

Untitled

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Things people do often bring tears to my eyes, sometimes of joy, sometimes frustration, sometimes anger. Tears may mark an impactful moment intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually -- illuminating some truth. This happened to me recently in the Singapore Flower Dome.

The Gardens by the Bay – home to those iconic metal “super trees” shown in every tourist brochure -- also include two mega-domes. The Cloud Dome houses a man-made waterfall at least 70 feet high, and the mist it generates supports myriad species of plant life at all different levels with suspended platform paths weaving throughout. The Flower Dome is another multi-level design wonder, with pathways winding through its many sections from Olive Grove to Baobab Desert. Both of them present 360-degree views of Singapore harbor, the Colonial district, and downtown skyscrapers.

As we strolled slowly through the Flower Dome, I noticed the vast diversity of people around us. They had all come to see the beauty, and to learn. They were of every age, station in life, ethnicity, nationality, religion; they included families, groups of school children, elderly with canes and walkers, smartly dressed professionals, young adults and teens with their iPhones in-hand. They spoke every language I can recognize, and some that I cannot. No one felt shy about asking perfect strangers, “Take photo of us, please?” as they found some special spot. There was jostling and the dance-of-direction that happens in a crowd, but everyone just smiled and made room for others to pass or hurry, or dawdle. We were all entranced, not only by the flowers and strange-looking plants, but also by the artfully placed sculptures. There were coy dragons peeping out of foliage, and ferocious dragons with razor claws and shimmering scales perched almost at the top of the Dome, looking for a meal, perhaps? Carved wooden mountain goats climbed the railings between levels; magnificent stallions galloped through stately fern gardens. A family cast in bronze – each with a suitcase in hand – strode through the plains grasses to show they were tourists, just passing through. Everywhere we looked, there was some additional delight.

We had just wandered past a dozen charming ten-year old Singaporean ballerinas dressed as mice, and one as Cinderella, dancing on a lawn. We made our way to the very highest section: the Baobabs and Ghost trees, forming strange and alluring shapes against the roof. We had settled in a good spot, feasting our eyes on the winding paths below us, the gentle surge of the crowds, the dragons climbing toward the sky and the magnificent baobabs. All at once a

haunting, beautiful melody wafted through space; directly below us, a Japanese koto master musician and her flautist son began to play.

Suddenly my eyes filled with tears; I felt my heart swell in my chest. All of us in that place, at that time, could have been at each others throats; pushing, shoving, suspicious, annoyed, isolated in our own shells and concerned with our own interests.. Instead, we were joined in an experience of community, turning our energies toward the appreciation of the beauty of nature and of music.

This is what human beings can be – not angry, divisive creatures bent on destruction and chaos, but open and sharing, connected to the world and each other by the best parts of our natures. I thought about other parts of the world where, at the same moment, humans were focused on destroying life and beauty, killing themselves and each other, acting with cruelty and callousness toward everyone and everything “other.”

If tears can be prayers, I hope the universe was watching.