

## **The Importance of Reciprocity**

(Original)

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I remember walking along the path to my ancestral house as a child. I noticed that there was a huge tree stump, the biggest I had ever seen. It looked very ancient from its near infinite annual rings encircling one another like some ancient hieroglyphs. I guessed it must have been a magnificent tree, except it wasn't a tree anymore. My father told me it used to be a majestic cypress tree. It had been cut down since it was thought to be a possible obstruction for aeroplanes. It was sad how the tree had tried to reach for the sky for centuries, growing a millimetre at a time, and it was chopped down when humans wanted to build airports so that they could fly instead.

It was in that instant that I realised how detrimental our relationship with nature was. There is only taking with no giving. The sad remainder of the chopped tree showed how in this world, everything is either a resource to take advantage of or a obstruction to remove. It showed how fundamentally wrong our way of thinking was. We are under the mass delusion that nature only exists for our sakes and to exploit it is our inherent right. This sort of entitled thinking I realised is very dangerous, as we only know how to take and not reciprocate. It sets in place a lack of two core foundations of any sound and healthy relationship—respect and harmonious balance,

It has always amazed me that though our miniscule kingdom felt far removed from the world, yet it had managed to usher in and embrace change at a very swift pace. Till that point, I had only known the perks of modernization. I realised it was the same for the rest. We were too busy enjoying the fruits of it and we only understood our right to exploit resources, and not our responsibilities to sustain it for the future or simply for its own sake. It presents the problem of the society as a whole I thought, to want to reap the benefits free of responsibilities.

The idea of an aeroplane or getting to be in one was very exciting till that point, because it symbolised efforts towards coming out of isolation and being connected with the rest of the world. But now, I started realising that of every innovation and progress, a tree had to

be cut down, a forest had to be cleared. It made me feel guilty that with every comfort we gained, some other form of life lost their right to be. It is absurd to think we are the only ones who have the right to live, and live comfortably, simply because there is no one to oppose us.

If only nature had a voice, I am sure things would be different. Had it been settlements that were to be cleared instead of the tree, there would have been anger that led to protests that led to alternatives being sought. I wonder why that wasn't done in the case of the ancient sentinel. Nature does not have a voice, but we can still hear her cries. There is no true modernization without fostering respect for the silent giver who never demands anything in return. The stump of the great tree taught me that for our intimate relationship with nature to be sustainable, reciprocity is of the utmost importance. Otherwise all that remains of the world would be decaying stumps of both trees and humans.