

October 12, 2019. Topanga, California.

Dear Friends:

I have been reading *Dark Matter: Women Witnessing: Extinction Illness: Grave Affliction and Possibility*, Issue #9, October 2019 - <http://darkmatterwomenwitnessing.com/issues/Oct2019/index.html> - slowly but steadily, in a parallel tempo with the eruption of the SaddleRidge fire 18 miles to the north, a synchronicity deserving attention. Though our power has not been shut down in Topanga, as it has for over 800,000 people in California, the replacement of our solar panels did require the electricity to be shut off for the day, so I shared a little discomfort. Yesterday, the smoke was heavy and I could not be outside but this morning the fire is seemingly stalled at 12.5 square miles, the heavy smoke abating although for the last hour, the Santa Ana winds which had died down have increased here, my estimate is 25 mph.

Before receiving *Dark Matter*, I was beginning an essay in response to a memorial for the clear cutting of 16.5 acres of ancient trees including at least one Douglas fir dating to Shakespearean times, 1599 by Oregon State University's College of Forestry. Earlier this week, the environmental journalist, Dahr Jamail, sent me an article with the headline, 'This Is Truly Terrifying': Scientists Studying Underwater Permafrost Thaw Find Area of the Arctic Ocean 'Boiling With Methane Bubbles'. In Japan, Typhoon Hagibis, the largest to hit Japan in 61 years, made landfall today sweeping northeast through the Tokyo region as a 5.7 magnitude earthquake struck an area in the storm's path earlier that day. This week I also learned that the internet has a huge carbon footprint that must be addressed equal to our need to give up fossil fuels and to stop deforestation. Meanwhile this is Day 5 of Extinction Rebellion's disruption and shut down of London and other cities leading to the arrest of 1300 climate demonstrators in London, 300 in Brussels and more across the globe. And Greta Thunberg has been given a Lakota name by Chief Arvol Looking Horse, "Woman Who Came From the Heavens."

This is the field I am in this week as I respond to the field of concern created by the essays in *Dark Matter*.

Here is the welcome Lise Weil and Kristin Flyntz wrote to Issue #9 "Grave Affliction and Possibility: "Deena Metzger's essay "Extinction Illness: Grave Affliction and Possibility" appeared in the [January issue of *Tikkun*](#). Its premise, in Metzger's essay is that, as the reality of human-caused mass extinction sinks in, we are all succumbing to what she calls 'extinction illness.': "Contemplating the extent and pervasiveness of despair and violence across the globe, the increasing aberrance of human and non-human behavior, I see that all humans and non-humans know this, all human people and all beings, animals, trees, birds, insects, fish, know this. And all of us are being driven to some form of madness, pain, or dysfunction."

"A few months after the essay appeared, we put out a call for responses, thinking we might publish them as a special section of an issue. Responses did not stop coming until just last month. They came in many forms: letter, formal essay, poetry, fiction, artwork—even a sermon. We soon realized we had the makings of an issue."

It took me a long time to comprehend that the essay had prompted a call for people to respond to the question of how we meet extinction and to the premise of the essay which has not changed: “The only healing for Extinction, and so Extinction Illness, as they are entirely intertwined, is stopping Extinction. The only healing for Extinction Illness is changing our lives to stop Extinction.”

After my essay was published in January, I was filled with dismay by the rash of unrelated but parallel essays, many, but not exclusively from academic, medical and mental health publications, which were concerned with *our* grief about extinction and climate collapse, with the affect of climate dissolution on *our* health or which proposed, for possibly unacknowledged self-serving reasons, that more research be done to determine the extent and nature of Aboriginal and Indigenous people’s suffering in regard to their increasing inability to pursue their ways of life. Imagining the “grief” of the Polar Bear mother on her disappearing ice floe and her cubs extreme hunger or the “grief” of the desperate Guatemalan refugee mother, restrained at the border, or imprisoned or separated from child, as much victim of climate dissolution as any other factor, I was not moved by these concerns with ourselves and our pain. The Earth is not calling on us to focus on or give energy to healing our dysfunction; it is for us to engage in rigorous scrutiny of our personal and cultural lives, our assumptions, values and actions, to discern how we are responsible for extinction, then to divest in all ways so that our lives change radically and restoration, not extinction, is inevitable.

On the other hand, I am also aware that the conversations among many of us have changed radically and that extinction and climate collapse are now increasingly the ground of concern. Perhaps we are actually meeting our denial and fear with some speed and moving on to bear witness, gather determination, and, even, might it be true, change?

The essays in *Dark Matter* are exquisite considerations of how we might consciously meet these times. Everyone whose piece is published has read, struggled with, lived with the tragic circumstances we are in. That means that we have been in conversation, soul resonance, *hartzeitig*, grief and wonder for days, weeks even months. These writers, these women, have taken on our tragic circumstances in response to Lise’s and Kristin’s request They have in order to answer how to meet extinction moved close, as close as they can, without shield or protection, to the current reality.

When I first heard there would be a call for response, I couldn’t take it in and simply forgot. So when the issue arrived, I was stunned. The reality of this issues implies that our condition, this which has broken my mind and heart, this desperate soul’s cry has been heard. First it was heard by Lise and Kristin, then by those who responded, by all who have taken it in and said: “Yes, let’s meet this call directly. Let’s not step away. Let’s enter the unspeakable and unbearable together.”

The responses aren’t to an essay that a woman wrote. The responses are to extinction and climate collapse. The responses are to the suffering Earth and her beloved beings, her holy creatures, her diverse and wondrous progeny and their extreme suffering at our hands. Accordingly, I find myself in a conversation while reading, a conversation that will not end with having read these pieces because they have become part of me in the way that I see that extinction has become part of them, part of all of us, that we are in this together. We always have been. But also, I am compelled to say, “Finally!”

Having read the Dark Matter pieces, I do not know much more about meeting extinction or healing extinction than I did when the essay came through me. But I know, from the field I have been in this week, and the increasing focus and centrality of global warming, that there are significant changes occurring, not because we have scientific solutions, hardly that, but because we are awakening together. Together makes all the difference. Each of the responses, essays, poems, observations, are distinct. Not any one provides an answer, even for the writers, but together the field of concern offers possibility. Even the question, “What shall I do?” which many pose, has a different implication in the way it is held by these writers. It translates again and again, into: What are the many ways I can respond?

For myself, I have been focusing on *reversing* extinction. I have been gathering with environmental activists and Indigenous people who are working at the very edges to meet extinction and climate collapse. But as their brilliant and courageous work, in collaboration with everyone’s persistent focus to turn this around, is not proving timely enough or sufficient, not, realistically, even hopeful, we are doing whatever else we can to create a true dialogue with the spirits, the Divine, with Earth, with the animals, with all the non-human beings in order to also receive the guidance and alliances we desperately need to change our minds and ways entirely. As so many who write in Dark Matter, are saying, “We have to listen.”

For at least thirty years, I have been writing and teaching about the need to step out of Western imperial mind which has been destroying and dominating North American for the last five hundred years and the globe for more than five thousand years. Colonization, extinction and ecocide come from the same mind and that mind penetrates us. And so we have to listen and then change our minds and our lives.

Here’s a thought: The question, “What shall I do?” implies that one engages in single actions. But perhaps that is the old mind that calls us to live our lives and then add another activity if and when we can – nothing essential changing. Let me suggest that meeting extinction, reversing extinction, meeting climate collapse, meeting the causes of world-wide social and political chaos and dissolution need to be the all-inclusive focuses of our individual lives while we fit in, where we can, the maintenance and pursuit of personal concerns. An entire reversal of priorities and interests.

And when we do this, we will find that we will be living the ways Indigenous peoples have lived for thousands and thousands of years – in right relationship with the Earth.

Thank you Lise and Kristin who had the vision to create this issue of Dark Matter: Women Witnessing.

Thank you writers for your deep engagement with what matters

Thank you readers for reading this journal, for considering the issues heartfully, and for joining our on-going global council for the Earth.

Deena Metzger

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