A "animalines" is often asked if anything on the horizon brings us cause for optimism, and our response is resonantly in the affirmative. We hear from increasing numbers of committed activists who are redirecting their energies from an organizational focus to assuming individual responsibility for making a difference. This greatly heats "animalines" as it reflects a growing awareness that a movement is ultimately nothing more than the collective journeys of its members. If we as individuals are lacking in terms of what we have to offer of ourselves, then even the most noble of sentiments carries a hollow ring. Movements are not grab bags to fill our personal voids, but a privileged opportunity to give back to Nature what we have mercilessly taken from her.

The crucial question is what brings people to life-affirming movements? No human animal is without needs and frailties, and certainly movements provide ample opportunity for recognition, influence, and a host of other factors associated with altruistic endeavors. We are all nourished from the kinship of pursuing a common dream with brothers and sisters, but such nourishment should occur naturally from the intrinsic satisfaction of giving, not the deliberative act of taking. This is why "animalines" derive such encouragement from those who are embarked on a journey of the spirit, for they realize the capacity to give to others is directly proportionate to their own continued growth and evolution.

The capacity for giving generously of ourselves is critical to our ultimate success, for outreach efforts depend upon creating an inviting climate which appeals to a broad-spectrum audience. "animalines" is not suggesting diluting either principle or message, but even the most radical vision must be presented with kindness, tolerance, and a willingness to embrace people at whatever point in their journey we find them. Individuals travel at different speeds and in different directions, and rather than self-righteously judging their progress, we should be painting an inviting portrait of the many paths to peace. The critical element is motivating people to embark upon the quest, not predefining the route or destination for them. Many of our friends believe "animalines" is indulging in romanticism when we write of unconditional regard, but charity is the music of the soul, and we make no apologies for uncompromisingly and tenaciously pursuing our ideals with one hand while embracing our adversaries with the other. "animalines" is saddened by the myopic manner in which movements dismiss the power of feelings to produce change, as historically virtually every successful nonviolent struggle for justice has predicated its approach on touching the soul rather than the mind. The mind assimilates fragmented information and rarely responds with great compassion except in circumstances when self-interest and altruism coincide, whereas the spirit can perceive the promise and splendor of a new dawn. Like the wonder of a young child, feelings and imagination are able to transcend the boundaries of cultural conditioning and bias. That is the magic of poetry, for it translates words into feelings without walls. Walt Whitman described this magic as the power to "enlarge" ourselves, and that power resides in each of us. The mind is restricted by a myriad of constraints, but feelings carry a boundless potential for expansion and self-discovery if unlocked by a gentle vision and supportive hand.

It’s that vision which "animalines" has sought to further in our outreach efforts, for we measure our success not by how many we quantitatively reach, but how many we profoundly "touch." No less a great thinker than Schopenhauer asserted that compassion alone is the critical determinant of ethics, and if history has taught us anything, it is that compassion is a product of the soul— and that compassion is a critical component to all of us. They write: "One must care for the air and water and forest and grass. We want to help you in any way we can. We know you care about us. We care about you. We are your friends. We love you.

"animalines," however, the quest for peace is fundamentally a vision of gentle possibilities, and it's the passionate love of life and Earth that fuels this growing force in every nation on this planet. It's not governmental bodies or organized movements that are leading the way, but the individuals we referred to who are embarked on a journey of the spirit—finding within themselves rich nourishment to share with others. Through this process of giving generously and unconditionally, we are planting seeds to heal the fragmentation and artificial divisions that Einstein described as human-kind's "optical delusion." Einstein so clearly understood what our troubled species has yet to grasp—the properties of the parts can only be understood from the dynamics of the whole, and the whole is all the organic and inorganic elements that comprise the symmetry and integrity of our fragile universe.

This integrated concept of wholeness cannot be realized externally, as it can only be found within the spirit of each individual. Children possess this unified life force in great abundance before the weight of socialization and fragmentation descends upon them, and for most adults it's an arduous journey back to again experience the child's spontaneous capacity for exploring, discovering and sharing. Tragically, many well-intentioned reformers tend to sanctimoniously lecture and chastise rather than sensitively convey the joy of their own journey, for they often have little to give themselves and even less to give others. Having lost connection with their own spirit, they're unable to lovingly touch others. Adults obscure the simple truth and power of a child's feelings, and in so doing deny their own essence. "animalines" recently received a note from a kindergarten class in Kirkwood, Missouri, which embodies the spirit and light of unconditional love—love that lies waiting in each of us. They write: Our teacher told us ... you love all life forms-birds, trees, the air and water and forest and grass. We want to help you in any way we can. We know you care about us. We care about you. We are your friends. We love you.

Edward S. Duvin is editor of "animalines," from which this essay is reprinted. "animalines" is a program of The HSUS.