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The screams of a child are impossible to ignore for most humans. When babies cry, it elicits an urge to drop everything and help. Studies have shown that many mammals respond even to the cries of another species (Goldman). Across species, it is a part of evolution for the young and helpless to attract the help they need to stay alive. Until recently, I had never paid attention to the kind of suffering that would elicit such sounds. In modern society, we have grown away from nature, and in doing so, have grown numb to its beauty. We humans are so caught up in our own problems that we don't recognize that humans are a part of nature and all of nature suffers and is alive.

When I went backpacking in the Pecos wilderness in New Mexico a few years ago with my dad and sister I learned how truly removed most humans are from the intensity and vitality of nature. We set up camp in one of the most beautiful meadows I've ever seen. A river rushed past on one side of the meadow and wild raspberries dotted the other. On the side opposite the river, there was a mountain slope, and on top of that, woods. It was at the base of the mountain that we found the injured fawn. It was smaller than a dog with skinny, awkward legs, big, pitiful eyes, and white spots that made it look like a cartoon character. It was lying with its head up and legs curled like it was completely unbothered by the humans getting closer. You might not have known anything was wrong if it wasn't for the gash in its side, surrounded in dried blood and matting fur. There was so much pain in those eyes but there was nothing we could do but watch as it stayed still, frozen in panic as we got closer.

That night I laid awake listening to the pained cries for help from an animal so different from me, and I started to cry. When it comes down to it, the cries of baby deer feel the same as the cries of a human child. At that moment I understood how at our weakest moments, there is no real difference between human or animal; we all are born and we all die. It is in observing the end of a seemingly insignificant animal life that I began to understand that every life is sacred and valuable. Aldo Leopold said that "the last word in ignorance is the [person] who says of an animal or plant, 'What good is it?' Before this experience it would have been tempting for me to ask what use a baby deer is to a human and what good could possibly come out of watching one suffer. However, that day I learned that if you pay attention, even the smallest animal can teach you the importance of all life.

I came to understand this fact by studying a single creature in the moment when it was closest to death and therefore most alive. Just as Joy Harjo writes that “It’s possible to understand the world from studying a leaf.” It is possible to understand the vibrance of life that all living things share by witnessing the pain of one single life. And just as it is “possible to travel the whole globe and learn nothing,” it is possible to see all the suffering in the world and if you do not pay attention, not truly understand any of it. Joy Harjo understands that the smallest details of the natural world can teach you about the wider Earth. The next morning my dad carried the dying deer in his arms away from our campsite with the same care and softness he used to carry me after a long car ride when I was too tired to walk. I realized that by witnessing pain and suffering in nature we can understand the rawness of death and in doing so, comprehend the beauty of life that we share with nature.

Work Cited:

Goldman, Jason G. “Crying Baby Mammals All Sound the Same to Mama.” *Scientific American*, 1 Dec. 2014, www.scientificamerican.com/article/crying-baby-mammals-all-sound-the-same-to-mama/