

A few years ago I visited the gorgeous Muir Woods north of San Francisco with a friend Gary. Muir Woods is a sanctuary of enormous redwood trees; many are hundreds of years old. Gary told me that redwood trees have very shallow root systems and the loose soil of Muir Woods provides little support for the huge trees. Each redwood tree's roots branch out and wrap tightly around the roots of their neighboring trees; this gives the trees the strength to endure strong winds and rain. Their strength comes from their unity. There are small trees, large trees, lush beautiful full trees and small dwarf trees. Even though each tree is an individual, its strength comes from its connectedness to the other trees which allows them to grow and thrive even in adverse conditions.

The redwood trees in Muir Woods are great teachers for us. Here are a few lessons we can learn from them:

Be flexible and inclusive. Redwood trees unconditionally support each other. They do not judge or discriminate against each other. Science is proving that people who are open and accepting of others are living healthier lives. Having a flexible perspective towards others implies a flexible approach to life. A non-inclusive and narrow attitude to others may extend to the narrowing down of options in life, a path that will ultimately negatively impact one's well-being.

In diversity there is beauty, and there is strength. This statement is a teaching from the redwood trees and a quote from Maya Angelou.

Look deliberately for *beauty* in diversity. When we encounter beauty, our hearts open, and our minds relax. When we experience beauty, we become filled with peace. Recognize the beauty in others, in their character, choices, sacrifices and aspirations. Look for the beauty within yourself.

Look to find the *strength* that exists in diversity. Mother Teresa wrote *I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot. Together we can do great things.* Aristotle wrote. *The whole is stronger than the sum of its parts.* Whether you call it synergy, teamwork or something else, there is something special that happens when we work together towards a common goal.

True Harmony begins with one's self. We can't effectively bring sustainable unity to the world without first finding harmony within our mind, body, and soul. Sometimes different people and situations can make us fearful. Our outside world is an exact reflection of our inner world. You have heard the expression, *as within, so without.* Much of the difficulty we face in the world is caused by not facing our inner fears or our shadow self. There will be peace in the world when we find peace within ourselves. Take a journey within and make peace with your fears. Doing so will bring harmony and peace to you and your relationships.

We are all one. Creating a common feeling of unity in a world of competition and diversity is an immense challenge for human beings. If we are going to realize unity in diversity, we must understand how we are all unified despite our differences. There are many temporary identities that we connect with having a physical body: *I am a man, I am a woman, I am a Christian, I am a Muslim, I am black or white, I am rich, or I am poor.* True spiritual wisdom begins with the realization that *I am not this body.* My body is simply a vehicle that will be left behind when, I, the soul moves on. In truth, what we have in common is our eternal spiritual nature. We are all one with the Divine which is expressing in, through and as each of us.

As we deepen our awareness of these truths, we begin to see the multiplicity of our beautiful life experience. Life would be boring if everything were the same. Keeping this in mind, let's practice being flexible and inclusive. Let's look for and see the beauty in diversity that comes in all shapes, colors, and sizes. Remember that harmony comes from within. Despite outer appearances, we are all seeking to love and to be loved.

Affirmation: *I am one with all life. I am one with God. Life is one with me.*