us in how we live our lives, but with the intention of self-education, we can support each other to be able to do this as we learn to provide meetings of silence together.

Deeper listening is difficult to do with the squalor of urban work life and technology and traffic. We can find ways to train ourselves for deeper listening. First, we can learn to listen to our heart, where grace may reside and tells us what our spirit needs. Listening inward to know ourselves aids us to know others.

Concentration may aid us in learning to listen to our minds, where we may find paradoxes, conflict and diversity of voices and needs. We also need to listen to others to supplement our own vision of truth. We inhabit this earth together with other equal, yet different, beings.

Care for the body, is where our connection of soul and mind reside. We find this sensibility in our muscles, physicality, such that we locate our intuitive knowledge, the “*precious knowledge*”² which is not written down. We can learn to honor our gut feelings, our intuitive sensibilities, when searching for guidance for decision-making.

What is your issue? What are your issues?

Margaret Wheatley writes about being a warrior of the human spirit. A warrior of the human spirit notices moments of grace. Grace is the sense of “*something is working here*” and has the potential of changing life.

For example, have you noticed the times of synchronicity in your life? When questions you have about what you are meant to do come together, indicating the moment for change is here? Have you noticed the times unexpected opportunities lead you to make some of the

most difficult decisions you have had to make? Sometimes things fall together, like a particular sentence spoken, a passage from something you are reading, or a dream gives you a message for clarity. What are you noticing in your life right now?

What is mine to do?

Recovery and regeneration

Exploring our own human spirit takes some practice. Looking deeper within our own selves, understanding our own skills and abilities, helps us to choose, what can I do which is useful? Strengthening spirit is necessary in times of

heartbreak, genocides, continual human rights breaches, bigotry and fascist strategies to oppress any oppositional opinions among citizens.

We explore our own human spirit to remain clear and stable, confident in our darkest moments near and far. We are global inhabitants, and this is where we get our strength, from all our communities of all beings and not be overwhelmed by suffering, near and far.

When we discover, what is my capacity? What is mine to do? we can begin good local work. The effect of good local work is powerful and useful. Good local work is where most people have their sphere of influence. Wheatley quotes Theodore Roosevelt, “*Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.*”

The *Esperanza Peace and Justice Center*’s concept of *Buena Gente*³ is one way of recognizing what ordinary citizens and neighbors do to contribute to each other’s well-being, to build communities of peace, as what Wheatley calls, “*islands of sanity*”. These locations of *islands of sanity* enable model teaching of kindness, generosity and service. *Islands*, because these exist in the global systems of repression and injustice and can serve as refuges of community spirit.

Not least the local *islands of sanity* pass on living legacies of useful service and community leadership where this is needed. This is the power of building our local communities of humans.

BIO: Susan Morales Guerra, writer/facilitator from San Antonio, Texas currently resides in Norway. A mother, grandmother and spiritual humanist, her work for social justice integrates participatory methods with arts and culture. Co-founder of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, she was also an organizer of the first International Women’s Day March in San Antonio in 1983.

NOTE: For a complete listing of footnotes, contact lavoz@esperanzacenter.org.