

OUR “INNER” AND “OUTER” LANDSCAPES

Catherine
Nelson, Ph.D.



The young white man had grown up in a middle class family and both parents had a college education. He was working his way through college to supplement several scholarships he had received. He was interested in protecting the environment (his inner landscape values) and he wanted customers to be more thoughtful about conservation.

The young black man also came from a middle class family and he had won a fellowship to help pay for his tuition. So why did this young man insist on getting a bag for his purchase at the store?

He wanted to feel safe (his inner landscape beliefs). When he left the store he did not want to be challenged by the security guard at the exit. His father had taught him well. His father had several bad experiences making purchases in stores when he was a young man. His father had taught his son to be “mindful” in different situations. The young black man walked out of the store with his new purchase and receipt in the plastic bag with the store logo on it and the security officer did not question him.

In our society, young black men, compared to young white men, are more likely to be challenged, questioned and even arrested by police and other authorities. The two young men had entirely different priorities.

When I first heard this true story, I couldn’t figure out why the young black man needed a bag for his purchase. I also had a hard time in the workshop understanding why there were so many different perceptions about the crystal. I have come to appreciate more and more the power of our unique inner landscapes. ■

Let’s look at how much our inner emotional world colors our perceptions and our relationships in the outer world. Several years ago, I attended a workshop and the instructor placed a large amethyst quartz crystal in the center of our small circle. Our task was to connect with the crystal and share a few words about what we experienced. I was surprised at the diversity of what people saw, sensed, and felt. The crystal evoked different emotions, different qualities, and different memories and images for others.

In sum, the exercise helped me to appreciate how our perceptions and our relationships to the “outer” landscape are determined by our “inner” landscape. Our inner landscape holds our emotional history, good and bad memories, our cultural and religious beliefs and so much more. Each one of us has his or her own unique inner landscape beginning at birth. Here’s another example.

“I need a bag,” said the customer to the clerk at the cash register. The clerk said, “You don’t need a bag. Just put your cell phone in the box and save a few trees.” The customer replied, “I need a bag.” The customer spoke the same words a third time but more forcefully before the clerk gave him a plastic bag with the store logo for his small but expensive purchase.

Both the clerk and the customer were in their early twenties. Both were seniors at a nearby college and both were hoping to find good jobs after graduation. However, there was one major difference, which created a chasm between them. The clerk was white and the customer was black. Their “inner” landscapes had distinctly different life experiences.

CATHERINE NELSON, Ph.D., has a counseling practice in Bozeman with over 25 years of experience working with individuals and groups. She has taught at the Barbara Brennan School of Healing and is a certified Pathwork Helper. She offers workshops on personal transformation and energy healing and is available for individual sessions. Call Catherine at (406) 585-8025 or send e-mail to nhobbit@gmail.com.

