

# Separation Anxiety (human style)

► By Michael Mountain

**Our work for the animals is a work of the soul.**

“The idea that we are separate from each other is a kind of optical delusion.”

According to current polls, pundits, and focus groups, most of us agree that we want a united country - "one nation under God."

But that seems to be just about the only thing we do agree on - other than that "we" are right and that the other half of us are wrong. (Could so many of them really be so wrong about pretty much everything?)

It begs the question: how come we're so divided—so completely split down the middle? And so convinced of our own rightness.

The obvious conclusion would be that we really prefer division and disharmony to unity and cooperation. Except that when something happens that brings us together, it always feels so much better than the usual way we go about life. The trouble is, it happens most at times of extreme crisis, like after the 9/11 attacks when, especially in New York, people actually greeted each other on the street, worked together, and behaved like civilized human beings.

But it also happens when we share a common interest - like among those of us who care about the animals and agree that their needs come first and that if we alienate each other, it's the animals that will suffer.

So it seems we're quite capable of settling differences and treating each other with respect - when it matters.

The thing is, it matters all the time.

The wish to be "one nation indivisible" stems from something instinctive and basic - the simple knowledge that we really *are* one: one people, one world, one planet.

We all know this deep down. Our creation stories, whether in the Bible or any of hundreds of other sacred texts, tell of a time when humans lived at peace with each other, with their creator, and with nature. And they



go on to tell of a time when we broke away from that state of innocence and harmony and set out on a different path that led to division, conflict, and war.

They also include a simple formula for how we can recapture the connections that we've lost: It's the simple Golden Rule that tells us that as we give, so do we receive, and so to treat others as we would want to be treated ourselves.

That's because this Golden Rule is the way we express the knowledge that we are one. By treating you with the respect that I would like you to accord me, I affirm that, on the most basic level, we really are one.

Most of us try to behave this way with our friends, family, and pets. That's what binds us together. But we can reach out much further - as far as our dreams can take us. Albert Einstein said that the idea that we are separate from each other is "a kind of optical delusion." He once wrote to the *New York Post*:

"Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison [of separation from each other] by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

When we treat animals simply as commodities - as sport or entertainment or medical spare parts or factory-farmed food - we turn them into objects, into something "other." We don't just steal their bodies, but their soul or spirit or inner nature. And by that same simple Golden Rule, we lose touch with our own true nature.

Kindness to all living beings - to each other, to the animals, even to our enemies - is nothing more than treating them as we would want to be treated ourselves. And it's the key to a better world for all of us. 🐾