

We Are One

Illarion Merculieff

I learned the Aleut way of hunting as a meditation and a spiritual practice. The Aleut hunter suspends ego for group cohesion and hunting success. He defers to the most experienced hunter in the group. Even if we all fired a killing shot at the sea lion, we all knew whose bullet struck the animal first. This hunter gets first pick of the meat, I watched as the hunters all worked to retrieve the sea lion, taking turns cutting the carcass, then dividing up the parts in roughly equal portions, no matter how many hunters were present. And I knew that each hunter gave meat to others before his own family, especially the elderly and widows.

As I connected more deeply with other hunters, I also learned to connect more deeply with all of life. Aleut hunters know that when we take an animal we are killing another conscious being. We are taught to revere all life and all life forms. All life has the same spirit we do. It comes from the same place, the same source: *Agax* (the Maker or Creator).

It is one thing to understand the concept of sacredness (with your head) and another thing entirely to experience it with your whole being. I was eleven years old the first time I experienced the true sacredness of life. One day I was alone hunting when a sea lion came by, and I shot it. I knew the instant of its death, not because I was so sure of my shot, but because of what happened next. In an instant, an extremely subtle electrical impulse rushed through my body. I experienced the spirit of this animal. In the instant that the life-force came through my body, this sea lion told me it had consciousness and intelligence, and it was surrendering itself to me. That changed the way I looked at all life on this planet. In an instant, my reverence and regard for all life expanded exponentially.

Later, I told my *Aachaa* what I had experienced. He smiled, looked me deep in the eyes, and said, "*Exumnuxkoh*." Good. That was all he said. In that single word, he affirmed my experience, told me it was shared, and rejoiced with me in the knowing of it.

For the first deep time, I knew the reverence my people had for any animal they took. In experiencing the profoundness of this sea lion's death, I came into connection with the Divine and experienced the oneness of all Creation. When I killed that sea lion, I experienced our connection at the deepest level. We are not separate beings, he and I. We are one.

This is what we mean by a sacred experience. It's not religion; it's a way of being that is connected to self, others, and all of existence in a deep, profound, and spiritual way. It is connection that guides, directs, and informs us of our proper relationship with self, others, and the earth. This is what we call the way of the real human being.