PRE-PUBLICATION DRAFT

Turning Toward Life

An Invitation to Explore Reverence for Life as a Spiritual Path

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Editor

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and
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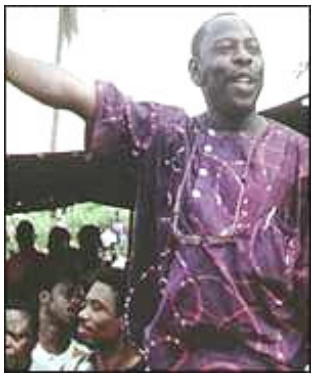
Dedicated to the memory of



Ken Saro-Wiwa
Ogoni Human Rights and Ecology Activist
Martyr

Turning Toward Life

An Invitation to Explore Reverence for Life as a Spiritual Path

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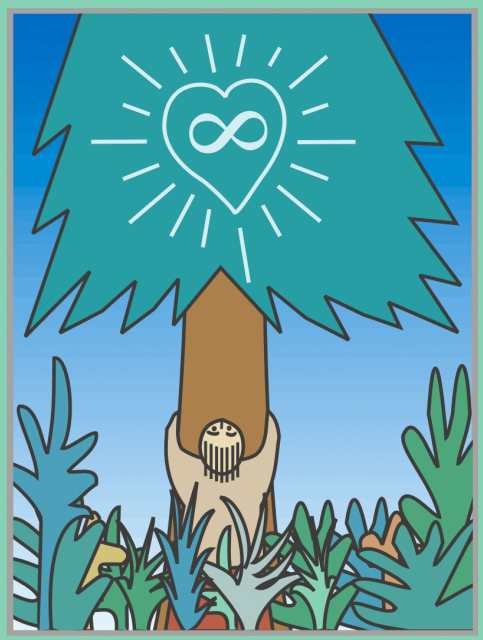
turning toward life: a mandala/manifesto of earth spirituality

participating in the Source of *All Life as it breathes*
through all creatures *and recognizes,*
loves, evolves and *celebrates itself*
in and through all *creatures (us!)*

transcendent *meaning*



human fulfillment

fulfilling our lives in love, kindness, service, creativity, peacemaking & the experience of beauty --
embracing deeply, taking responsibility for all the children of the Earth -- entering into communion with the spirits
communion of all lives and all religions -- compassionately resisting exploitation, oppression & the abuse of violence

ecological passion

embracing the creation as the Body of God -- serving the Web of Life --
taking responsibility for all our plant and animal brothers and sisters, the land and the waters --
giving ourselves to Life as Life has given itself to us -- compassionately resisting economic systems

everyday embodiment

turn toward life

is a spiritual community without walls, embracing
all people who are energized & connected by concern
for the future of life, and by gratitude for the gift of life on Earth
and the gift of life in and through one another.

Love and survival: Because of the overwhelming impact of human activities on the biosphere....
the future of life depends on our love & compassion for all living creatures

By Dennis Rivers, with inspiration from Saint Francis, Maia, Julia Butterfly, Allysyn Kiplinger, Lauren DeBoer, Cathy Holt, Joanna Macy, Kaz Tanahashi, Gene Knudsen Hoffman, Bette Powers, Anne Parks, Sharon Hall, Jim Smallwood, John Mabry
Vijali, Brian Swimme, Raimon Panikkar, Paloma Pavel, Matthew Fox, Provrojika Sarado, Edwin Shaw, Mayumi Oda, Tyrone Cashman, Tom Beeler, Martha Glessing, and many others, including all the frogs, bees and tigers who are still with us.

Chapter 1: An Introduction to Turn Toward Life

A Cooperative, Interfaith Spiritual Community Focused on Reverence for Life

by Dennis Rivers, with suggestions from Maía, Paloma Pavel, Molly Young Brown, Gene Knudsen Hoffman and Mary Watkins

December 2004 revision

.PREFACE In responding to the current need to give people more support and encouragement for a lifetime of caring about the Earth and about our shared human fate, several members of the 1978-1981 Turn Toward Life have joined together with other anti-nuclear and Earth-care activists to renew, deepen, connect and extend the work we have been doing, each in our own way, over the past twenty years. "Turning Toward Life" feels like a theme and a title worth continuing.

We think of this work as being done in support of lovers of life everywhere (and drawing on resources that belong to everyone), so we do it in the spirit of sharing and non-exclusiveness. We hope to expand the idea of common ground and the practice of generosity by declaring that whatever we create around the theme of reverence for life belongs to everyone on Planet Earth, without any conditions or obligations.[1] As a way of honoring the ground of aliveness we share with everyone, we welcome everyone to use/adopt/adapt any of our information, emphases, insights, prayers and practices, in whatever ways may support their caring about people and the web of life.[2] And, we also invite people to participate in our particular evolving circle of supportive friendships (at www.turntowardlife.org).

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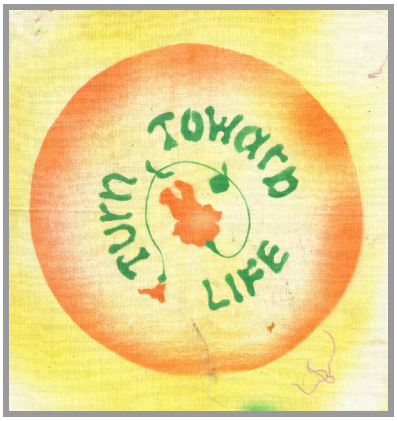
[1] The past half century has seen an enormous increase in organizations and teachers who present spirituality and the development of one's human potential as $50-per-hour (or $500 per weekend) services that must be purchased from authorized purveyors. However noble the intentions of such teachers may be, and however understandable their need to earn a living, this approach separates us from everyone who does not have the required amount of money, which includes most of humanity. Many traditions would counsel us that this very sense of separation, socially reinforced in a thousand ways, is exactly what keeps us from feeling at one and at peace with God, with Nature, with one another and with ourselves. For an alternative vision of the spiritual life, emphasizing grace and gratitude, please see *Gratefulness, The Heart of Prayer*, by Brother David Steindl-Rast.

[2] In adopting this attitude, various member of the Turn Toward Life working group have been influenced by Buddhist, Christian and Native American traditions of generosity and non-possessiveness

1. HISTORY Turn Toward Life began in 1978 as one of many "affinity groups" (mutual support groups) of Santa Barbara residents who were protesting the construction of a nuclear power plant in a nearby county. The protestors had discovered that the (appropriately named) Diablo Canyon nuclear reactor, through a combination of greed, ignorance and bad luck, was being built directly over an active earthquake fault. Many thousands protested the construction of this particular plant, especially after the near-meltdown at Three Mile Island. And although the Diablo Canyon plant was eventually completed and put into service, very few nuclear plants were built in the United States after it. A defining moment of that era occurred a few years later when a judge presiding over the trial of 500 of those Diablo Canyon protestors turned to the first defendant, a Quaker from San Francisco named David Hartsough, and asked, "How do you plead?" David answered, "I plead for the lives of my children." and was led off to jail.

Around the time of the early 1980s Diablo Canyon protests, three of the participants, Dennis Rivers, (Ms.) Gene Knudsen Hoffman and Maía, all writers, began a series of conversations about the overlapping topics of spirituality, ecology, protest, community and the life of compassion. These conversations have continued for a period of twenty years and have included an open-ended questioning about possible new forms of spiritual friendship and community appropriate to sustain people through the growing toxic side-effects of the nuclear arms race and runaway industrialization by out-of-control corporations (global warming; world hunger, poverty, disease and violence; species extinction; etc.).



Cloth banner from demonstrations against the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, 1978.

I, Dennis Rivers, began the current round of work on developing the Turn Toward Life Community-Without-Walls after a period of deep mourning over the death of whales caused by U.S. Navy warships (finally acknowledged in 2002 by the Navy after many years of denial). The intense sound from the warships' sonar bursts the blood vessels near the inner ears of the whales, causing them to die. In this period of mourning and depression, I became convinced through a process of prayer, dreams and inner turmoil that the blood of the whales was the very same blood that issued from the side of Jesus on the cross. This represented a great intensification of my already held belief that Nature, the Web of Life, is in fact the Body of God, worthy of our devotion and protection. Turn Toward Life expresses both the hope and the anguish of all the founding participants about caring for people in a world of mechanized violence and caring for the Earth in a time of species death.[3] Turn Toward Life has always been pluralistic and interfaith, allowing each person to draw from their own deepest inner

[3] As the eco-philosopher Brian Swimme commented in a 1997 lecture, "From the point of view of species extinction, this is the worst time in the last 65 million years."

resources, and the current renewal of Turn Toward Life continues that interfaith tradition.

2. SOME MEANINGS OF "TURNING TOWARD LIFE" Many spiritual traditions advocate a turning toward life and the idea was everywhere as the 1978-81 anti-nuclear demonstrations took shape. We were strongly influenced by Taoist, Feminist and Native American teachings, as well as by an often-quoted verse in the Bible that seemed especially appropriate in an era of leaking nuclear power plants and runaway nuclear arms manufacturing by both the U.S. and the USSR:

> "I call heaven and earth today to witness; I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendents may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19)

The idea of turning toward life also refers to the Jewish tradition of "the turning," or *Teshuvah.* That tradition holds that no matter how far person may have wandered into error and separation from God, that person can, at any moment, turn toward God, a ray of whose presence is always present in each soul. What was appealing in this tradition was the spirit of infinite forgiveness. What it meant to us was that no matter how many nuclear bombs and leaking nuclear power plants our country had made, we could, according to this tradition, suddenly see the folly of it all and turn toward life, thus saving our lives and affirming our basic sanity in a single step.

In the 1980s and '90s, the eco-psychologist Joanna Macy began exploring the idea that our creation of mountains of radioactive waste that will be dangerous to all living things for hundreds of thousands of years, requires the creation of a completely new kind of religious order that would be devoted to guarding the waste and protecting the integrity of life into the far future. While it is not clear today how this dream will be realized, it is very clear that the integrity of life needs protectors.[4]

3. GROWING THREATS TO LIFE ON EARTH In the years since the Diablo Canyon protests, the original members of Turn Toward Life, along with many of the anti-nuclear protestors of the past two decades, have expanded their circle of concerns, realizing along the way that peace, ecology, social justice and compassion are so deeply interwoven that they will all rise or fall together. (Many anti-nuclear activists already understood this perfectly well in 1980. Others, like myself, needed a few years to get clear about it.)[5]

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[4] For an interview with Joanna Macy about the idea of nuclear guardianship, please visit www.context.org/ICLIB/IC28/Macy.htm

[5] Among the original members of Turn Toward Life, Quaker peace activist Gene Knudsen Hoffman has helped to promote the practice of compassionate listening around the world, Eric Schwarz has produced many public radio programs about ecology, and Dennis Rivers teaches conflict-resolution skills and manages an anti-nuclear web site (www.nonukes.org). Gene Knudsen Hoffman's *Compassionate Listening: An Exploratory Sourcebook* is available free of charge online at www.coopcomm.org/compassion/

As a new century opens, the worst trends of the last century continue: greed, fear, ignorance and hatred continue to combine with ever more destructive technologies to endanger both people and the entire web of life. The poisonous dust from nuclear bomb tests of the 1950s that continues to circle around the world has been joined by the poisonous dust of nerve-gas munitions exploded in the Iraqi desert and the poisonous dust of depleted uranium munitions exploded in Bosnia and Serbia. It is a dangerous illusion to imagine that any group of people can continue to create and use these poisonous technologies without eventually being poisoned by them. And many already have been, such as Vietnam veterans poisoned by Agent Orange, Gulf War veterans now ill who breathed the dust of U.S. depleted-uranium anti-tank shells, nuclear fallout cancer victims in the small towns of rural Utah, and agricultural workers around the world sickened by pesticides.

4. OUR HOPES FOR FULFILLMENT Many thoughtful observers have come to agree that our military-industrial-chemical pollution of Planet Earth is threatening the web of life upon which we ourselves depend both physically and emotionally. We cannot hope to live deeply fulfilled lives in a world that is biologically and socially unraveling.[6] How will we explain to our grandchildren that the tigers, elephants and whales are gone, and that it was humans who killed them?[7] How will we live with the knowledge that millions of people died of AIDS because drug companies withheld medicines from poor countries[8], or that millions of children continue to starve to death each year around the world because adults in wealthy countries are simply too lost in their own preoccupations to feed them.[9] In spite of America's tradition and advocacy of a very isolated kind of individualism, many people, both in the U.S. and around the world, see quite clearly that our survival and happiness are connected to the survival and happiness of everyone else. That sense of infinite connectedness is at the heart of Buddhist teachings. And for those of us who understand life as having been created by a Divine Presence (named differently in different cultures), caring for the Creation is a direct way of expressing our love for the Creator. In previous eras it might have been possible for a person to wall off the needs of others and create their own little world of personal fulfillment, but in a world made small by technology, that is now impossible. We all live together.

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[6] Although, as demonstrated by St. Catherine of Siena in nursing victims of the plague, and by many battlefield medics, heroic acts of lovingkindness can allow a person to stay centered in chaotic circumstances.

[7] In his book, *The Dream of the Earth*, Thomas Berry gives a beautiful description of the way the natural world enters into us and becomes part of our personalities. Thus to lose species to extinction is to lose dimensions of our own personhood.

[8] In fact, we have no guarantee that the collapse of large AIDS-stricken countries such as India and China will not cause the collapse of world civilization, taking all who imagined they were safe along with it.

[9] Our technological accomplishments cast a harsh light on our social failings. If we can put people on the surface of the Moon, we can certainly bring rice to someone's front door. And for me, as an American, it is especially troubling that America can manage to deliver landmines to every wretched corner of the Earth, but not chicken soup. If people starve in a world full of food, we can no longer claim that feeding them is beyond our reach.

5. THE RE-EMERGENCE OF ECO-SPIRITUALITY As is true in many areas of life, deep challenges require of us deep responses. All around the world people are taking up the cause of protecting the web of life, and many see this as a religious vocation, an inner calling that connects them to the source of their lives.[10]

In human history reverence for life has been a recurring theme, expressed by such Christian saints as Francis of Assisi and Hildegard of Bingen, and also very strongly by Native American traditions, Women's wisdom traditions in almost every culture, the Jains of India, Judaism and Taoism. The last two centuries have also seen a variety of what might be called contemporary Earth Saints, including such figures as John Muir, Rachel Carson, Albert Schweitzer and Jane Goodall. The last thirty years have witnessed the five-fold rise of ecology: as a field of study; as an area of human concern; as a focus of political action; as a new dimension of spirituality, the latter represented by such eco-thinkers as Joanna Macy, Matthew Fox, Thomas Berry, and Brian Swimme; and as a focus in art, as represented by such eco-artists as Vijali,[11] Andy Goldsworthy and Christo.[12]

In the past it might have been possible to look at this group of eco-saints, eco-artists, and eco-advocates as quite different from spiritual teachers and social reformers such as St. Catherine of Siena, Gandhi, Dorothy Day, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Dalai Lama. But as one studies the roots of our growing ecological crisis, one finds that the roots of the crisis are in the very greed, fear, hatred, and a jumbled need for love, forgiveness and healing, that these spiritual leaders have labored to address. Thus, the new eco-spirituality is not just about whales or forests, it is also about us humans, about all the children of Planet Earth, and about the quality of our relationships with one another, person to person and nation to nation. (Weapons productions and military activities around the world, along with greed-driven manufacturing, are probably the most significant sources of environmental pollution on planet Earth. So, as much as I would like to avoid murky human issues, preserving the environment and nurturing the web of life will require that we humans courageously face our unresolved psychological and political problems that support war and greed, our ugly shadows.)

Reaching Beyond My Humanity
by Susan Cohen Thompson

[10] This is the central focus of *EarthLight* Magazine. You can read a wide range of articles from *EarthLight* online at www.earthlight.org.
[11] For a brief introduction to Vijali's work, visit www.rocvision.com/vijalibio.htm.
[12] For introductions to ecological art, visit www.greenmuseum.org/c/ecovention/intro_frame.html and www.indyweek.com/durham/2001-04-18/cover3.html.

When the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, in relation to nuclear weapons, "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools," he was speaking spiritual and political words which would come to have ecological meanings as well. In much the same way, the words of Jesus, "Whatsoever you do to the least to these, you do to me" are coming to have both a religious and an ecological meaning in our time. The Dalai Lama once said, "My religion is kindness." Many now see how that kindness needs to be extended in every direction.

6. A PATH OF REMEMBRANCE AND QUESTIONING What Turn Toward Life seeks to offer the emerging world of eco-spirituality is **our effort to integrate serving the web of life and becoming more soulful and fulfilled persons**. A focus on spiritual friendship and on the biographies of great nurturers of life brings us back again and again to the possibilities of deeper development in our own lives. As Albert Schweitzer put it:

> In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.

(In my experience this is true not only of meeting living persons, but also of encountering the life stories of extraordinary people.)

Turn Toward Life welcomes people of every religious faith, and also people whose spiritual lives are completely unique and/or pluralistic. What matters in our community is only that a person be drawn toward reverence for life as a spiritual path and be interested in exploring our shared questions as a way of deepening their spiritual/ecological life. In following a path of guiding questions rather than established answers, we are grateful for the example of Quaker practice and especially for the work of Gene Knudsen Hoffman, who has translated the Quaker practice of spiritual queries into patterns that can be used by any spiritual support group.[13] Our twelve areas of creative self-inquiry appear on the following pages.

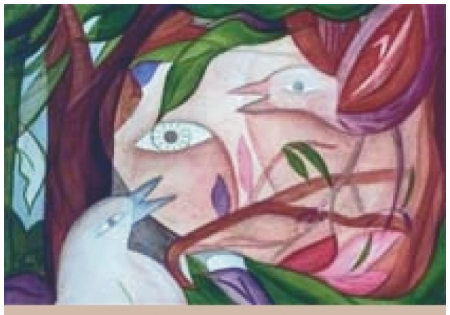
7. FOLLOWING NATURE'S WAY In seeking to create a community that serves and celebrates the web of life, we are drawn to using models from nature itself, and that means encouraging significant variety. If one looks closely at living systems, one sees that life evolves through variety rather than uniformity. So rather than having a list of doctrines to which everyone must agree, **our community is focused on a set of deep questions which each participant will answer with unique responses that can evolve over a lifetime**. Our model of spiritual integrity is not the logical model of "one correct answer." It is the natural model of all rivers running to the sea, each taking its own course, or all spokes leading to the hub of a wheel.

This is not, however, a directionless model of "anything goes." There is a sea, and the rivers do eventually reach it. Reverence for life is quite different from the culture of greed, violence and death that surrounds us. A path of reverence for life

[13] For several of Gene Knudsen Hoffman's essays about compassionate listening and the life of reconciliation, please visit www.coopcomm.org/cclibrary/. She proposed the use of exploratory questions as part of forming spiritual communities in her 1988 pamphlet, "Forming Spiritual Base Communities in the U.S.A.," which is included as Chapter Two of this document.

makes real demands on its followers, and has created many martyrs, such as Judi Bari, defender of forests,[14] Ken Saro-Wiwa, of the Ogoni People in Nigeria[15], and Chico Mendes of Brazil.[16] What we hope to give up in our community is the idea that one person would know in advance how reverence for life ought to unfold in another person's life. Instead of telling, we ask such questions as, "How are you called to serve the web of life?" And we listen. We try to walk along with one another as we search and struggle to evolve responses that will be genuinely our own. In terms of spiritual development, we see this approach as watering the tree of faith, rather than demanding the fruit.

Although ideas can be wonderful helpers, a path of compassion and lovingkindness needs to be taught primarily by embodying more compassion and lovingkindness. Therefore, as a spiritual community we hope to avoid the way that belonging to a strongly defined group and/or believing in certain doctrines, even beautiful doctrines, can blot out many essential steps in of the soul's journey. These steps include the opening of one's heart, loving God, loving and serving others, and the embodiment of virtues (wisdom, honesty, attentiveness, etc.).



Birds Eye View
by Susan Cohen Thompson

"Having the answers" about spiritual life, or belonging to the "right" group, often seem to bring an illusory sense of closure to a process that is better understood as ongoing throughout one's lifespan.[17] Focusing on the questions can allow each person's responses to evolve and grow deeper, and can also allow for cycles of renewal and change.

8. COOPERATIVE CIRCLES OF ENCOURAGEMENT Another way that we follow the patterns of nature, and also Quaker and Native American traditions, is to meet one another as a cooperative circle of equals. Whatever we have to teach, we try to teach by loving example and friendly persuasion. Even more than teaching or persuading others, we are called to a life of mutual *encouragement*, and we encourage everyone to take up the life of encouragement. We do this instead of designating one person in our circle as *the* minister, because this designation often has the unfortunate effect of telling people that their spiritual lives can be carried along by someone else's excellence. What seems to be more the case is that every grace that comes to us through the excellence of another needs to be matched by our own effort and deep participation, our work to assimilate the gift. I have become convinced that one meaning of the teaching of Jesus, "Love one another as

[14] To learn about Judi Bari's life, visit www.monitor.net/monitor/bari/barideath2.html
[15] For more information about Ken Saro-Wiwa, see Chapter 5 of this document and visit www.goldmanprize.org/recipients/recipientProfile.cfm?recipientID=45
[16] For more information about Chico Mendes, visit www.environmentaldefense.org/article.cfm?contentid=1551
[17] Perhaps that is what prompted Jesus to say something on the order of, "By what they have embodied in their lives, you will know those who follow me." For and extended study of how belief came to overshadow love in the early history of Christianity, see *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* by Edwin Hatch.

I have loved you," is that part of everyone's development as a soul consists of learning to nurture the unfoldment of other souls. The ecological octave of this teaching might be thought of as the Sun, the Earth and the Milky Way saying to us, "As we have filled each one of you with life, so nurture the life of the world around you." It remains to be seen how we will create the appropriate forms for this vision of universal ministry, given that not everyone has given equal time, thought and preparation to becoming a nurturing encourager of others. One possible avenue might be by re-understanding friendship as a spiritual practice, and by holding this as one of the central missions of our community.

9. FRIENDSHIP AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE A central part of our effort to build a more cooperative web of relationships is our commitment to give one another time and attention as a gift, rather than asking for money in return. There are trends at work in our time, as embodied in psychotherapy, personal coaching, care of the dying, and spiritual direction, that are professionalizing and even commodifying our most important conversations. While psychotherapists, coaches, grief counselors, and spiritual directors do their very best to support the healing and unfoldment of their clients, it is also true that the empowerment of these professionals to do good works often goes hand in hand with the disempowerment and devaluing of everyone else. It is part of the dynamics of professionalization that when one group of people specializes in a given activity, practically everybody else stops doing it.

While this may be perfectly appropriate for brain surgery or bridge design, it is not a good model for emotional and spiritual nurturance, which need nearly universal participation. In our hyper-competitive world, those who do not have enough money to purchase emotional nurturance come back to haunt all of us in the form of the mentally ill, criminals, drug addicts and the millions of ordinary people who are now heavily medicated with anti-depressants. In this context, to be a friend is an act of radical spiritual practice, affirming the inherent dignity (that of God, in Quaker and Hindu terms) in each person. To share the joys and sorrows of another person[18] asking only for time to share your own joys and sorrows, is to create a little island of cooperative mutuality in a world that continues to manufacture savage inequalities, is to create a Sabbath, a resting place, at least one single moment free from the pressures of money and status.

Our little community-in-the-making, Turn Toward Life, joins in the effort that many groups are making to create an environment in which webs of mutual support can unfold. We hope to celebrate life in ways that are open to everyone, through delight in nature and the sharing of our own abilities and life stories, and thus revive a tradition of friends entertaining, delighting, supporting and nurturing one another that has been part of many cultures for many centuries.[19] Our goal in declaring friendship to be a spiritual practice is not to make the world of professional

[18] Sharing both the joys and sorrows of others is a central theme in Buddhist spirituality.

[19] For an exploration of spiritual friendship in the context of Irish culture, see John O'Donohue's *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom.*

counseling smaller, it is to make the world of friendship larger. In wanting to mend a violent and broken world spiraling toward ecocide, we take on emotional burdens that are beyond the range of ordinary psychotherapy, but not beyond the range of deep friendship.

In these labors of compassion we are encouraged by the work of Carl Rogers, who spent a large part of his life explaining that psychotherapy has a positive effect on people when it includes, and because it includes, the elements of acceptance, caring, honesty and active empathy that are also the heart of friendship and good parenting.[20] Our goal in relation to this large area of human concern is to apply Gandhi's teaching that we "be the change we want to see." One important first step toward building a world based on compassion and mutual assistance is for us to reach out to one another in more compassionate, nurturing and sustaining ways.

10. TWELVE CREATIVE AREAS OF INQUIRY

The psychological explorer Sam Keen recently wrote an essay about the most significant questions in human life[21], and summed up his vision of the power of questions with the phrase, "your questions are the quest you're on." It might be helpful to think of the questions that follow as challenges and areas of inquiry as well, because the word *question* can imply an answer that might be given quickly, whereas a *challenge* and an *area of inquiry* implies a response that could take weeks or even decades to evoke from within oneself.[22] Throughout the tree of life and throughout human life, challenge and development are closely interwoven. In all three dimensions of being a person, body, heart and mind, we develop and find our fulfillment in relation to the challenges we accept.[23]

We invite you to consider the following questions as worthy of long reflection. They are given in the Quaker form of questions to oneself. All of them are quite intimate; therefore, we invite you to share with others as much or as little of your responses as feels appropriate to you. Your answers will probably change and evolve as you explore them and live them more consciously and completely. Partners may find in the exploration of these questions a way of deepening their connections to one another as they explore deepening their connection with life. (If you are not already a journal writer, we hope you will begin keeping a journal as you contemplate these open-ended questions.)

(In providing commentaries for each of the following questions, I have sometimes given my own answer to the question, sometimes given a response from a Turn Toward Life participant, and sometimes discussed what the question might mean to you the reader. I have followed my intuition about this, to try to give the most meaningful commentary, but I recognize that my comments are uneven, in that they do not all come from a single point of view.)

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[20] See Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person.*

[21] Sam Keen's article on "Radical Questions For Critical Times" is available at www.coopcomm.org/cclibrary.htm

[22] I have written a chapter that explores learning to ask deeper and more fruitful questions. I invite you to read it at www.coopcomm.org/w7chal5.htm.

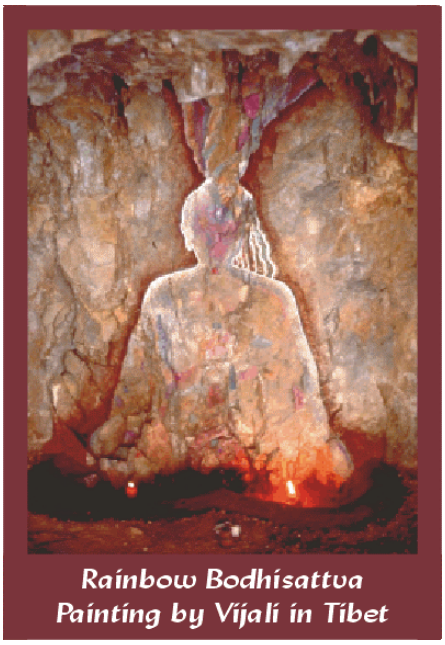
[23] This appears to be a fractal truth, one that applies equally to muscles, persons, organizations and societies. The link between challenge and development would also explain why a life of ease is very rarely a life of deep fulfillment.

1. How do I feel/experience/understand my life as part of, and/or connected to, the life of the world? (including, what animals or plants do I feel the deepest link with?)

Commentary from Molly Young Brown: Once I stood in a forest near my home, in the midst of a labyrinth I'd created there, and looked around me as the world looking at itself through my eyes-this particular set of eyes. World inside, world outside-no difference. And I knew that the trees were also the world experiencing itself through tree perspective. And it wasn't merely "the world." What experiences "itself", through my eyes and the trees, is Spirit, God, the Tao, Life, etc.

It's much easier for me to experience my interbeing with all life when I'm in the woods. I definitely feel my deepest link with trees-ponderosa pines, redwoods, red firs, especially. I have thought for a long time that bear is my totem animal, although I've never really known one "in person." Something about bears' fierce protection of their young, their essentially gentle nature that can turn to fierceness in a moment. And then: birds, in their beauty, their song, their quick movement from place to place, their fragility, their flight, their innate, uncomplicated intelligence and response to life.

Commentary from Dennis Rivers: For me, there are three overlapping experiences at the heart of the spiritual life: feeling alive, standing in love, and the feeling of being a part of something larger. Something that holds us, guides us, calls us forward. Because I come from a culture that views nature and spirit as mutually antagonistic, for a long time I thought that whatever larger something held my life must be either God or nature. On a particular day in 1973 God and nature combined in my mind into a kind of living Milky Way, source of All, always evolving, often painfully, toward ever-greater love and beauty.



Rainbow Bodhisattva
Painting by Vijali in Tibet

Since then, information about DNA has helped me to see through some of my illusions of separateness, has helped me to understand how related I am to every living thing I pass. I feel especially close to frogs, who serenade me to sleep many nights of the year, and who are fragile, as we are fragile. Frogs around the world are suffering a terrible die-off in their numbers, perhaps due to ultraviolet light damaging their eggs. In the larger scheme of things, it seems as though the frogs are dying in order to warn us about the consequences of our runaway industrialization of planet Earth, which is damaging the Earth's protective ozone layer.

2. What does reverence for life mean to me? How are these meanings evolving?

Commentary from Molly Young Brown: Reverence for life suggests a basic unconditional attitude toward life in all its manifestations, including my own life, an attitude of a deep respect, even awe or worship (without a hint of groveling). We experience reverence when we automatically become silent, or speak only in hushed tones, when entering a cathedral-whether in a forest or a human-created place of worship. I experience this when out in nature, and have a much more challenging time feeling reverence for the life in relationship to some humans (such as the neocons of the current U.S. Administration). I often have to consciously remind myself to regard them in this light. The Buddhist practices for developing "metta" (loving-kindness) and compassion help a lot.

Commentary from Dennis Rivers: I was once discussing with a friend how much the prayer of St. Francis means to me, especially the phrase, "where there is injury, may I sow forgiveness." My friend turned to me and said, "You know, Dennis, that applies inside of you as well as outside of you." I was startled, humbled, and inspired by this remark. It opened up a whole new world for me. My feelings about, and understandings of, reverence for life have undergone a similar kaleidoscopic transformation over the last twenty years. I now experience reverence for life as having, for me, at least five dimensions!

From my dreams and journal writing I have learned to appreciate *the life that lives within me,* in my own body-heart-mind. From my experience of friendship, marriage, and my work as a communication skills trainer, I have come to appreciate *the life that lives between us*, the world of personal relationships with people and plants and animals and oceans and mountain ranges. From my study of ecology I have come to appreciate *the life that lives around us*, the web of life that reaches beyond my personal horizons, but supports my personal life in infinite ways. From my participation in the antinuclear campaigns of the past twenty years I have come to appreciate *all the life of the future*, enfolded in the body of life today as fragile seeds of possibility. From my practice of meditation in prayer and my study of the lives of saints, both eco- and regular, I have come to appreciate *the source of all life*, hardly graspable by the human mind, and yet immediately present and available to us in the deeper reaches of our own aliveness, and speaking to us through the lives of all who have loved greatly. (See Chapter 12 of this volume for an exploration of these five dimensions of reverence for life.)

3. How am I called this day, this year, this decade, to serve the web of life?

> The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness
> and the world's deep hunger meet.
>
> Frederick Buechner

Commentary: To the quote above I would add the pain and outrage that are deeply one's own. There are many crises and many needs in the world, more than any one person could ever attend to. Your life of service depends on you not only looking out to see what people or children or whales or bears may need, but also

looking in to your own heart and following your own deepest love, talent *and wound*. In our understanding of calling, it helps to make room for seasons and cycles of change. You do not have to decide now what you are going to do for the rest of your life, you only need to feel what engages you, what fills you with energy now.

One of my main paths of service concerns nuclear weapons, power and waste. In the course of dealing with these issues, I volunteer to think and write very intensely about death, pain, injury, betrayal, ignorance and sorrow, as well as about love and hope.[24] Once you have worked on such issues for a while you come to realize, in the marrow of your bones, that human behavior in relation to both other humans and the natural world is often monumentally ugly, an ugliness that implicates us in a variety of ways. To me, part of reverence for life means not looking away. Another part of reverence for life is continually coming back to what is beautiful.

4. Who has inspired me to care more deeply about people and the web of life, and how have they inspired me? Whose love, integrity, work, creativity, energy and/or wisdom has opened up new possibilities for my life, and how will I remember/celebrate them? How will I carry forward their work?

Commentary: In exploring this question, we acknowledge the grace that comes to us through other people's lives. Our mentors, saints, and exemplars can show us new worlds of human possibility, can grant us permission to do things we would not otherwise feel empowered to do, and can give us the strength to endure what we otherwise would not be able to endure.[25] We are not alone in our search for a deeper life. And in the area of reverence for life, we inherit a tradition made rich by the labors of many lifetimes, made rich by the devotion of many great souls. We invite you to become a student of these great souls, and to open your self to the deep blessings radiating out of their life stories. Although these life stories are expressed in words, they hold meanings and energies that can never be fully captured by words.

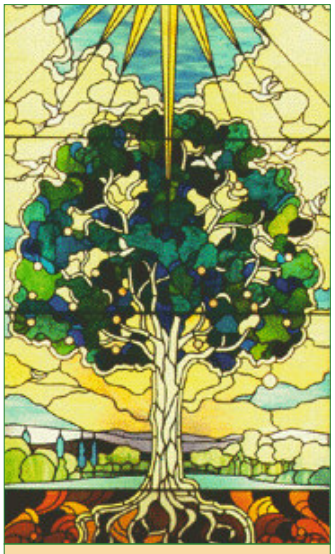
5. In the course of my lifetime, what virtues, visions or principles do I want to embody? *(Some may express this through naming a spirit-guide animal.)* Presently, which of these do I find most challenging, and how might I address this?

Commentary: Although we can be inspired by the many great lovers and defenders of the web of life, we cannot follow in their exact footsteps. We live in a different time and face unique challenges. What transfuses from one life to another are great principles, such as Gandhi's idea of being the change you want to see, great qualities of heart such as the Dalai Lama's practice of infinite forgiveness, and heroic integrity, such as that of Archbishop Romero of El Salvador. As you travel

[24] My most recent anti-nuclear project is "A Citizen's Renunciation of Nuclear Weapons," which you can find at www.nonukes.org.

[25] For an exploration of the role of exemplars in women's empowement, see *At the Root of This Longing* by Carol Lee Flinders

with this question over months and years, the qualities of heart you want to embody will become clearer to you.



Tree of Life
by Charles Williams

In my work as a communication skills trainer, I've spent years paying attention to how people talk to each other and listen to one another. I've come to have a sense of how we grow in and through our conversations. Thus I have been led to translate all the adjectives of virtue, such as honesty, kindness, awareness and so on, into adverbs: honestly, compassionately, awarely, beautifully and so on. The wonderful thing about these virtues-as-adverbs is that there are 10,000 opportunities a day to practice them. There are ten adverbs that open the widest range of new possibilities for me: awarely, gratefully, compassionately, beautifully, honestly, nurturingly, wisely, courageously, forgivingly, energizingly (filling with energy). My heroes, such as Jesus, St. Francis, and John Muir, each wove these ten adverbs together into their own unique pattern of living excellence. Their lives inspire, guide and give me permission to weave these ten together into my own unique pattern (as excellent as I can make it, given all the help I have received). It's a mystery where these qualities come from. They could be the qualities of God's very own heart, or they might be the emergent properties of a complexly evolving universe. They call to me from beyond the horizon of my understanding.[26]

6. How will I make and deepen the place in my life that can hold both joy and sorrow?

Commentary: Part of making peace with nature is to make peace with our own nature, which is that we are born to both suffer and rejoice, to both grieve and give thanks, to both cry and laugh. Our bodies have built into them elaborate processes of self repair, precisely because we are born into a world full of rough edges and we are destined to be scraped and cut. Our difficult lives become even more difficult when we decide that there should be only joy or only sorrow. Our attempts to be only happy leave us with a well of unexpressed grief. Our attempts to make life consistent by focusing only on pain leave us with hearts closed to love and dead to the many gifts that life bestows upon us. As Sam Keen points out in his book, *Apology for Wonder*, tribal peoples use the cycle of the seasons as a model for living that allows them to integrate both joy and sorrow into their experience of life. There is winter and deprivation, but that is not the final word. And there is springtime and delight, but that is not the final word, either. I am convinced that we cannot serve the web of life unless we're willing to feel her pain. I don't think we will be able to persevere unless we can let the grief wash through us. But serving the web of life also calls us to hold a vision of healing and wholeness and harmony,

[26] I have written an essay on this topic entitled, "What Kind of Person am I Becoming, What Kind of People are We Becoming Together?" The essay is on the web at www.coopcomm.org/becoming.htm

to give thanks, and to experience delight in the many forms of beauty.[27] One of the ways that Turn Toward Life seeks to serve its participants is by making an accepting place for all these feelings.[28]

I had a dream once in which my hands bore the wounds of Jesus. In the dream I took seeds with my right hand and pushed them deep into the wound in my left. A little tree grew our of the palm of my left hand and its branches were covered with white blossoms. I believe this is what life asks of us, that we make something beautiful with the energy of our woundedness. We can't undo the fact of having been wounded, but we can change the meaning of it, make an offering of it.

7. What is my path toward reconciliation, peacemaking and forgiveness? Where in my current life am I called and challenged to work in these areas, and how might I nurture the skills necessary to move more fully in these directions?

Commentary: The practices of forgiveness and peacemaking are central to many religious traditions for reasons that one could spend a lifetime exploring. The practices of forgiveness and peacemaking need to be a central part of serving the web of life, for an additional set of good reasons. To serve the web of life will bring us face-to-face, eventually, with the terrible crimes that have been committed against her, and the terrible crimes we have committed against one another and future generations. If we are not to be frozen with rage and anguish, we will need to enter deeply into the practice of forgiveness and starting anew. The prayer of St. Francis, written in honor of St. Francis in the century after his death, recommends that we sow forgiveness where there is injury. Anyone who has tried to do this knows that this is an extraordinarily difficult thing to do, whether we are seeking to bring forgiveness to an injury that exists between people, or seeking to bring forgiveness to an injury that exists within ourselves. These monumentally difficult tasks help us to give birth to our own souls. They demand that we mobilize resources inside of us that we did not know were there. They demand every last ounce of our capacity to feel, every last neuron of our capacity to think, every bit of attention and willpower that we possess, and they demand that we work together with a whole new level of cooperative love. The overlapping crises we face, of ecology, war, pollution and conflict, demand nothing less than all of the above.[29]

8. How will I express my sexuality in a way that weaves together my body, heart, mind and attention, and supports a similar emerging integrity in all those with whom I interact?

Commentary: An ecological view of sexuality. Because sexuality is so much a part of the web of life, a spiritual path of reverence for life needs to find a way of embracing sexuality. Sexuality is the energy to create, nurture and celebrate life,

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[27] Joanna Macy explores this polarity in her book, *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age.*

[28] The expansion of one's heart to hold both joy and sorrow is one of the deepest issues in human development, beginning in infancy. For an introduction to this topic see the early chapters of Sheldon Cashdan's *Object Relations Therapy.*

[29] For an approach to making peace in everyday life, see *The Seven Challenges Workbook*, by Dennis Rivers, available as an e-book free of charge at www.coopcomm.org/workbook/.

and to connect our life with the life of another person, at many levels. Many religious traditions have demonized sexuality out of fear of its power, or in order to manipulate people through guilt. And many commercial enterprises have idolized sexuality, in order to use its power and to manipulate people through desire. But neither of these approaches represents the sexuality of complete persons, persons in whom body, heart and mind each add depth and completeness to the others. Unfortunately, a society that promotes extreme competitiveness cuts the emotional ground out from underneath intimate connection, because as competitors we have to continually armor ourselves to not feel the pain of those whom we defeat. In my view, the flood of sexual imagery in our time represents the desperate attempt of people to imagine closeness, in a society that is pushing them farther and farther apart. In a sad sort of way, our culture seems to be asking our genitals to do the work that our hearts can no longer do. The numbness we adopt in order to not feel the pain of the world eventually sabotages our own need for intimate communion. From this perspective, Eros and Agape, passion and compassion, are not the antagonists we might have thought they were, but instead flourish or wither together, and secretly nurture one another.[30]

9. What practices or disciplines will I explore, adopt or continue to help me focus my attention, mobilize my inner resources, and express my deepest aliveness?

Commentary: Every culture has evolved patterns of self-discipline that allow a person to pay deeper attention to their own body-mind and to the world around them. Yoga, meditation, Tai Chi and Kung Fu are examples that come easily to mind. But such activities as weaving, pottery, art, music, dance and caring for babies can also be disciplines of consciousness, as well as various forms of repetitive prayer. Almost any activity can become a form of meditation, if it engages you deeply and is done again and again with loving concentration. This is related to reverence for life because your own neurons are as much a part of the web of life as a forest or a coral reef. We invite you, therefore, to think of meditative disciplines as reverence for life bestowed upon your own body-mind, to find a practice that fits your temperament, and to share the fruits of your practice with the world around you.

10. How do I currently understand the journey of my life, with whom do I share my life story, whose life stories do I receive, and how could I deepen all these?

Commentary: Whether you join with us in a community of sharing or simply use these questions to deepen your friendships and/or your inner life, we invite you to think more consciously about your life-journey of development. Part of reverence for life is reverence for your very own changing and unfolding life. And, as we try to make a sense out of our life journey that someone else could understand, we move forward in making a sense out of our life journey that we ourselves can understand. The path of reverence for life, in world full of chaos and conflict, will

[30] For an exploration of this theme, see Joanna Macy's book, *World as Lover, World as Self.*

confront us with many extraordinary challenges. Whether we are crushed by them or ennobled by them depends partly on our developing a kind of sacramental friendship, friendships in which our deepest callings are recognized, and in which we open ourselves to recognize (and express what we understand of) the deepest callings of others. In my own life I have been deeply influenced by a specific idea from the later work of Carl Rogers, about our need to express our life experience in symbols of some sort or other: words, songs, doodles, dances, carved sticks, stories. (Our ancestors began, eons ago, by making notches in reindeer antlers.) Although one might imagine that one has a life first, and then tells a story about it, we are complex, many-leveled beings, and it is actually in the telling of our life story to others that we realize *we have a life* about which a story can be told.

11. What kind of activities, gatherings and celebrations would support my life of service and nurture my feelings of reverence for life?

Commentary: The focus of the Turn Toward Life community is on loving, serving and celebrating the web of life, within us, between us and all around us. We try to find creative ways of keeping faith in the present with all those nurturers of life who have gone before us, and with all those generations of life, human, plant and animal, yet to come. We encourage each regional group of Turn Toward Life participants to work out a schedule of weekly or monthly support and sharing gatherings that will meet their needs. (I personally like potluck dinners. I think feeding one another could become a kind of Earth sacrament.) What I would hope for in a new kind of spiritual meeting is twofold. First, that each participant, at each of gatherings, will take some time to share their journey in relation to one or more of the questions explained above, and that the assembled participants will practice compassionate listening in receiving the sharings of each person.[31] And second, we hope that each gathering can include some way of recognizing and celebrating the heroes of care and compassion who have gone before us. As Bill Cane, among others, has pointed out, inspiration travels from life to life, like one candle flame lighting another.

I would like to encourage community participants (and everyone else I can persuade) to read and reflect on the now extensive literature of Earth-inclusive spirituality. (See reading list at end of this document.)

When I think of other possibilities that may evolve in this community, another one that comes to mind is providing support for conscientious objectors to military service, whose conscientious objections are based on reverence for life. Participants may also be interested in "A Citizen's Renunciation of Nuclear Weapons," a citizen's personal stand against the use of nuclear weapons in his or her name, or on his or her behalf. (see www.nonukes.org).

As mentioned in the earlier paragraphs of this document, I would like to encourage all Turn Toward Life participants to keep a journal. Writing in a journal, and returning weeks or years later to think about what you have written, can be an important part of reclaiming your life from many external influences, an attending to the ecology of your own development. In a culture that idolizes owning things,

[31] for a book-long meditation on compassionate listening, see Kay Lindahl's *The Sacred Art of Listening*.

we are supposed to know that we are okay because we are surrounded by our possessions, somewhat as Egyptian mummies were surrounded by their jewels to help them feel better about being dead. These outer signs of success are taken to bear witness to our inner completeness. Except that we know this is a painful illusion, an illusion that leads people to try to live through their automobiles and furniture rather than living through their own hearts. (We could learn much from the Native American traditions in which a person's greatness is measured by how much they can give away rather than by how much they can hang on to.) To keep a journal is to seize control of the story of your own life from the advertising agencies and television producers who hope to turn you into an obedient, robotically reliable but never fully satisfied customer. To keep a journal is to develop your own sense of time, which can then allow you to appreciate more deeply nature's cycles of time, including your very own life-time, another meaning of that infinitely-meaning-ed phrase, reverence for life. Sharing your journal can become an important part of sharing your life in community. One implication of TV and home video is that the lives, thoughts, feelings and performances of a small group of people in Los Angeles and New York are much more worthy of your attention than your own life, thoughts, feelings, spouse, children and/or friends. But, however humble our lives may be, it is only through the cultivation of our own lives, families and friendships that we can hope to find happiness and fulfillment. Keeping a journal can be a systematic way of bringing your attention back to your own life. The questions explored in this paper, and in the Sam Keen essay mentioned above, will give you material for a lifetime of journaling.

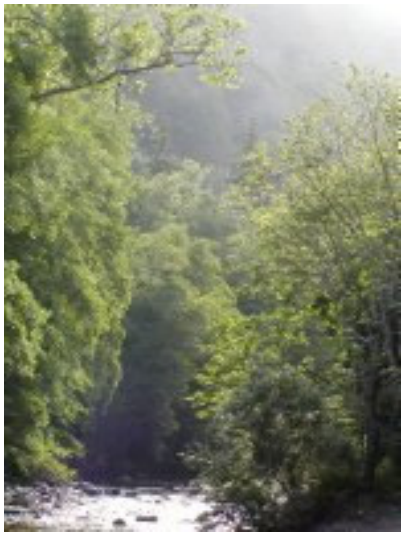
12. What are the unique challenges and questions of my life? What calls me forward to a deeper aliveness?

Commentary: As life itself is an open-ended, exploratory process, a list of important questions about one's life ought to be similarly open-ended and exploratory. Thus, we encourage you to spend some time thinking about the unique challenges of your life. You have unique wounds, the healing of which will help to heal the world around you. You have unique talents, the unfolding of which will help with the unfolding of the world around you. Your uniqueness is part of life's endless searching forward. As you honor your uniqueness, you give a quiet encouragement to everyone around you to honor theirs. Life is actually one unique moment after another, and part of the reason for having questions rather than answers is to allow us to receive each unique moment more completely, to find and bring forth the gift or lesson that each moment offers.

11. INTENTIONS, COMMITMENTS, AND VOWS AS *COMPASSIONATE RESISTANCE*

We invite you to share in the evolution of all the activities outlined above, and to invent new ways of celebrating life: *the life within you, the life between you and others, and that Larger Life of which our lives are expressions.*

For many people, stating intentions and commitments is an important step toward disentangling themselves from the dominant paths of our culture. The way of consuming more continually entices us with the dream of fulfillment through buying things. The way of violence continually assures us that if we just own enough guns, we will be safe. (Never mind if the North and South Poles melt and the aging nuclear plants start to leak.) The way of domination continually reassures us that intimidating all peoples on Planet Earth with armed might will keep us secure, in spite of the fact that we are teaching the world how to intimidate us by our very own behavior. These are some of the deep, sorrow-producing illusions of our time, and they are so woven into the fabric of everyday life in many countries (especially the US, the country I live in) that it is difficult to avoid them. Thoughtfully and prayerfully defining and expressing the kind of person you want to become and the kind of world you want to build is a very personal way of compassionately resisting these dominant illusions, and of following your own heart.



The circle of friends working on the evolution of this eco-spiritual community envisions that people will become participants by expressing their intentions/ commitments/vows toward reverence for life in some sort of shared way. Since our goal is to encourage people in loving and serving the web of life and one another, we propose a form of membership-by-participation which is pluralistic, that is, affirms that people can and do belong to more than one community. The following pages present examples of intentions and commitments in the service of Life, drawn from many sources, including one written specifically for Turn Toward Life by Dennis Rivers, with comments and suggestions from Maía, Gene Knudsen Hoffman and Paloma Pavel.

The exact content of a person's commitments, and how often and in what way a person would recite and celebrate them is very much a matter of deep individual feeling and intuition. Because these kinds of commitments are prayer-like and point to intimate feelings about ultimate reality, our deepest hopes, dreams and meanings, and the Web of Life and our relationships in it, it is probably not a good idea to try to have one prescribed set for everyone. Ultimately, each person needs to define their own deepest commitments. What Turn Toward Life offers is a set of starting points that represent centuries of thought, love and prayer. You are invited into the creative labor of defining and expressing *the truths that you will help to make come true* through your own love and work. You are welcome to adopt and/or adapt, and express, any of the intentions/commitments/vows presented on the following pages, as your way of participating more deeply in the Turn Toward Life web of friendships. All the examples presented are like rivers converging on their way to the same ocean; each one will point you toward living more awarely and compassionately, especially when accompanied by studying the lives of great lovers of Life. You are also welcome to use this wide range of materials as a starting place for the development of your own unique set of intentions.

Honoring the variety and alternations that are at the heart of life would suggest that we encourage one another to take the themes presented in the commitments and re-express them in our own new words, images, dance movements, weavings, poems, music, masks, and/or seeds planted in a garden. Our gift to one another is not that we all say these things in exactly the same way, but instead that we take these themes seriously enough to each find our own heartfelt way of expressing them, living them and sharing them.

In asking people to do this deep creative work, the question arises as to what would keep a person from merely gliding along the surface. What guarantees that people will actually do the work of making real commitments? There are volumes that could be written about this, but the two answers that mean the most to me are as follows: First, spiritual development comes from within, and from engagement with life. No method, creed or vow offered by one person to another can guarantee the spiritual unfolding of the recipient. (The history of religion up to this very moment is full of examples of people who have ignored or betrayed their most solemn vows.) Secondly, I am deeply convinced that words and ideas about the spiritual life have meaning only in relation to actual lived lives, not in relation to other words in the dictionary or the encyclopedia of religion. If you want to understand courage, study the lives of Ken Saro-Wiwa and Martin Luther King, Jr.. If you want to understand integrity, study the lives of Rachel Carson and Wangari Maathai (see Chap. 4). If you want to understand awe in relation to the natural world, study the lives and works of John Muir and Thomas Berry. Human lives embody these qualities, words only point to them. Therefore I believe that the closest we can get to ensuring that people will really become engaged with the themes of reverence for life is to encourage people to study the lives of the many wonderful eco-saints down through the centuries, to make friends with them.

In the path of infinite kindness, the entire world is our beloved infant.

One emerging way of living out the understanding that our spiritual community is a network of sustaining friendships, is the practice of expressing our intentions/commitments/vows to one another, one person at a time. This is a more nature-oriented model, taking vows the way the days lengthen in springtime, the way the buds come out. And there is no need for it to happen just once. Along with my own daily recitation and meditation, I look forward to renewing my intentions with these same supportive friends every spring.

A note on "no-no's" in community vows: I am personally committed to using positive language in my spiritual life, and as a teacher of communication skills I encourage others to translate every goal and intention into positive language. But I also recognize that there is much to be learned from those who express vows as "thou-shalt-not's," and some of these vows are included for your consideration the in pages that follow.

12. A CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE OF INTERFAITH, ECO-SPIRITUAL INTENTIONS / COMMITMENTS / VOWS

by Dennis Rivers, Maía, (Ms.) Gene Knudsen Hoffman, and Paloma Pavel (revised November, 2004).

1. REVERENCE FOR LIFE

I open my heart
to consider, to delight in, to nurture and to celebrate
the beauty, integrity and well-being
of all life-forms and natural systems:
people of all ages, kinds and races,
animals and plants, lands and seas,
which co-exist with me now and which will come after me
into the far future. These I take
to be my kin, expressions of the same Heart of Being,
the same Living Universe, of which my life is an expression.

2. SERVICE

Holding reverence for life to be one of my deepest values,
I commit myself to serving the Web of Life,
to hearing the pain of both people
and our sister and brother life forms in distress,
to finding the path of service that is right for me,
and to inviting and joining, encouraging and accompanying,
others to do the same.

3. QUESTIONING AS A PATH OF TRANSFORMATION

Mindful of the way that answers can become meaningless
without the questions that evoked them,
and that even great truths can become lifeless dogmas,
I embrace the practice of creative, open-ended, questioning
of self, of others and of institutions as a way of deepening my engagement
with the ongoing quest for a wiser and more compassionate world.
Following in the spirit of Gandhi's teaching
"to be the change you want to see,"
I vow to translate every "Thou Shalt…"
into "How will I…?" and "How will we…?"

4. SAINTS AND EXEMPLARS

I open my heart to receive the grace
of all those who have walked before me
on the paths of compassion, caring, creativity and courage.
I open my life to receive the empowering gift
of their lives and their love for all.

12. A CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE OF INTERFAITH, ECO-SPIRITUAL INTENTIONS / COMMITMENTS / VOWS *(continued)*

5. COMMUNITY

I commit myself to befriend
others who love, serve and celebrate the Web of Life,
and to work with others to build
cooperative communities of mutual support,
that honor and encourage such love, service and celebration.

6. GRATEFULNESS AND PRESENCE

Learning of the countless ways
that people, the Earth, and the Universe support my life,
I vow to expand the circle of my gratefulness
by becoming more fully present to each moment
of the life that is given to me,
and by surrounding with mercy and lovingkindness
all that is wounded and incomplete in myself, in others and in the world
that we might journey together into a deeper completeness.

7. FORGIVENESS

Learning from the way that nature starts anew each year
I open my heart to the new possibilities hidden in each moment
and I vow to deepen my practice of forgiveness,
to make amends for my mistakes,
and to ask others to forgive me when I have injured them.

8. UNIQUENESS AND VARIETY

Understanding that nature thrives in variety,
I open my heart to celebrate and to earn from difference
as well as to delight in agreement,
and I affirm the rightness of each person
to find their own path of service,
and their own unique vocabulary and community
with which to express their love for and concern about the Web of Life.

9. CHANGE

Understanding that nature is a continuous flow of change,
I open myself to acknowledge all that is changing in my life and world,
and to the periodic reevaluation, renewal and restatement
of all my commitments: to organizations in which I participate,
to points of view, citizenships, affiliations, ownerships, etc.
I will affirm and bless all those
who leave my familiar circle to follow their own path.

12. A CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLE OF INTERFAITH, ECO-SPIRITUAL INTENTIONS / COMMITMENTS / VOWS *(concluded)*

10. PEACE, NON-VIOLENCE & CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Understanding that human conflicts in a technologized world
have ever more drastic consequences for both people and the Web of Life,
I commit myself to work for the peaceful resolution of conflicts
between persons, between nations and between humans and other species.
Following the saints of all religions, and my own deepest inner guidance,
I renounce the intention to injure others,
and as part of that process, I commit myself to facing, and working through,
my own anger, fear, greed, ignorance, self-deception,
unfulfilled needs, lack of skill, and lack of creative engagement,
such as they may be, and also the same, of my culture and my country.

11. JOY, SORROW, PASSION AND COMPASSION

Learning from the cycle of the seasons
that holds both the harshness of winter and the pleasure of springtime
I open my heart to embrace more fully all the joys and sorrows
of my life, of all people, and of all Life.

12. EXPLORATORY SPIRAL OF ENDLESS BEGINNINGS

Understanding the limited capacity of words to hold spiritual meanings,
and understanding the temptation to try to complete with words
what can only be completed in living,
I affirm these Commitments as a way of mobilizing my inner resources
to continue my path of exploration, action, embodiment, and dialogue,
of compassion, reflection, and celebration.
Not as completing, resolving or even fully describing
any of the themes they name.
I open my heart and mind to affirm and learn from
all that is reverential toward life in every tradition and culture,
and to evolve new affirmations and practices
as my reverence for life deepens.

Rose Heart Ofelia Pagani

13. OTHER WAYS OF EXPRESSING CONNECTEDNESS WITH ALL LIFE

Rug based on design motif from early 20th-century Guatemala
Courtesy Santa Fe Interiors [permission pending]

Weaving and woven-ness are natural metaphors for deep connectedness.

Contemporary Huichol Yarn Painting by Juan Gilberto Carrillo Hernandez
[permission pending]
All-inclusive themes are common in both Native American and Tibetan art.

14. AN ADAPTATION OF TRADITIONAL BUDDHIST VOWS BY STEPHANIE KAZA

With [friendly amendments] by Maía, Facilitator for the Vipassana Support Institute and Isla Vista ecology activist, and Dennis Rivers, a scholar of interpersonal communication.

Vows

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to kill.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to take what is not given.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to engage in abusive relationships.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to speak falsely or deceptively.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow to not harm self or others through
poisonous [ideas or] substances.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to dwell on past errors [or triumphs].

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to speak of self [as though] separate from others.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to possess any thing or form of life selfishly

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow not to harbor [or enact] ill will toward any
plant, animal or human being [nor to deliberately
waste or hoard any element or substance].

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,
We vow to not abuse the great truth of The Three Treasures[32]
[by becoming dogmatic or self-righteous about our Buddhist faith,
or abusive of the trust that others place in us].

[32] "While Buddhism can be studied in many different ways, the heart of Buddhist teaching is realized by taking refuge in the Three Treasures - Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Buddha is the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. Dharma is the teaching of Buddhism. Sangha is the community of practitioners." *(This explanation of The Three Treasures is from the web site of the Albuquerque Zen Center)*

15. THE FOURTEEN PRECEPTS OF THICH NHAT HANH'S ORDER OF INTERBEING

1. Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. All systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth.

2. Do not think the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to receive others' viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout your entire life and to observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times.

3. Do not force others, including children, by any means whatsoever, to adopt your views, whether by authority, threat, money, propaganda, or even education. However, through compassionate dialogue, help others renounce fanaticism and narrowness.

4. Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering, including personal contact, images, and sound. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.

5. Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry. Do not take as the aim of your life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need.

6. Do not maintain anger or hatred. Learn to penetrate and transform them when they are still seeds in your consciousness. As soon as they arise, turn your attention to your breath in order to see and understand the nature of your anger and hatred and the nature of the persons who have caused your anger and hatred.

7. Do not lose yourself in dispersion and in your surroundings. Practice mindful breathing to come back to what is happening in the present moment. Be in touch with what is wondrous, refreshing, and healing both inside and around you. Plant seeds of joy, peace, and understanding in yourself in order to facilitate the work of transformation in the depths of your consciousness.

8. Do not utter words that can create discord and cause the community to break. Make every effort to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

9. Do not say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people. Do not utter words that cause division and hatred. Do not spread news that you do not know to be certain. Do not criticize or condemn things of which you are not sure. Always speak truthfully and constructively. Have the courage to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten your own safety.

10. Do not use the Buddhist community for personal gain or profit, or transform your community into a political party. A religious community, however, should take a clear stand against oppression and injustice and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflict.

11. Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. Do not invest in companies that deprive others of their chance to live. Select a vocation that helps realize your ideal of compassion.

12. Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war.

13. Possess nothing that should belong to others. Respect the property of others, but prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

14. Do not mistreat your body. Learn to handle it with respect. Preserve vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of the Way. Be fully aware of the responsibility of bringing new lives into the world. Meditate on the world into which you are bringing new beings.

16. THE TEN COMMITMENTS OF THE JEWISH RENEWAL MOVEMENT

A contemporary reading of the Ten Commandments, recommended for daily affirmation by participants in the Jewish Renewal Movement.
(from the Tikkun web site).

Commentary from the Jewish Renewal Community:

Many of us find the notion of "commandments" oppressive and hierarchical. Yet we know that a community cannot be built on the principle of only doing what feels right at the moment--it requires a sense of responsibility to each other. So, we encourage our community to take on the following ten commitments, based roughly on a rereading of the Torah's ten commandments (and incorporating the framework and many specific ideas articulated by Rami Shapiro in his book Minyan). Start each day with ten minutes of meditation on these ten principles, followed by the Shema. It will bring a new level of joy in your life.

Ten Commitments

1. YHVH, the Power of Transformation and Healing, is the Ultimate Reality of the Universe and the Source of Transcendent Unity

Aware of the suffering caused by not acknowledging the ultimate Unity of All Being, I vow to recognize every human being as a manifestation of the Divine and to spend more time each day in awe and wonder at the grandeur of Creation.

Aware of the suffering that is caused when we unconsciously pass on to others the pain, cruelty, depression and despair that has been inflicted upon us, I vow to become conscious and then act upon all the possibilities for healing and transforming my own life and being involved in healing and transforming the larger world.

2. Idolatry

Aware of the suffering caused by taking existing social realities, economic security, ideologies, religious beliefs, national commitments, or the gratification of our current desires as the highest value, I vow to recognize only God as the ultimate, and to look at the universe and each part of my life as an evolving part of a larger Totality whose ultimate worth is measured by how close it brings us to God and to love of each other. To stay in touch with this reality, I vow to meditate each day for at least ten minutes and to contemplate the totality of the universe and my humble place in it.

3. Do not take God in Vain

Aware of the suffering caused by religious or spiritual fanaticism, I vow to be respectful of all religious traditions which preach love and respect for the Other, and to recognize that there are many possible paths to God. I vow to acknowledge that we as Jews are not better than others and our path is only one of the many ways that people have heard God's voice. I vow to remain aware of the distortions in our own traditions, and the ways that I myself necessarily bring my own limitations to every encounter with the Divine. So I will practice spiritual humility. Yet I will enthusiastically advocate for what I find compelling in the Jewish tradition and encourage others to explore that which has moved me.

16. THE TEN COMMITMENTS OF THE JEWISH RENEWAL MOVEMENT (continued)

4. Observe the Sabbath
Aware of the suffering produced by excessive focus on "making it" and obtaining material satisfactions, I vow to regularly observe Shabbat as a day in which I focus on celebrating the world rather than trying to control it or maximize my own advantage within it. I will build Shabbat with the Beyt Tikkun community and enjoy loving connection with others. I will use some Shabbat time to renew my commitment to social justice and healing. I will also set aside significant amounts of time for inner spiritual development, personal renewal, reflection, and pleasure.

5. Honor your mother and father
Aware of the suffering caused by aging, disease, and death, I vow to provide care and support for my parents.

Aware that every parent has faults and has inflicted pain on their children, I vow to forgive my parents and to allow myself to see them as human beings with the same kinds of limitations as every other human being on the planet. And I vow to remember the moments of kindness and nurturance, and to let them play a larger role in my memory as I develop a sense of compassion for them and for myself.

6. Do not murder
Aware of the suffering caused by wars, environmental irresponsibility, and eruptions of violence, I vow to recognize the sanctity of life and not to passively participate in social practices that are destructive of the lives of others. I will resist the perpetrators of violence and oppression of others, the poisoners of our environment, and those who demean others or encourage acts of violence. Aware that much violence is the irrational and often self-destructive response to the absence of love and caring, I vow to show more loving and caring energy to everyone around me, to take the time to know others more deeply, and to struggle for a world which provides everyone with recognition and spiritual nourishment.

7. Do not engage in sexual exploitation
Aware of the suffering caused when people break their commitments of sexual loyalty to each other, and the suffering caused by using other people for our own sexual purposes, I vow to keep my commitments and to be fully honest and open in my sexual dealings with others, avoiding deceit or manipulation to obtain my own ends. I will rejoice in my body and the bodies of others, will treat them as embodiments of Divine energy, and will seek to enhance my own pleasure and the pleasure of others around me, joyfully celebrating sex as an opportunity for encounter with the holy. I will do all I can to prevent sexual abuse in adults and children, the spreading of sexually transmitted diseases, and the misuse of sexuality to further domination or control of others. I will respect the diversity of non-exploitive sexual expression and lifestyles and will not seek to impose sexual orthodoxies on others.

16. THE TEN COMMITMENTS OF THE JEWISH RENEWAL MOVEMENT (continued)

8. Do not steal

Aware of the suffering caused by an unjust distribution of the world's resources, exploitation, and theft, I vow to practice generosity, to share what I have, and to not keep anything that should belong to others while working for a wise use of the goods and services that are available. I will not horde what I have, and especially will not horde love. I will support a fairer redistribution of the wealth of the planet so that everyone has adequate material well-being, recognizing that contemporary global inequalities in wealth are often the resultant of colonialism, genocide, slavery, theft and the imposition of monetary and trade policies by the powerful on the powerless. In the meantime, I will do my best to support the homeless and others who are in need.

Aware that others sometimes contribute much energy to keeping this community functioning, I will give time and energy to the tasks of building the Beyt Tikkun community, and, when possible, will donate generously of my financial resources and my talents and time.

9. Do not lie

Aware of the suffering caused by wrongful speech, I vow to cultivate a practice of holy speech in which my words are directed to increasing the love and caring in the world. I vow to avoid words that are misleading or manipulative, and avoid spreading stories that I do not know to be true, or which might cause unnecessary divisiveness or harm, and instead will use my speech to increase harmony, social justice, kindness, hopefulness, trust and solidarity. I will be generous in praise and support for others. To heighten my awareness of this commitment, I will dedicate one day a week to full and total holiness of words, refraining from any speech that day which does not hallow God's name or bring joy to others.

10. Do not covet

Aware of the suffering caused by excessive consumption of the world's resources, I vow to rejoice in what I have and to live a life of ethical consumption governed by a recognition that the world's resources are already strained and by a desire to promote ecological sustainability and material modesty. I vow to see the success of others as an inspiration rather than as detracting from my own sufficiency and to cultivate in myself and others the sense that I have enough and that I am enough and that there is enough for everyone.

Meditate on the following mantra:

Shema Yisra'el, YHVH (adonai) Eloheynu, YHVH (adonai) Echad.
Hear, you who struggle to connect to God:
The Power of Healing and Transformation is the ultimate reality and shaper of the universe, the Transformative Power unifies all being as One spiritually-alive, mutually inter-dependent, awesome and fantastic totality.

17. PARTICIPATING IN THE ***Turn Toward Life*** COMMUNITY-WITHOUT-WALLS

Organizers of nature-based spiritual paths, it seems to me, have a special responsibility to include everyone and yet constrain no one. We all already *belong* to the Web of life, every person, leaf, snail and atom, so the language of *belonging* is not particularly helpful in expressing what were up to. An alternative approach, one that feels more appropriate to me, is to emphasize *conscious participation* rather than membership. If we speak of participating more fully and more consciously in life's unfolding, if we speak of nurturing life more creatively and protecting life more carefully, these ways of understanding our community life would allow the Turn Toward Life community to have a very strong sense of center without needing to have a boundary that separates us from other people. Another central aspect of a community-without-walls is the understanding of a community as a network of *sustaining friendships*. This understanding can help us focus on how we reach out to one another to encourage one another to deepen the various dimensions of our reverence for life.

Suggestions. So, here are a wide variety of open-ended suggestions concerning how you could get more involved in reverence for life as a spiritual path, and, if you are so inclined, participate in the Turn Toward Life community-without-walls. There is no specific moment that defines joining Turn Toward Life. Instead we invite people to embody and celebrate reverence for life every day. Since our goal is to inspire and encourage. rather than to require, we see each individual as free to chooses how much or how little they will participate in each activity. You are welcome to expand this list of suggestions with your own favorite, life-nurturing activities.

1. **Morning circle of prayer and meditation.** Every morning when you wake up, you are invited to join a morning communion of all hearts, a circle of meditation and prayer on the gift of life. Participants in this activity have agreed with one another to begin each day by giving thanks for the mysterious gift of life that we receive from a living well of life beyond ourselves and by opening ourselves this day to serve all people and all life as our beloved kin. Please use whatever words, forms and silences that express your deepest sense of gratitude and connectedness. If your spiritual practice and/or religious tradition already includes morning prayers/meditations of gratitude and self-offering, we hope that you will do these practices each day knowing that we join our hearts and minds with yours.

The specific time does not matter. Whenever you wake up is fine.) Emerson wrote that for those whose hearts keep pace with the Sun, day is forever dawning. As more people come to participate in this activity, we hope to encircle the world in a perpetual prayer of gratitude.

Morning Circle

In order to find the strength to face
more courageously, what is broken in our world
and in need of mending,
we seek to become more deeply rooted
in the inner goodness and beauty of life.

As a way of participating in this activity more fully, we recommend that each person read and contemplate the themes developed in *Gratefulness, The Heart of Prayer* by Brother David Steindl-Rast, and *A Grateful Heart*, edited by Mary Jane Ryan, or similar books. This practice is intended to be both very personal and also communal. We who are now involved in the Morning

Circle invite you to make it more personal by building a little altar of gratitude where you live, perhaps containing leaves or shells or other gifts from life, pictures of animals with whom you feel a strong connection, and pictures of the people life has entrusted into your immediate care, a pictures of adults and children from the far corners of the globe, with whom our ecological fate is now completely joined. You are welcome to spread this practice by individual invitation to friends and family members. On your altar please feel free to include photographs of those with whom you have personally agreed to join in morning prayers and meditations of gratitude.

2. **Find (or extend) the activities that allow you to live out more fully your reverence for life**, by actively moving in the direction of treating all people and all life as your kin. Many paths serve the Tree of Life: protecting forests, oceans, wetlands, deserts and the creatures who live in them. supporting disarmament and peace on Earth, global sharing, compassion for the poor, the amelioration of social, economic, racial and gender inequalities, the renewal of life in cities, space for wildlife, parks and gardens, conservation and recycling in your community, and many others. As Joanna Macy explains in her various books and lectures, safeguarding the mountains of poisonous nuclear waste that humans have already created will require that we develop an extraordinary new sense of loving responsibility for the Earth and Her creatures that will guide and inspire people for hundreds of thousands of years! And this same imperative to love more deeply reaches us from many crises. Therefore, from the many ways that you can express your caring for the Earth, choose one or two toward which you feel strongly drawn, and let these one or two issues be your contribution to the Tree of Life and to the Turning Toward Life Community. No one person can work on all issues, but as a community we can work on many issues, and each person's activity on one issue can be a gift to all the others in the circle.

3. **Begin (or continue) studying the classics of Earth-inclusive spirituality**, such as Thomas Berry's *The Dream of the Earth*. or Tom Hayden's *The Lost Gospel of the Earth*. We hope you will read *Turning Toward Life*, a book of readings assembled specifically for this community, because it explores many of the central themes of eco-spirituality at greater length than can be done is this letter. (It is free on the web at www.turntowardlife.org.) I have included at the end of this letter our preliminary reading list of the classics of Earth-embracing spirituality.

4. **Develop and/or extend one or more friendships dedicated to exploring reverence for life as a spiritual path**, to serving the Web of Life, to exploring your evolving activities, commitments and the Community's creative questions, and to mutual support in the unfolding of your awareness, understanding, compassion, creativity, courage, honesty, gratitude, sense of beauty and forgiveness (Life's unfolding in human beings). One way you can nurture this friendship is to accept one another as partners in the morning circle of prayers and meditations on gratitude, and discuss your journeys toward gratitude.

5. **Start a study group or weekly potluck** dedicated to exploring the community's Shared Possible Questions, as mentioned above and explained in *Turning Toward Life* (and as extended by your own concerns). Discuss and explore with others the evolution ***and living out*** of your commitments toward the Web of Life. Make yourself available to others as a spiritual companion in such explorations. Include gratitude and celebration in your gatherings.

6. Working with the themes and concerns expressed in the various commitments presented in *Turning Toward Life*, **explore, develop and/or adopt a set of commitments** that express your path toward a deeper reverence for life. You are welcome to adopt the Turn Toward Life commitments as developed by the community's founding circle of participants. And you are also strongly welcomed to use the materials presented here as starting places for your own

journey of study, reflection, meditation and spiritual self-definition that will lead you toward your own unique commitments.

7. **Find at least one person (or group) who is serving life in a way you admire**, and find a way to recognize, encourage and support that person (or group) in their work.

8. **Choose one or more Earth Saints or Luminaries of any culture or religion** to whom you feel attracted, and learn as much about those persons, their lives and their work as you can. Find creative ways to let their lives be a blessing upon your life. Share with others what you learn and how you are changed by the study and contemplation of those lives.

9. **Find gentle ways of publicly acknowledging your reverence for life** and your loyalty to life, that feel appropriate and satisfying to you. Some people may feel called to acknowledge their reverence for life in dramatic ways, for example by adopting monastic dress of some sort, or by wearing black arm bands of mourning for people killed in wars and species of animals driven extinct. For others it could be as simple as wearing a bracelet of green beads that represents the connectedness of all living creatures. What is crucial is that you find a way of expressing your commitments toward life that is deeply your own.

10. **Make a serious review of your diet** and consider eating less meat, or giving up eating animal products altogether, for the good of Planet Earth, for the good of poor people everywhere who need the grain that is now fed to animals, and for the good of your own body, and for the good of your won heart as you expand the circle of your caring.

11. Explore ways, **in purchasing the necessities of life**, to support individuals, farms and businesses that are working to **sustain Mother Earth**. For example, buy organic fruits and vegetables at your local farmers market.

Membership as ongoing sharing. As you deepen and extend your practice of reverence for life, we hope you will share your experiences with the larger Turn Toward Life community by visiting and participating in the www.turntowardlife.org and www.earthlight.org web sites.

18. A INTERFAITH, MULTIPLE-PERSPECTIVE READING LIST ON REVERENCE FOR LIFE AND EARTH-INCLUSIVE SPIRITUALITY

Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*

Jane Goodall, *Reason for Hope*

Frances Moore Lappe & Anna Lappe, *Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet*

Pierre Tielhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe: A Mass on the Altar of the World*

Brooke Medicine Eagle, "Sacred Ecology and Native American Spirituality" Article on web at: www.medicine-eagle.com/6_4.html

Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self*

Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing*

Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought*

Fritjof Capra and David Steindl-Rast, *Belonging to the Universe*

Arthur Waskow, ed., *Torah of the Earth : Exploring 4,000 Years of Ecology in Jewish Thought* (Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 2000)

Marjorie Hope and James Young, "Islam and Ecology" Article on web at www.crosscurrents.org/islamecology.htm

Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, eds., *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water*

Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations* and *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*

Julia Butterfly Hill, *The Legacy of Luna: The Story of a Tree, a Woman and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods*

Chris Hoffman, *The Hoop and the Tree: A Compass for Finding a Deeper Relationship with All Life*

David Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*

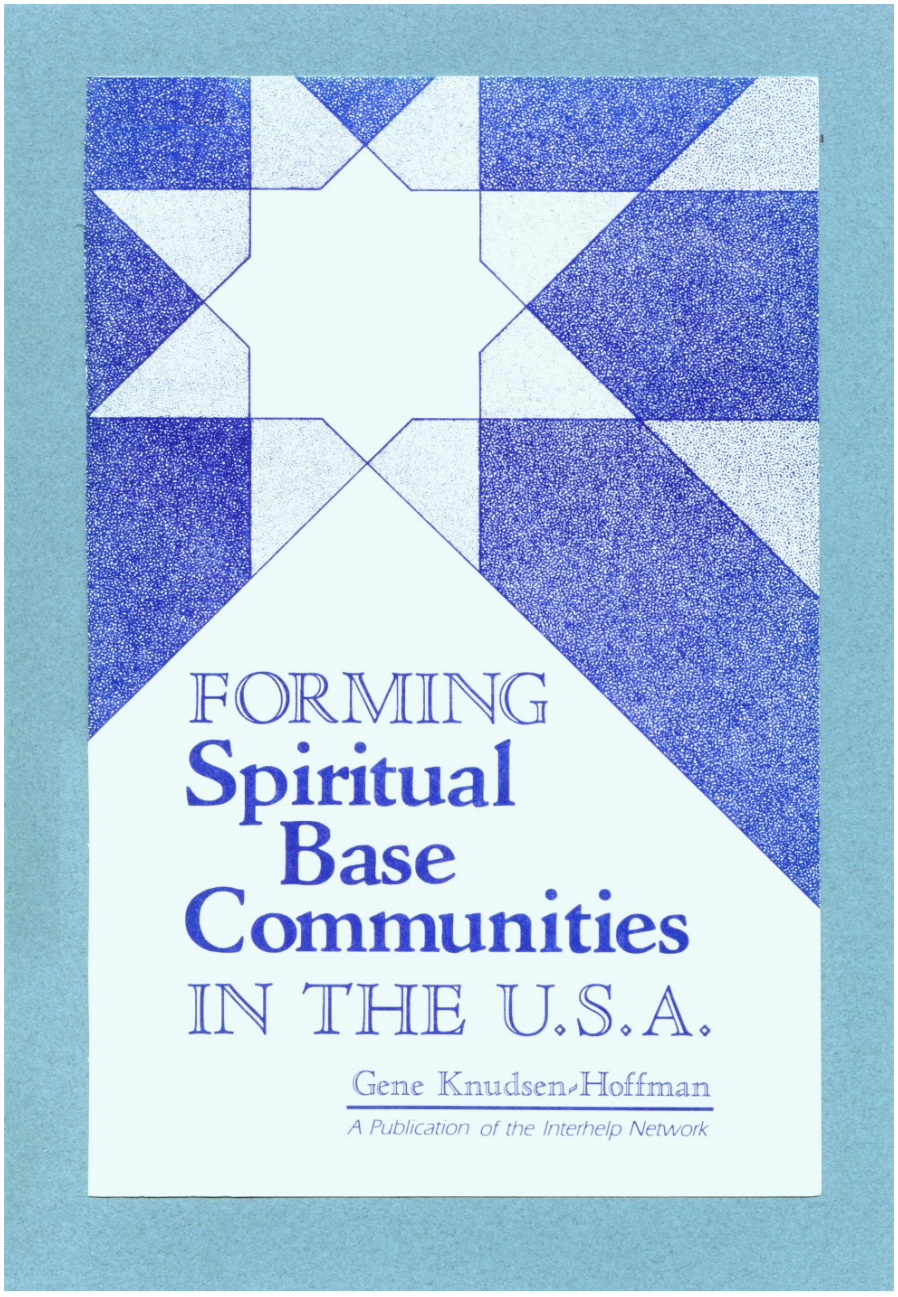
Machaelle Small Wright, *Behaving As If The God In All Life Mattered*

Jay Byrd McDaniel and John B. Cobb Jr., *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life*

Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*

Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Phillip Berryman, Translator),

Harvard University web site on religion and ecology: http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/ecology/index.htm



Included as Chapter 2 of *Turning Toward Life*

Preface -- 1988

If we are truly committed to the work of peacemaking, eventually we come up against a hard truth—our goal is not immediately at hand. Part of this awakening comes when we see that working for peace is not separate from working for justice, or human rights, or protection of the earth. The deeper we delve into peacemaking, the greater is our task.

To be peacemakers, then, we must be "in for the long haul." We must learn how to sustain ourselves, so that our work can be fruitful over an extended period of time—even a lifetime. One of the essential ingredients for such longevity is the support of other people.

We need a place where we can get emotional and spiritual support for the personal struggles which arise in our peace and justice work. We need mutual consultants, who help to create compelling visions and bring them into concrete form. We need allies with whom we have formed passionate bonds.

New social forms have recently emerged for this purpose. Sometimes they are called "support groups," or "affinity groups." They can exist over many years, or they maybe formed just for a specific project or action. They may meet only once a month, or even less frequently, or they may meet every week. Depending on the situation, they may even meet every day, or live together for a time.

In the liberation movements of Latin America, a particular type of ongoing support group has sprung up, known as "base community" (or in Spanish, *communidad del base).* In these base communities there is a very strong focus on spiritual resources as a powerful foundation for extended commitment to political action. In the Latin American context, such communities have a Christian orientation, since this is the background of the people, and of their culture. This is true also in the Philippines, where base communities played an important role in the nonviolent revolution which ousted the dictator, Ferdinand Marcos.

Gene Knudsen-Hoffman, a longtime peaceworker and member of the Interhelp network, believes that base communities could also be a significant contribution to building peace communities in the United States. This booklet suggests one possible way to begin building a Spiritual Base community in your city or town.

What follows, then, is a suggested structure. Please take what you like, use it well, and leave the rest. Perhaps you will even create something different, something all your own. The important thing is that you find ways to strengthen the bonds which connect you to others, and to the deeper mystery and spirit of life. This booklet offers a valuable resource toward that goal.

Building community is the essence of peacemaking in our time. It means going beyond the culture of individualism and atomization. It means recovering the human connections we have lost with the rise of the nuclear family, social mobility and transiency, and the shopping mall/automobile society.

As we create and nurture community in small groups, right where we live and work, we will not only make our efforts for change more effective, but we will also start bringing into being the world for which we so dearly long.

Kevin McVeigh
National Coordinator
Interhelp

Why Spiritual Base Communities?

Some of us feel that our temporal resources are not enough to cope with the needs of today. We experience burnout, blocks to our creativity, and despair, if we rely solely on temporal resources.

Some of us believe we have found an energy, a healing force, in the universe and in ourselves, to which we can repair. It is referred to by many names: life-force, God, energy, the light, the holy spirit, an informing presence. Some of us find that we can open ourselves to this power, if we choose, and when we do, new visions, new answers, and new solutions come to us. We, in turn, are energized and encouraged by others who share this view and affirm our new perceptions. We find that we need this exchange and support from one another to keep our sanity.

In Latin America and in the Philippines, people have gathered together in Christian base communities for these very purposes. These communities have been fountains of hope, inspiration and energy; creative ground for new experiments in transformation; and the hub and the wheel of nonviolent revolution.

Many of us yearn for such connectedness here in the U.S.A., where we, too, are faced with the need for profound transformation of ourselves and our society. Therefore, this outline for possible processes, in harmony with our variety of faiths, or with no traditional faith, is offered here.

A Way To Begin

If we are seekers for such a community, one way to find others is to express our need to people to whom we feel drawn, to learn whether they share this need. The next step is to take the initiative to gather together those interested and test the possibility of creating such a community. This could be with anywhere from six to twelve people; it is recommended they be no more than twelve. The next step is to come to know one another. One way to get this knowledge is through sharing parts of our histories and hopes.

Below are suggested outlines for seven "Getting to know one another" sessions. (They are simply that, suggested outlines. Other questions may be more appropriate for your group. However, the process is *highly recommended.)* The process is sometimes called "Creative Listening," though it goes by other names as well. In it, each person speaks as she/he feels moved to. There can be a time limit for each speaker. No one speaks twice until everyone has been heard. There is no cross-talk; nobody asks any speaker questions during the session or comments on what has been said. Each person speaks *to the question.* The rest listen with full attention.

The convenor (this role rotates in the group) should answer the first question to set a tone for other answers. In addition, a time-keeper may be needed.

I. Spiritual Histories

1. What was your religious background, if any? What sort of religious or spiritual activities, if any, took place in your home when you were a child? What meaning did they have for you?

2. Can you describe a personal emotional or spiritual experience which represented a turning point in your life?

3. How do you meet your religious/spiritual needs today?

4. What are your present resources in time of trouble?

5. Can you describe a time you had a mystical experience or felt "God" in your life?

Dialogue Time: The group may now seek to determine if they want to commit themselves to a spiritual practice (including kind, frequency, place).

II. Nonviolence

1. What is your definition of nonviolence?

2. Can you describe a nonviolent act (from your life or another's) which appealed to you?

3. Can you give an example of someone caring for an adversary, even while being treated violently by her/him?

4. Can you describe a way *you* have invited the good and allowed it to unfold from a person who has, or might, harm you?

5. Describe a way you might express concern for the oppressor as you work for justice with (choose one) the Soviets, the people in Nicaragua, the people in the Pentagon war-room, or other.

6. Put yourself in a situation where violence is coming at you. How might you feel and respond? What would help you to remain nonviolent?

Dialogue Time: The group could share insights about nonviolence and how the group might use it.

III. Educational History

1. Describe your educational experience in or out of schools.
2. What were you educated to do? How do you feel about that?
3. What kind of further education would you like to have?

Dialogue Time: If you were to teach something to the group, what would it be?

IV. Political History

1. What kinds of political action have you participated in?
2. What do you feel was the most effective?
3. What do you feel was the least effective?
4. What kind of political action do you feel is suited to today?

Dialogue Time: Discuss possible political action for the group.

V. Work History

1. How did you earn your first dollar?
2. Describe kinds of work you have done?
3. What work do you feel most qualified for?
4. What are your secret wishes regarding work?
5. What particular skills and interests do you have?

Dialogue Time: Share perceptions of work you might do together, or for one another.

VI. Psychological History

1. Have there been periods of psychological disturbance in your life? Can you briefly describe them/it?

2. What did you do about them/it?

3. What kind of care, if any, do you feel most comfortable with (therapies, support groups, one-on-one counseling, other)?

4. Do you know of problem areas in your life? Can you describe them/it?

5. Do you have any guideline for dealing with your problem(s)?

Dialogue Time: Brainstorm on ways the group members could support one another psychologically.

Consider topics for possible ongoing meetings, to continue learning about yourself and one another. Take a topic at each meeting and describe how you cope with it. As in the 12-step programs (AA, Al-Anon, etc.), the most helpful thing you can do is share your "experience, strength and hope."

Possible topics:

Loneliness	Distance	Fear
Jealousy	Anger	Resentment
Intimacy	Grief	Judgment

VII. Home Life History

1. Describe the home of your childhood: where **it** was, what **it** looked like, what **it** felt like, who lived there.

2. What habits were encouraged there (such as neatness, cleanliness, discussing one another, promptness, refraining from criticism, other)?

3. How do you feel about such early training? How have you changed?

4. What is important for you in your home now?

Dialogue Time: How can you integrate such varied backgrounds into your community? How can you meet its varied needs?

VIII. Fun History

1. What's fun for you?

2. What brings you pleasure?

3. What do you like to share?

Dialogue Time: Describe ways you need to have fun, relaxation, and recreation, and learn what you might be able to expect from the group.

At the end of the coming-to-know-one-another session, those who want to experiment in community can move on to deciding how often to meet; what needs can be served; how to inspire one another; and what creative action you might want to take.

Recommendations from the Past

In 1947, the Quaker writer and teacher Douglas Steere wrote a little pamphlet called "Cells for Peace." He had suggestions for small groupings of concerned people, which seem to fit in here. They are worth repeating:

1. The groups should be made up of those committed to active nonviolence. Not all will be at the same level, but some commitment is necessary.

2. If possible, the groups should consist of a broad age range and, of course, should include both men and women.

3. Once-a-week meetings are highly recommended. Soon after the group is organized, a weekend retreat with all members is important. Thereafter, such a retreat could take place twice a year. Of course, the question comes up: Where is time to be found in our busy lives? If we really believe that peace must become our "way of life," there is no doubt that we can revise our priorities and make the time.

4. The groups offer a fine opportunity for reading and discussion of the best materials written on peace and nonviolence, but it shouldn't confine itself narrowly to peace literature or it will suffer malnutrition.

5. Since we're talking about Spiritual Base Communities, it is logical that there be some form of spiritual practice. This might take the form of silent meditation, sharing passages from books that have been meaningful, or whatever the group finds meets its unique needs. Helpful also is some daily spiritual observance for each member.

6. If the group does manual work together, they won't lose touch with the elemental

roots of life. Some possibilities might be: creating a community vegetable garden, taking first-aid training or improving the neighborhood.

7. On the agenda should be the group's decision to engage in active nonviolence within its own community, as needs arise. It can be a vigilant guardian of the rights of the underprivileged and oppressed. Hopefully, it will be at its reconciling work before things turn desperate. And, of course, all action taken by the group is based on unity or consensus.

Hope and Hazard

DIFFERENCES CONFLICT CAREFRONTING

RESOLUTION RECONCILIATION

After working in the peace movement for over thirty-five years, I believe the chief obstacle to creating such a community is conflict which never becomes resolved.

There appears to be a deep fear of exposing differences, and admitting to conflict. The admission of differences and conflict shakes our comfortable assumptions. How often do we stay with the hurtful familiar instead of daring the unfamiliar which feels more threatening? A common response to feeling hurt, rejected or ignored is continuing in an uncomfortable denial, doggedly proceeding without resolution, stuffing feelings, seeking to make things right by being "nice." Or again, we might pursue confrontation and truth without being aware of the other's response or condition. Allaying anxiety by quick forgiveness, and denying the unresolved issues, is far from unusual.

I have come to wonder if this behavior relates to terrorists. It seems people become terrorists when they feel they will never he heard; their grievances will never he addressed. Desire to punish and harm when grievances are denied, when we do not receive respectful attention is a natural response. Often we peace people are so disturbed by our anger that we refuse to acknowledge it in ourselves and instead try to appease. It doesn't work.

While our first responsibility is to patiently seek to change ourselves, and to deepen our understanding of our experience, processes for prevention are essential. Methods for listening, coming to resolution, and seeking reconciliation are desperately needed. What might these be?

Methods for Reconciliation

When we have those first intimations of differences, discontent, dissension, or resentment, we must honor them. We must not discard them as mean, petty, or shameful. These are messages telling us something is awry, and we must look at it.
If we cannot resolve the difficulty alone, and if it keeps troubling us, then it is time to share it with a trusted other, to try to clarify our perceptions. This means we want to look at an unpleasant, possibly unwelcome perception; we do not want to act on it. (Everyone in a group has the potential for becoming such an "other," a non-judgmental person.)

After the difficulty is thus seasoned, and if we feel it is necessary to carry it to the person or persons with whom we have it, this should be done with "carefronting," respecting both the giver and the receiver. Usually it is helpful to have a third person present when an unwelcome truth is communicated, enabling the conflicting parties to listen deeply to one another.

If the conflict cannot be resolved by these means, the next step can be to have the mediator meet separately with the conflicting parties, interpreting each to the other. Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen master and peacemaker, offers us this prescription:

> "Reconciliation is to understand both sides, to go to one side and describe the suffering being endured by the other side, and then to the other side, and describe the suffering being endured by the first side."

Ultimately, it is to be hoped, the two parties can acknowledge their contributions to the conflict, resolve their differences, and emerge more loving and bonded than before. If this does not happen, then they probably must separate and work individually to forgive and understand the other and themselves.

Conflict resolution, reconciliation, may be the most important focus of our fledgling communities, and the most difficult one. But we, who would be part of this remarkable enterprise — peace — are essentially risk-takers and know that if we share openly with one another and recognize that change and flexibility are our strengths, not our weaknesses, we will move on to new and more compassionate ways of being.

To trust and be trusted, to learn and deepen, to be weak and be renewed, to err and be corrected — this is the stuff of bonding and love. To feel connected, encouraged, of value, with meaning — these are the gifts we can give one another. This is a way to keep our sanity, our hope, and our vision, a way to keep aware of life and beauty in a world which seems to deny it. It may be, perhaps, a way to make peace.

About the Author (1988)

GENE KNUDSEN-HOFFMAN, from Santa Barbara, California, has been involved in Interhelp for many years. She founded the Santa Barbara Peace and Resource Center, and has also worked with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, where she created the US-USSR Reconciliation Program.

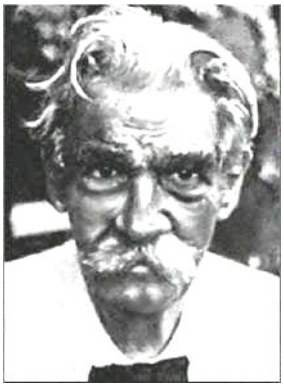
Her earlier years were devoted to theater, and raising seven children. In addition to this, she earned a Masters degree in Pastoral Counseling. Today Gene continues to be an active Quaker, writer, teacher and counselor.

About Interhelp (1988)

INTERHELP is a global network of people who strive to integrate political, emotional and spiritual dimensions in our work for a peaceful and just world. Our programs and projects provide people with an opportunity to share their deepest responses to the dangers which threaten our planet—be they dangers of nuclear holocaust, environmental degeneration, or human oppression.

We aim to enable people to know the power that comes from their interconnectedness with all life and to move beyond powerlessness and numbness, into action. In addition to workshops, trainings, community gatherings, and other programs, Interhelp also provides support and resources for those wishing to organize and facilitate such programs, and for others whose projects share an affinity with our goals and purposes.

INTERHELP P.O. Box 8895 Madison, WI 53708



Chapter 3: Albert Schweitzer's Affirmations of Reverence for Life

Marvin Meyer

Marvin Meyer presented this paper at the international conference on "Albert Schweitzer at the Turn of the Millennium," held on the campus of Chapman University on February 19-21, 1999. The paper was given as a scholarly meditation in the context of an all-faiths service, which also included an ecumenical liturgy, organ music of Bach played by Schweitzer, and African Music and Dance performed by the Dembrebrah West African Drum and Dance Company of Long Beach, California.

One of the vivid images, among others, that comes to mind when I think of Albert Schweitzer affirming Reverence for Life is the image of Schweitzer with his ants. This image has been made memorable by the dentist, artist, and author Frederick Franck, who lived and worked with Schweitzer for a time in the late 1950s, and described his experiences in his book *Days with Albert Schweitzer: A Lambarene Landscape*. Among the charming drawings in the book is one with the caption "Dr. Schweitzer entertains his ants." Frederick was kind enough to present me with an artist's proof of the drawing, and I have mounted it appropriately in my study among other drawings and prints. The drawing shows Schweitzer at 86, bushy of hair, mustache, and eyebrows, hunched over his writing table, with pages of a manuscript tacked to a wall, sheets of paper on the table, and ants crawling over the sheets. Frederick describes Schweitzer encountering his ants: "For some years he has been watching this particular family of ants, a few hundred or a few thousand quite benign and harmless ones, which live in a nest somewhere under the floor boards of his room. After every

meal he puts a little piece of fish under the kerosene lamp on his table; immediately the ants crawl up the table leg, walk in a neat line across the top piled with papers, and start to tackle the fish offering from all sides. It requires five or six of the tiny insects to transport a huge fragment of two cubic millimeters of fish across the table, down the leg to their residence. Dr. Schweitzer and I watched with delight how first the softer pieces of fish were chosen in preference to older, harder ones."

Schweitzer considered Reverence for Life to be the elemental and universal ethical concept.

Schweitzer affirming Reverence for Life: Certainly Reverence for Life comes to expression in Schweitzer's treatment of his ants, as well as his mosquitoes, his chickens, and his pelican Parsifal, but it should not be trivialized as being reducible to only that. Schweitzer considered Reverence for Life to be the elemental and universal ethical concept; he considered Reverence for Life to be the foundation for all sound moral thought and action; he considered Reverence for Life to be a necessity, a necessary conclusion, of clear thinking and reflection. When Schweitzer affirmed Reverence for Life, he affirmed the solidarity of all living things and the moral obligation of people who live in the midst of living things.

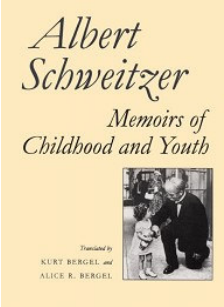
Certainly Schweitzer was neither the only person nor the first person to advocate love and solidarity among humans and all living things. But when he affirmed Reverence for Life, he did so in his own inimitable way, with the variety of formulations and affirmations typical of the man who did so many different things so well.

It is my pleasure in this meditation to examine several ways – four or five ways – in which Albert Schweitzer articulated his understanding of Reverence for Life.

Schweitzer affirmed Reverence for Life autobiographically.

First, Schweitzer affirmed Reverence for Life autobiographically. In his *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth* Schweitzer traced his sensitivity to the pain and suffering in the world back to his childhood, and he recounted stories, now familiar to us, of his concern for living things from the days of his early childhood. I quote from the translation by Kurt and Alice Bergel: "Already before I started school it seemed quite incomprehensible to me that my evening prayers were supposed to be limited to human beings. Therefore, when my mother had prayed with me and kissed me goodnight, I secretly added another prayer which I had made up myself for all living beings. It went like this: 'Dear God, protect and bless all beings that breathe, keep all evil from them, and let them sleep in peace.' " Again: "I had an experience during my

seventh or eighth year which made a deep impression on me. Heinrich Bräsch and I had made ourselves rubber band slingshots with which we could shoot small pebbles. One spring Sunday during Lent he said to me, 'Come on, let's go to the Rebberg and shoot birds.' I hated this idea, but I did not contradict him for fear he might laugh at me. We approached a leafless tree in which birds, apparently unafraid of us, were singing sweetly in the morning air. Crouching like an Indian hunter, my friend put a pebble in his slingshot and took aim. Obeying his look of command, I did the same with terrible pangs of conscience and vowing to myself to miss. At that very moment the church bells began to ring out into the sunshine, mingling their chimes with the song of the birds. It was the warning bell, half an hour before the main bell ringing. For me, it was a voice from Heaven. I put the slingshot aside, shooed the birds away so that they were safe from my friend, and ran home. Ever since then, when the bells of Passiontide ring out into the sunshine and the naked trees, I remember, deeply moved and grateful, how that day they rang into my heart the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill.' " Schweitzer told other stories about an old horse being dragged to the slaughterhouse in Colmar, about his own dog Phylax and his neighbor's dog Löscher, about the revolting experience of impaling worms and hooking fish, and about the treatment extended to Mausche the Jewish dealer when he passed through Günsbach.

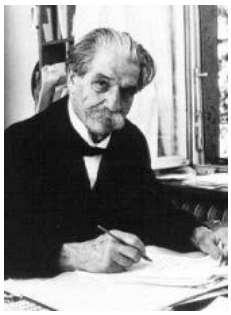


Schweitzer observed that the commandment not to kill and torture impacted him in a powerful way in his childhood and youth.

When reflecting on his childhood, Schweitzer observed that the commandment not to kill and torture impacted him in a powerful way in his childhood and youth, and such may well be the case. It may well be that Schweitzer was predisposed from childhood and influenced by childhood experiences to feel a kinship with other living beings, a feeling that may anticipate his later affirmations of Reverence for Life. Yet Schweitzer's reflections published in his *Memoirs of Childhood and Youth* are based upon his sessions, in 1922, with the psychologist and pastor Oscar Pfister in Zürich, when Schweitzer was depressed and in need of counsel. His reflections in his *Memoirs* allowed him the subsequent opportunity to present his own interpretation of the experiences of his childhood and youth, and while James Bentley's charges of "emotional duplicity" seem to me to put the matter too strongly, I suggest that Schweitzer may in fact project his values as an ethical thinker in his mid-forties back upon the experiences of his childhood. In his *Memoirs* we may learn as much about the values of the adult Schweitzer as we do about young Albert in and around Günsbach.

Schweitzer affirmed Reverence for Life exegetically.

Second, Schweitzer affirmed Reverence for Life exegetically. Albert Schweitzer grew up as a PK, a preacher's kid, and from an early age he was exposed to the interpretation of the Bible in an open, liberal, Lutheran context. He was given a copy of the New Testament, he says, at age eight, and he apparently entered the world of critical biblical scholarship already in his youth. If wise men from the East visited baby Jesus and offered him valuable gifts, young Albert asked, why was the holy family so poor? If shepherds saw the holy child in the manger, he wondered, why did none of them become followers of Jesus? And, not to leave out critical questions pertaining to the Hebrew scriptures, how could a rainstorm lasting forty days and forty nights produce a cataclysmic flood according to Genesis, he questioned, when a similarly heavy rain in Günsbach produced nothing of the kind? (His father's answer: In the old days it came down in bucketsful, not in drops as it does today.)



Later, as a young man involved in military service for Germany, Schweitzer spent some of his leisure time opening his Greek New Testament and reading a text that was to play a powerful role in his exegesis of the Bible and his interpretation of the person of Jesus: Matthew 10. (Today I might prefer to refer to this as the Matthean version and revision of the mission speech in the synoptic sayings source Q.) In Matthew 10, Jesus sends out the twelve followers to announce that heaven's kingdom is near, and he reassures them that, although they will be opposed, they will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the child of humankind – conventionally called the son of man – comes. The child of humankind who is coming, Schweitzer recognized, is the apocalyptic figure announced in the book of Daniel and elsewhere, who will return to usher in God's kingdom at the end of time.

Schweitzer proposed that Jesus was convinced – mistakenly, tragically – that the end was at hand.

Schweitzer's radical proposal, following Johannes Weiss, was eventually published in *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* and *The Quest of the Historical Jesus.* The latter work in particular was a masterful piece; James Robinson observes that the reader must be "amazed at the undistracted persistence with which Schweitzer worked out a brilliant thesis as he worked his way through enormous masses of literature." Schweitzer proposed that Jesus was convinced – mistakenly, tragically – that the end was at hand, and that he was to be the instrument by whom the final kingdom would be brought in. Through Jesus' efforts, and through his death, God's kingdom would come. Of this Jesus was convinced, but he was wrong,

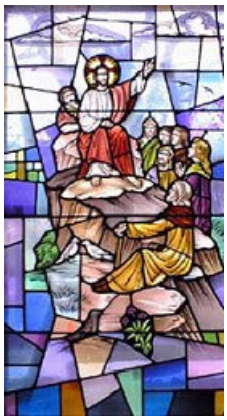
heroically wrong, dead wrong. Schweitzer depicted Jesus' grand and misguided efforts in this manner: "There is silence all around. The Baptist appears and cries, 'Repent, for heaven's kingdom is at hand.' Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that he is the coming son of man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and he throws himself upon it. Then it does turn, and crushes him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, he has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great man, who was strong enough to think of himself as the spiritual ruler of humankind and to bend history to his purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is his victory and his reign."

Jesus, according to Schweitzer, is a stranger to our modern world. "He comes to us," Schweitzer writes in his conclusion to his *Quest*, "as one unknown, without a name." Schweitzer scoffed at the many scholars who engaged in a quest for the historical Jesus and ended up creating a modern Jesus in their own image, after their own likeness, reflecting their own values of their own world. Thus with regard to Ernest Renan's *Life of Jesus*, Schweitzer charges, "It is Christian art in the worst sense of the term – the art of the wax image. The gentle Jesus, the beautiful Mary, the fair Galileans who formed the retinue of the 'amiable carpenter,' might have been taken over in a body from the shop-window of an ecclesiastical art emporium in the Place St. Sulpice."

Schweitzer's reconstruction of the life and death of Jesus is not above reproach, however. In the face of a great deal of the scholarship of his day, and scholarship to the present day, Schweitzer stressed the primary place and importance of the Gospel of Matthew. He chose his own scholarly path, passing by his brilliant teacher Heinrich Holtzmann, who championed the hypothesis of the primacy of Mark among the synoptic gospels. I believe in this respect Holtzmann was probably right and Schweitzer was probably wrong. Yet Schweitzer also needed Matthew, he needed Matthew 10, he needed the apocalyptic historical Jesus of Matthew 10 in order for his strange, foreign Jesus to emerge as the eschatological child of humankind. Though scholars in his day and ours have seen Matthew 10 as the creation of the later Christian church imposing its apocalyptic vision upon its portrait of Jesus, Schweitzer disagreed. He thought the apocalyptic Jesus to be the historical Jesus. Schweitzer's apocalyptic Jesus has remained one of the truly compelling images of Jesus

throughout the twentieth century, but it is no wonder that many of us now gravitate to a different paradigm of Jesus, a non-apocalyptic paradigm of Jesus as a teacher of wisdom.

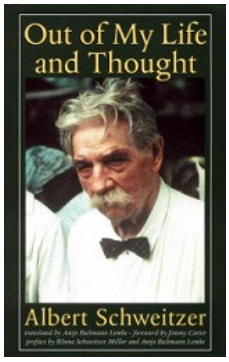
Schweitzer was touched by Jesus' ethic of love, and he was moved by the Sermon on the Mount.



It was not that Schweitzer was willing to bypass the wisdom of Jesus. Schweitzer was touched by Jesus' ethic of love, and he was moved by the Sermon on the Mount as much as Tolstoy, Bonhoeffer, Gandhi, and others. For Schweitzer, the sayings of Jesus communicated the message of love that was to remind him, increasingly, of Reverence for Life. Already in 1905, in a sermon he preached at St. Nicholai's Church on Sunday, November 19, he exclaimed, "What kind of a living person is Jesus? Don't search for formulas to describe him, even if they be hallowed by centuries. I almost got angry the other day when a religious person said to me that only someone who believes in the resurrection of the body and in the glorified body of the risen Christ can believe in the living Jesus . . . Let me explain it in my way. The glorified body of Jesus is to be found in his sayings." If for Schweitzer those sayings are the sayings of an apocalyptic preacher announcing the end of the world, they remain the purer and stronger because of that. They are the charged ethical sayings about the life of love in the interim, in the brief time before the end. They are the sayings about how to love when everything is at stake, when there is no room for weakness and vacillation. In his *Quest* Schweitzer describes our encounter with Jesus and his sayings as an encounter with "Jesus as spiritually risen within people," and Schweitzer himself becomes a proponent of "Jesus mysticism."

Jesus actually only used the language of apocalyptic to communicate his primary message, his ethical message of love.

Later Schweitzer emphasized these sayings of Jesus even more emphatically, when he suggested that Jesus actually only used the language of apocalyptic to communicate his primary message, his ethical message of love. In his 1950 preface to *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* he wrote, "It was Jesus who began to spiritualize the idea of God's kingdom and the messiah. He introduced into the late-Jewish conception of the kingdom his strong ethical emphasis on love, making this, and the consistent practice of it, the indispensable condition of entrance. By so doing he charged the late-Jewish idea of God's kingdom with ethical forces, which transformed it into the spiritual and ethical reality with which we are familiar. Since the faith clung firmly to the ethical note, so dominant in the teaching of Jesus, it was able to reconcile and identify the two, neglecting those utterances in which Jesus voices the older eschatology."



For Schweitzer, then, Jesus becomes preeminently the proclaimer of love, and for Schweitzer Jesus becomes – like Schweitzer himself – the proclaimer of Reverence for Life. In the epilogue to *Out of My Life and Thought* Schweitzer puts it quite succinctly: Reverence for Life is the ethic of Jesus, "the ethic of love widened into universality." Suddenly Jesus, who was said to come to us as one unknown, does not seem so much a stranger to our times after all. He seems to be, as Henry Clark put it, the first liberal Christian, who under the guise of old-world apocalyptic preached a modern, humanitarian message of love and compassion. It is somewhat ironic, but perhaps also indicative of Schweitzer's own humanity, that the person who called scholars to a self-critical stance in the face of their modernizing portraits of Jesus, himself concluded that he and Jesus articulated the same basic ethical message for today.

Third, Schweitzer affirmed Reverence for Life religiously, I mean in his study of world religions. Schweitzer was a student of world religions, but he was no disinterested student. Rather, he betrayed the nearly desperate spirit of a scholar who – one of my colleagues noted – was writing his books on world religions "as a drowning man looking for something – anything – to grab onto." He frantically searched – that same colleague said he ransacked – the religions of the world to find an appropriate ethic that would allow for an active affirmation of life. The result of his academic and personal search was C*hristianity and the Religions of the World, Indian Thought and Its Development*, and the still unpublished *Chinese Thought and Its Development*. Schweitzer examined and evaluated, in addition to Christianity, ancient Mediterranean religions and Asian religions. I find it unfortunate that he did not pay any particular attention to the African religions around him, just as he did not learn an African language or study African music. Among the world religions that he did study, he appreciated features of many of them, particularly ancient Stoicism, Chinese religions, and aspects of Indian religions.

Schweitzer was especially fascinated with the ethical piety of Lao-tse and Meng-tse, among others from China. In *Indian Thought and Its Development* Schweitzer cites several Chinese maxims and stories that are indicative of the ethical stance of active compassion that he found so attractive in Chinese sources. "Have a pitiful heart for all creatures." "One must bring no sorrow even upon worms and plants and trees." "One does evil who shoots birds, hunts animals, digs up the larvae of insects, frightens nesting birds," and so on. "Do not

allow your children to amuse themselves by playing with flies or butterflies or little birds. It is not merely that such proceedings may result in damage to living creatures: They awaken in young hearts the inclination to cruelty and murder." Such statements of ethical wisdom are reminiscent of Schweitzer's own statements, stories, and actions having to do with birds, worms, and insects – recall Schweitzer's ants. (Could Schweitzer have carried these Chinese maxims into his own writing and his own life?) Compare also the following story about the wife of a Chinese soldier. She was, it is said, ill and near death: "As a remedy she was ordered to eat the brains of a hundred sparrows. When she saw the birds in a cage, she sighed and said, 'Shall it come to pass that to cure me a hundred living creatures shall be slain? I will rather die than allow that suffering shall come to them.' She opened the cage and let them fly. Shortly after, she recovered from her illness."

An Indian ethical principle that seems to have made a significant impression upon Schweitzer was that of ahimsa, literally nonviolence or non-injury

Schweitzer at times returned to a conviction that Christianity, and particularly the gospel of Jesus, may represent the best articulation of a living spirituality and of Reverence for Life. He once wrote, "Christianity alone is ethical mysticism," whereas the union with the divine found in Eastern religions represents a less active form of personal spirituality. Schweitzer was not appreciative of the renunciation of the world, of life, and of action that he considered characteristic of Indian religions. Nonetheless, I am convinced, with Ara Barsam, that Schweitzer was deeply influenced by religious expressions from China and India. An Indian ethical principle that seems to have made a significant impression upon Schweitzer was that of *ahimsa*, literally nonviolence or non-injury, as preached and practiced among Jains and others. Jainism was established in the sixth century BCE by a reformer of Hinduism named Mahavira.

Mahavira

The Jains believe that the universe is alive with suffering souls and agonizing lives: A person is hurt, an insect is crushed, a tree is cut, a stone is kicked – in our infinite cycle of births and

deaths and rebirths–*samsara*–our souls have known indescribable pains. Since our human lives are bound together with the existence of all other beings in the world, Mahavira affirmed, "One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water, and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them." To live rightly and well in this sort of world requires that we repudiate all the violence and the killing that can increase the stain of *karma* (the causality that shapes our destiny and determines the character of birth and rebirth). Thus, the Jain Sutras proclaim, "All things breathing, all things existing, all things living, all beings whatever, should not be slain or treated with violence, or insulted, or tortured, or driven away." A deep commitment to a life of *ahimsa* may be seen in the everyday practices of observant Jains. Jains ordinarily observe a strict vegetarian diet, and even the vegetables–that are, after all, living things to be killed or eaten–are evaluated for their karmic weight. Jains advocate that kindness and consideration be shown to animals and support programs for the prevention of cruelty to animals. Some Jains even wear masks to prevent the inadvertent slaughter of tiny insects that otherwise might be killed as people breathe in and out; some sweep the surface of the ground ahead of them lest they trample living things. Such radically nonviolent practices, extreme as they sometimes are, illustrate a lifestyle that is mindful of the precariousness of life all around and the need to exercise care and gentleness in the presence of other living things. Jains compare this restrained and gentle life to that of "the bee that sucks honey in the blossoms of a tree without hurting the blossom and strengthens itself."

In his evaluation of *ahimsa*, Schweitzer admitted that the proclamation of *ahimsa* is of great importance in the development of ethical thought. "The laying down of the commandment not to kill and not to damage is one of the greatest events in the spiritual history of humankind," Schweitzer announced in *Indian Thought*. "Starting from its principle, founded on world and life denial, of abstention from action, ancient Indian thought – and this in a period when in other respects ethics has not progressed very far – reaches the tremendous discovery that ethics knows no bounds! So far as we know, this is for the first time clearly expressed by Jainism." Schweitzer goes on to praise Buddha (with qualifications) for making this ethic of nonviolence an ethic of compassion, and he lauds Gandhi for transforming *ahimsa* into a principle of active compassion and affirmation of life – an ethic comparable, as Gandhi also recognized, to the ethic of Jesus as enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount.

Schweitzer's affirmation of Reverence for Life compares well, in several respects, with the ethic of *ahimsa* of Jains and others. If *ahimsa* is an all-encompassing ethical principle that fundamentally shapes the nonviolent lives and commitments of Jains and others, so does Reverence for Life for Schweitzer. If *ahimsa* embraces the value of all life – humans, animals, and plants – and proclaims solidarity among humans and all living things, so does Reverence for Life for Schweitzer. Schweitzer goes so far, in his *Philosophy of Civilization*, as to see, with Schopenhauer, a will to live not only in humans, animals, and plants, but even in crystals. And if *ahimsa* implies something of a gloomy, pessimistic assessment of life in the world – we cannot, finally, avoid the taking of life – so does Reverence for Life for Schweitzer. Mike Martin notes the guilt-mongering of Schweitzer; James Brabazon reminds us that we might equally well speak of debt rather than guilt. Schweitzer himself says that since we cannot avoid destroying and injuring life, we necessarily incur guilt or indebtedness. "The good conscience," he wrote, "is an invention of the devil."

"The idea of Reverence for Life came to me as an unexpected discovery… And when the idea and the words had come to me, it was of Buddha I thought..."

It is not entirely surprising, after all, to remember what Schweitzer told Charles Joy about the origin of the idea of Reverence for Life: "The idea of Reverence for Life came to me as an unexpected discovery, like an illumination coming upon me in the midst of intense thought while I was completely conscious. And when the idea and the words had come to me, it was of Buddha I thought . . ."

Schweitzer affirmed Reverence for Life philosophically.

Fourth, Schweitzer affirmed Reverence for Life philosophically. In his correspondence with his soon-to-be wife Helene, Schweitzer acknowledged that he was essentially a philosopher, though a philosopher who was caught by Jesus. ("Basically I am philosopher – but I let myself be caught by him, the greatest, the most divine of all philosophers, in whom

the most sublime thought leads back to the most simple. Because of this obedience he will forgive my heresies . . .") In his correspondence with Oskar Kraus, Schweitzer explained that in his philosophical writings he employed exclusively the language of philosophy and logical thinking, and thus referred to "the universal will-to-live" rather than "God." Schweitzer's most complete and arguably most compelling discussion of Reverence for Life is given in his philosophical writings, specifically *The Philosophy of Civilization*. There he considers Descartes' starting-point for philosophical discourse, the dictum *cogito ergo sum*, and pronounces it paltry and arbitrary. Instead, Schweitzer suggests that true philosophy begins with another sort of immediate awareness, in which each of us lives and moves, he claims, day by day: "I am life which wills to live, in the midst of life which wills to live."

From this awareness Schweitzer derives disarmingly simple and straightforward definitions of ethics, of moral goodness, and of evil: "Ethics consist, therefore, in my experiencing the compulsion to show to all will-to-live the same reverence as I do to my own." And, as for good and evil: "It is good to maintain and to encourage life; it is bad to destroy life or to obstruct it." Schweitzer never allows these descriptions of good and evil to degenerate into either relativism or legalism. Reverence for Life remains absolute, to be sure, but the application of Reverence for Life in concrete situations, in which we inevitably must make hard decisions that will sometimes – but only when necessary – destroy and obstruct life, requires the application of thoughtful reflection and ethical responsibility. Hence, as we have seen, Schweitzer's assertions about the need for clear thinking and a sensitive conscience.

"It is good to maintain and to encourage life; it is bad to destroy life or to obstruct it."

Schweitzer maintained that this exposition of Reverence for Life discloses that Reverence for Life is a logical consequence or necessity of thought. James Brabazon is helpful in his discussion of what Schweitzer meant by "thought," *denken, auf Deutsch*. When Schweitzer asserts that Reverence for Life is a necessity of thought, Brabazon explains, he is not referring only to intellectual argumentation and logical proof but also to other sorts of reflection: meditation, intuition, mystical reflection. Brabazon quotes Schweitzer approvingly in this regard: "If rational thought thinks itself out to a conclusion, it arrives at something non-rational which, nevertheless, is a necessity of thought." In spite of the best efforts of Schweitzer and Brabazon, I still do not think a strong case is made for Reverence for Life as a necessity of

thought. Schweitzer himself admits that "the world is a ghastly drama of will-to-live divided against itself," that the world is, as we also recognize to our grief, a dog-eat-dog world, or, for Schweitzer, a hippo-eat-hippo world. For this question, this issue, Schweitzer has no answer, and he calls the contrast between creative will and destructive will an enigma. Further, even if necessity of thought is not judged to be logical necessity, few thinkers other than committed Schweitzerians buy into the necessary relationship Schweitzer poses between rational and non-rational thought, nor do ethicists feel compelled to draw the same conclusion as Schweitzer. Reverence for Life remains a powerful, appealing ethical option, but it does not appear to be a necessity of thought.

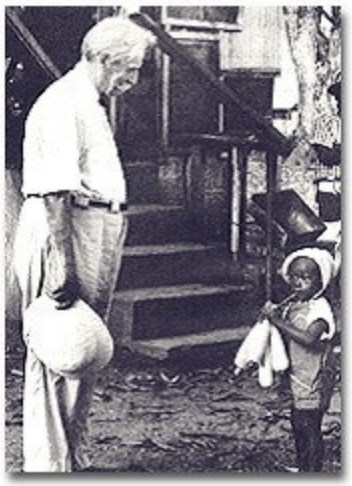
Foundational to Reverence for Life, I would propose, is reciprocity…

Nevertheless, it may be possible, in another way, to demonstrate a universalizing tendency in the principle of Reverence for Life. Foundational to Reverence for Life, I would propose, is reciprocity, the recognition that it is right and proper to balance my expectations and actions for myself with my expectations and actions for others. Thus Jesus, speaking out of his Jewish tradition, advises, "Act toward others the way you want others to act toward you." (the golden rule, which sometimes is articulated in the negative as the so-called silver rule), and he commands, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (love that includes love for enemy, as Jesus states in the Sermon on the Mount). Schweitzer himself preached a sermon on love for neighbor on February 16, 1919. These ethical rules of reciprocity are to be found all around the world among devotees of the religions of the world. Hinduism praises one who looks on neighbor as self. Buddhism announces a universal love for all beings, a love that overcomes the hatred of others. Confucianism proclaims, "Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you." The Tao-te-Ching observes, "One who loves the world as one's own body can be entrusted with the world." With these affirmations we are close indeed to Schweitzer's affirmation of Reverence for Life.

In September, 1915, Schweitzer says, he came up with the phrase Reverence for Life while passing through a herd of hippopotami on the Ogowe River, and thereafter he found a variety of ways to affirm Reverence for Life – autobiographically, exegetically, religiously, philosophically. But there is an additional way, arguably the most important way, in which Schweitzer affirmed Reverence for Life. He did so daily, actively, in his life. He lived Reverence for Life. As a medical doctor for Africans and Europeans who were in need of

But there is an additional way, arguably the most important way, in which Schweitzer affirmed Reverence for Life. …
He lived Reverence for Life.

medical attention, as the head of a village hospital that welcomed and nurtured people and animals, Schweitzer practiced Reverence for Life for half a century at Lambarene and in the equatorial jungle around. Like Goethe, in *Wilhelm Meister*, Schweitzer chose Reverence as the category to explain life in the world, and like Goethe, in *Faust*, Schweitzer considered the opening of the Gospel of John, *en arche en ho logos*, "In the beginning was the word," and understood it, "In the beginning was action." Before going to Africa, Schweitzer promised to be quiet as a fish, and he maintained that his life was his argument. Schweitzer found Reverence for Life when he found Lambarene and lived in Lambarene.



It remains for us, then, to evaluate for ourselves these affirmations of Reverence for Life. I do not anticipate that many of us will emulate Schweitzer by encountering and entertaining our own family of ants, but what shall we do? How shall we understand the challenges of moral goodness, evil, and ethics in the world? How shall we see ourselves in the context of other living beings in the world? How shall we assume our responsibilities, and act upon our responsibilities, in a world of painful and perplexing ambiguities? Finally, our consideration of Schweitzer's understanding of Reverence for Life may become a call to us, not unlike the call that Schweitzer describes at the end of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, the call to which he responded by going to live and work in Africa. This call has been issued, in different places and different times, by Buddha, by Mahavira, by Jesus, and by others, and in Schweitzer this call is a call to ethical action. How do we understand Reverence for Life? How shall we affirm life and Reverence for Life? How shall we find our own Lambarene?

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CORINNE DUFKA-REUTERS FOR TIME

Chapter 4:
PROFILES OF WANGARI MAATHAI, A KENYAN PROTECTOR OF FORESTS AND WINNER OF THE 2004 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

HERO OF THE WEEK
TIME MAGAZINE
DECEMBER 28, 1998

Her Women's Army Defies an Iron Regime
BY CLIVE MUTISO/NAIROBI

One morning earlier this month, two rival groups faced off on opposite sides of a makeshift steel gate that barred the way into Karura Forest on the outskirts of Nairobi. Leading the group on the outside was Wangari Maathai, an imposing 1.7-m-tall woman in a rainbow-hued African print dress. She and a handful of supporters were protesting what many Kenyans and UN officials were calling an environmental outrage. More than a third of the 1,000-hectare forest had been sold off to land developers for a luxury-housing project backed by President Daniel arap Moi, and 20 hectares had already been cleared--less than a kilometer away from the Nairobi headquarters of the UN Environment Program. Violence had been in the air for weeks after protesters invaded the site and burned $1 million worth of bulldozers and tree-cutting equipment. Police were deployed to guard the area, but on this morning they delegated the task to a gang of 200 hired men dressed in slacks, sport shirts, sneakers and baseball caps and carrying whips, clubs, swords, bows and arrows.

This menacing security force was more than a match for its opponents: 12 women, most of them elderly, and six members of the Kenyan Parliament, armed only with tree seedlings, gardening tools and watering cans. Maathai and her followers wanted to plant trees in the forest to reclaim it symbolically for the public. When she saw the force arrayed against her inside the gate, catcalling and bellowing threats, she told her group, "These thugs are spoiling for trouble, and the police will not protect us. Let's plant one tree outside the gate and leave." As Maathai picked up a 60-cm Meru oak seedling and moved toward the gate, more than 100 of the armed men surged out of the forest and began beating the demonstrators with whips and clubs. One powerfully built young man struck Maathai on the back of the head, and she fell to her knees under a hail of whips, with blood seeping from a scalp wound. Six women rallied around her, carrying her through a gauntlet of attackers to a waiting car, which drove a kilometer to a police station. The officers showed no interest in investigating the assault, but Maathai insisted on filing a complaint, signing it with blood from her wound. She was then taken to Nairobi Hospital, where doctors stitched her head and kept her under observation for three days. Altogether 10 of the protesters were injured, three of them seriously. From her hospital bed, Maathai declared, "As soon as I recover, I shall return to Karura forest, even if they bury me there."

It takes a strong person to stand up to the iron regime of Kenya's President Moi, and Wangari Maathai, 58, fits the bill. An anatomy professor at the University of Nairobi and the first Kenyan woman to receive a Ph.D., she founded the women's

Green Belt movement, which has planted 7 million trees in Kenya and inspired similar efforts around the globe. In 1989 her protests forced Moi to abandon a plan to erect a 62-story office tower in a Nairobi park. Once Maathai was clubbed unconscious by police. Another time she was arrested and placed overnight in a jail cell with no mattress. Through the years, her courage has earned her environmental awards from countries all over the world. Her latest battle has brought her powerful new allies, and no one seems to care whether she encouraged tactics like the burning of the bulldozers or overzealous followers were acting on their own. Said U.N.E.P. executive director Klaus Toepfer: "Karura Forest is a precious natural resource that the city cannot afford to lose. The destruction of this valuable ecosystem will have serious environmental implications." UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan condemned the recent attack on Maathai, praising her role as an environmentalist. Unless Karura Forest is restored, the UN may move U.N.E.P. from Kenya. The housing project that spawned the protest is expected to collapse, since most people rich enough to buy or rent homes in the proposed development would now be embarrassed to do so. U.N.E.P. staffers are certainly no longer on the list of potential tenants. Vows Maathai: "We are not going to allow any development in Karura. If any building takes place, it will be over our dead bodies."

Wangari Maathai:
Profile of a Winner of the Right Livelihood Award (1984)

(from http://www.rightlivelihood.se)

Wangari Muta Maathai was born in Nyeri, Kenya, in 1940. She was trained in biological sciences and received a doctorate from the University of Nairobi, where she also taught veterinary anatomy. She became Chair of the Department of Veterinary Anatomy and an associate Professor in 1976 and 1977 respectively, being in both cases the first woman in the region to attain these positions.

Maathai was active in the National Council of Women of Kenya from 1976 and was its chairman, 1981-87. It was through the Council that she introduced the idea of planting trees with the people and developed it into a broad-based, grassroots organization designed to conserve the environment and improve women's quality of life. By the end of 1993 the women reported that they had planted over 20 million trees on their farms and on school and church compounds.

The Green belt Movement grew very fast. By the early 1980s there were estimated to be 600 tree nurseries, involving 2,000-3,000 women. About 2,000 public green belts with about a thousand seedlings each had been established and over half-a-million school children were involved. Some 15,000 farmers had planted woodlots on their own farms.

In 1986 the Movement established a Pan African Green Belt Network and has introduced over 40 individuals from other African countries to its approach. This has led to the adoption of Green Belt methods in Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Lesotho, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and some other countries of the region.

The Green Belt Movement set itself both short- and long-term objectives. The overall aim has been to create public awareness of the need to protect the

environment through tree planting and sustainable management. More specifically, it has initiatives to promote and protect bio-diversity, to protect the soil, to create jobs especially in the rural areas, to give women a positive image in the community and to assert their leadership qualities. It has made tree planting an income-generating activity. It promotes food security and assists people to make the link between environmental degradation and many of the problems they face, including poverty and livelihood insecurity.

Over its first 20 years, many of the Movement's objectives have been achieved. Environmental awareness has been greatly increased in the country, and many women's groups have sold millions of seedlings to the Movement, using the income to meet immediate domestic needs such as education of their children or investing it in other income-generating ventures. Tree planting has become an honourable activity and many people have adopted it. Relevant knowledge and techniques have been imparted to the participants and many women have become 'foresters without diplomas'. There are now over 3,000 tree nurseries and more than 3,000 part-time jobs have been created.

In recent years Wangari Maathai's own work has focused on the human rights situation in Kenya. Standing up for a democratic, multi-ethnic Kenya, she has been subjected to defamation, persecution, detention and physical attacks.

> *"We have a special responsibility to the ecosystem of this planet. In making sure that other species survive we will be ensuring the survival of our own."*
>
> - Wangari Maathai

Wangari Maathai's Nobel Peace Prize

Daily Champion (Lagos)
EDITORIAL October 20, 2004
Posted to the web October 20, 2004
Lagos

THE award last week of the Nobel Peace Prize to 64 year-old Kenyan environmental activist, Wangari Maathai, is significant in more ways than one.

For one thing, it was the first time in the history of the Peace Prize since 1901, that an African woman has been so honoured. For another, the statement inherent in the decision by the Nobel Committee that a stable, sustainable and balanced eco-system is a pre-requisite to global peace and economic development, is a profound thesis that should appeal to development planners especially in Africa where issues of environment are hardly factored into national plans.

Also,Wangari's award will hopefully have more than salutary effect on the consciousness of peoples and governments the world over who view issues of global peace and stability only in terms of absence of war, and not in terms of the well-being of world communities whose resources are indiscriminately exploited to feed transient consumerist demands.

It took Maathai's genius to decode very early in her active life that there indeed lay a very critical connection between forest resource depletion and the abject poverty of Kenyan tribesmen whose forests were being hacked down for timber. She could see that

the ecological base of existence of her peoples we re being eroded with each forest land cleared by loggers through, not just loss of fuel wood but through loss of the bio-diversity which the forests offered as herbal medicine, food source and general erosion of the exposed top soils.

By recognising her work of over 30 years in the re-forestation of Kenyan forests, the Nobel Committee has added another dimension to global peace studies through more active environmental concerns. Indeed in the Nobel Committees citation, Wangari was acknowledged to be a "strong voice speaking for the best forces in Africa to promote peace and good living conditions on the continent."

Wangari's road to Nobel Peace award started in 1977 when, as head of her nation's council of women, she had witnessed the rape of Kenyan forests by outside interest groups with the collaboration of Kenyan politicians whose greed was only matched by their environmental ignorance.

It was her concern for the rights of Kenyans that led her to environmentalism and natural resource conservation.

Founding the Green Belt Movement in 1977, Maathai began what turned out to be a 30-year old campaign of re-forestation by planting just nine trees! Today about 30 million trees have been planted across Africa since her campaign started.

The trees helped check desertification, promote bio-diversity, created food and jobs especially for rural women. Her recognition centred mostly on her organic view of life which included the environment and resource exploitation and utilization in a sustainable manner.

Born in 1940 in Nyeri, central Kenya, Maathai became the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree in Biological Science from colleges in America. By 1964 she was already an academic and teaching Zoology at Nairobi University.

Her activism was not all smooth sailing or to the liking of Kenyan authorities who repeatedly had her physically beaten up, as in 1992 when along with three of her co-workers, she was clubbed unconscious during a demonstration. She has been tear-gassed, threatened with death and jailed for leading protests as happened in 1998 under former President Arap Moi whom she dragged to court to block forest clearance.

Her arguments have always been simple, logically consistent and imbued with the insight of a genius: "The environment is very important in the aspects of peace because when we destroy our resources and our resources become scarce, we fight over that."

Maathai is a true Amazon. Following a severe beating she received once with other members of her movement, she vowed from her hospital bed to return to the Karura forest near Nairobi to continue her activities which combined science with active social engagement and grassroots politics.

Wangari and her Green Belt Movement have received a lot of prizes and awards in her time. Among these are the Conservation Scientist Award in 2004' as well as outstanding Vision and Commitment Award 2002, Excellence Award 2001.

But the award of the Nobel Peace Prize is the jewel on the crown of her achievements so far.

Though only 64, Wangari has expressed no aim or desire to slow down on her zeal and passion to protect the environment. She also wants to improve governance as she has tried to do in Kenya.

Wangari's achievement is a pride to all Africans and an inspiration to other men and women to aspire and make a difference in their endeavours through dedicated service to humanity and not self.

The fact that the Nobel Committee has honoured an African environmentalist should also remind the continent's leaders that there is a close connection between poverty on the continent and resource exploitation in unsustainable manner.

This new highlighted thinking should form the background of all government plans on the continent. Tree planting for one slows desertification, preserves forest habitats for wild life and provides a source of fuel, building materials and food for future generations to help combat poverty. Wangari Maathai has shown an example worthy of following in a continent that needs selfless commitment to save its present and assure its future.

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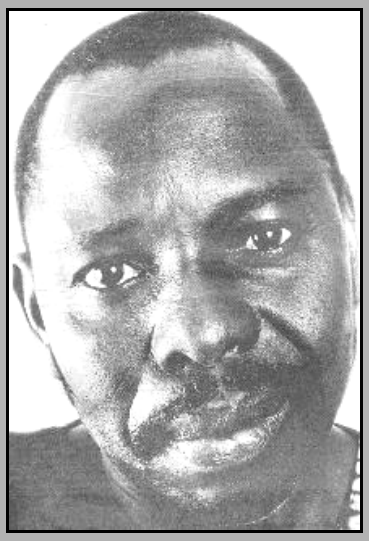
From a UNICEF interfaith religious service, September 13, 2001: Dr. Wangari Maathai, founder of the Greenbelt Movement, an NGO in Kenya, concluded the service by leading the gathering in a blessing of the world's children.

> "Whether children build a world of peace or a world of hatred is as much a result of the choices we adults make, as of the choices they make," she said. "Children will build a world using the tools and materials we provide them with, so let us choose to teach them the ways of peace."

Notes



KENULE BEESON SARO-WIWA
1941 -1995

Chapter 5: Selections from the writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa

Introduction to GENOCIDE IN NIGERIA: THE OGONI TRAGEDY

(Port Harcourt: Saros, 1992; 103 pp.)
Ken Saro Wiwa

Writing this book has been one of the most painful experiences of my life. Ordinarily, writing a book is torture, a chore. But when, on ever page, following upon every word, every letter, a tragedy leaps up before the eyes of a writer, he or she cannot derive that pleasure, that fulfillment in which the creative process often terminates.

What has probably worsened the matter is that I have lived through most of the period covered by this sordid story. I knew, as a child, that period from 1947 when the Ogoni saw, for a few brief years, the possibility of extricating themselves from the cruel fate which seems to have been ordained for them. I watched as they went into decline. I was privileged to play a role in the civil war which decimated them further and to assist in their rehabilitation at the end of that war.

Since then I have watched helplessly as they have been gradually ground to dust by the combined effort of the multinational oil company, Shell Petroleum Development Company, the murderous ethnic majority in Nigeria and the country's military dictatorships. Not the pleas, not the writing over the years have convinced the Nigerian elite that something special ought to be done to relieve the distress of the Ogoni.

I have known and argued earnestly since I was a lad of seventeen that the only way the Ogoni can survive is for them to exercise their political and economic rights. But because the Nigerian elite appear, on this particular matter, to have hearts of stone and the brains of millipedes; because Shell is a multinational company with the ability to crush whomever it wishes; because the petroleum resources of the Ogoni serve everyone's greed, all the doors seemed closed.

Three recent events have encouraged me to now place the issue before the world: the end of the cold War, the increasing attention being paid to the global environment, and the insistence of the European Community that minority rights be respected, albeit in the successor states to the Soviet Union and in Yugoslavia. What remains to be seen is whether Europe and America will apply in Nigeria the same standards which they have applied in Eastern Europe.

For what has happened and is happening to the Ogoni is strictly not the fault of the Nigerian elite and Shell Company alone; the international community has played a very significant role in it. If the Americans did not purchase

Nigerian oil, the Nigerian nation would not be, nor would the oppressive ethnic majority in the country have the wherewithal to pursue its genocidal intentions. Indeed, there is a sense in which the "Nigerian" oil which the Americans, Europeans and Japanese buy is stolen property: it has been seized from its owners by force of arms and has not been paid for. Therefore, these buyers are receiving stolen property. Also, it is Western investment and technology which keep the Nigerian oil industry and therefore the Nigerian nation alive, oil being 94 percent of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product.

Also, European and American shareholders in multi-national oil companies and manufacturers of oil mining equipment have benefited from the purloining of Ogoni resources, the devastation of the Ogoni environment and the genocide of the Ogoni people. Thus, shareholders in the multi-national oil companies -- both Shell and Chevron -- which prospect for oil in Ogoni [lands], the American, Japanese and European governments, and the multinational oil companies have a moral if not legal responsibility for ending the genocide of the Ogoni people and the complete devastation of their environment, if, indeed, that is still possible.

The requirement is enormous and urgent. The Ogoni people themselves including their children are determined to save whatever is left of their rich heritage. The international community can support this determination by championing the drive of the Ogoni for autonomy within Nigeria. The restoration of their rights, political, economic and environmental does not, cannot, hurt anyone. It will only place the responsibility for ending this dreadful situation where it should lie: on the Ogoni people themselves. The area being rich in resources and the people resourceful, the Ogoni will be able to sort out their problem in time.

Secondly, the international community must prevail on Shell and Chevron which prospect for oil in Ogoni, and the Nigerian Government which abets them, to stop flaring gas in the area immediately.

Thirdly, the international community can help by sending experts -- medical, environmental and agricultural -- to assist the Ogoni people restore a semblance of normality to Ogoni territory.

In the early years of this century, a French writer, Andre Gide, toured the Congo and observed the gross abuse of human rights being perpetrated in that country by King Leopold II of Belgium and his agents. He wrote about it and Europeans were sufficiently shocked to end the abuses.

I write now in the hope that the international community will, in similar fashion, do something to mitigate the Ogoni tragedy. It is bad enough that it is happening a few years into [before?] the twenty-first century. It will be a disgrace to humanity should it persist one day longer.

I expect the ethnic majority of Nigeria to turn the heat of their well-known vindictiveness on me for writing this book. I defy them to do so.

Some may wonder at my use of the word "genocide" to describe what has happened to the Ogoni people. The United Nations defines genocide as "the commission of acts with intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." If anyone, after reading this book, has any further doubt of, or has a better description for, the crime against the Ogoni people, I will be happy to know it.

I wish to thank Barika Idamkue and Dr. Sonpie Kpone-Tonwe for kindly reading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions for improving the work; and my assistant, Hyacinth Wayi, for speedy word-processing.

All errors in the book are mine and I accept full responsibility for them.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, Port Harcourt, 1992

Words from the final statement of Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa

In representing the Ogoni peoples of Nigeria in a struggle against devastation of their lands by multinational oil corporations, Ken Saro-Wiwa spoke for the impoverished many, against the empowered few. For his efforts, Saro-Wiwa was arrested in May, 1994 in Nigeria, on what many believe to have been spurious charges. On November 10, 1995, a Nigerian military-appointed tribunal executed nine Ogoni leaders. Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa was among them. His final statement, the closing paragraphs of which are reprinted here, was never heard by the tribunal.

(Editor's note: The text of this excerpt comes to us with certain logical inconsistencies in paragraph 3, perhaps the result of the trying circumstances under which it was written or transcribed. I have inserted, in brackets [ ], three short suggested amending phrases which allow the paragraph to express what I was believe Ken Saro-Wiwa's original intent.)

Closing paragraphs from final statement from Nigeria:

My lord,

We all stand before history. I am a man of peace, of ideas. Appalled by the denigrating poverty of my people who live on a richly endowed land, distressed by their political marginalization and economic strangulation, angered by the devastation of their land, their ultimate heritage, anxious to preserve their right to life and to a decent living, and determined to usher to this country as a whole a fair and just democratic system which protects everyone and every ethnic group and gives us all a valid claim to human civilization, I have devoted my intellectual and material resources, my very life, to a cause in which I have total belief and from which I cannot be blackmailed or intimidated. I have no doubt at all about the ultimate success of my cause, no matter the trials and tribulations which I and those who believe with me may encounter on our journey. Neither imprisonment nor death can stop our ultimate victory.

I repeat that we all stand before history. I and my colleagues are not the only ones on trial. Shell is here on trial and it is as well that it is represented by counsel said to be holding a watching brief. The Company has, indeed, ducked this particular trial, but its day will surely come and the lessons learnt here may prove useful to it for there is no doubt in my mind that the ecological war that the Company has waged in the Delta will be called to question sooner than later and the crimes of that war be duly punished. The crime of the Company's dirty wars against the Ogoni people will also be punished. On trial also is the Nigerian nation, its present rulers and those who assist them. Any nation which can do to the weak and disadvantaged what the Nigerian nation has done to the Ogoni, loses a claim to independence and to freedom from outside influence. I am not one of those who shy away from protesting injustice and oppression, arguing that they are expected in a military regime. The military do not act alone. They are supported by a gaggle of politicians, lawyers, judges, academics and business-men, all of them hiding under the claim that they are only doing their duty, men and women too afraid to wash their pants of urine.

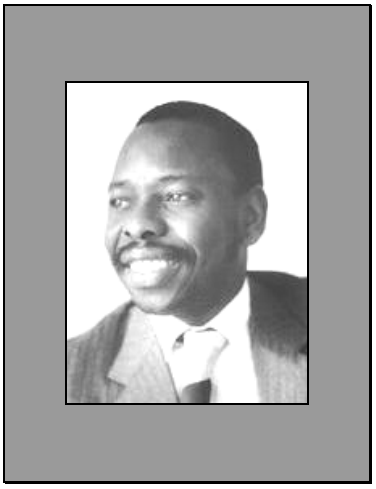
We all stand on trial, my lord, for by our actions we have denigrated our Country and jeopardized the future of our children. As we subscribe to the sub-normal and accept double standards, as we lie and cheat openly, as we protect injustice and oppression, we empty our classrooms, denigrate our hospitals, fill our stomachs

with hunger and elect to make ourselves the slaves of those who [do not] ascribe to higher standards, [do not] pursue the truth, and [do not] honour justice, freedom, and hard work. I predict that the scene here will be played and replayed by generations yet unborn. Some have already cast themselves in the role of villains, some are tragic victims, some still have a chance to redeem themselves. The choice is for each individual.

I predict that the denouement of the riddle of the Niger delta will soon come. The agenda is being set at this trial. Whether the peaceful ways I have favoured will prevail depends on what the oppressor decides, what signals it sends out to the waiting public. In my innocence of the false charges I face Here, in my utter conviction, I call upon the Ogoni people, the peoples of the Niger delta, and the oppressed ethnic minorities of Nigeria to stand up now and fight fearlessly and peacefully for their rights. History is on their side. God is on their side. For the Holy Quran says in Sura 42, verse 41: "All those that fight when oppressed incur no guilt, but Allah shall punish the oppressor." Come the day.

Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa

(Saro-Wiwa's full statement, of which the above is an excerpt, can be read at http://www.ratical.org/corporations/KSWstmt.html)



Chapter 6:
Two Essays by Joanna Macy

Sarvodaya Means "Everybody Wakes Up"

by Joanna Macy

Part of the series
"Essays on The Great Turning"
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The URL of this document is
www.earthlight.org/essay45_macy.html

I return from Sri Lanka where I saw how a country, devastated by civil war, can proceed to reunite and rebuild. Sarvodaya -- the name means "everybody wakes up" -- is a Buddhist-inspired community development movement active in well over 12,000 villages in all parts of the island republic. Its campaign for peace, moving into high gear with the fragile but promising cease-fire signed in January, aims to restore not only interethnic harmony, but also the bases for economic wellbeing. These two are inseparable in Sarvodayan eyes, along with respect for the land and for the human spirit. Having loved and learned from this movement for twenty-six years, I flew to be on hand for the event of March 15th, a mammoth peace meditation kicking off their "village-to-village, heart-to-heart" link-up program. I come back with these lessons:

1) Affirm and nourish the spiritual roots of action

By midday on March 15th figures in white filled the paths toward the great stupas and were pouring onto the grounds of the sacred ancient city of Anuradhapura. Walking along with them, I could not tell from which side of Sri Lanka's civil war these pilgrims came. No placards or shouted slogans proclaimed their identities, but place names on the busses parked back on the periphery gave a clue. They came from Hindu Tamil and Buddhist Sinhalese areas that had been pitted against each other for the last nineteen years, in a war that has cost 65,000 lives, wrecked the economy, and traumatized a generation of Sri Lankans.

This was Peace Samadhi Day, organized by Sarvodaya in support of the cease-fire recently negotiated with Norwegian help between the Sinhalese-identified government and the secessionist LTTE or Tamil Tigers. Over the last year and a half, Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, Sarvodaya's founder, had convened public peace meditations to change the "psychosphere." These gatherings let ordinary people at the grassroots level demonstrate and deepen their desire to end the war. Now, despite counsel from more cautious minds, he had reached for something huge: a meditation to include a half a million people. And despite a grenade attack on the Ariyaratne home, right before the event and just outside my bedroom, the event went forward. In what might well be the largest meditation for peace in the history of the world, 650,000 people took part.

Sitting on the grass as far as the eye could see, they made the biggest silence I ever heard. After prayers from Buddhist, Hindu and

Muslim clerics, and in the intervals between Dr. Ariyaratne's words, guiding us in mindfulness of breath, in lovingkindness and firm resolve for peace, the silence deepened. I thought: this is the sound of bombs and landmines not exploding, of rockets not launched and machine guns laid aside. It is possible, for us all.

2) Have practical actions people can undertake together

That day, off to the side by the ancient bodhi tree, a ceremony inaugurated Sarvodaya's Link-Up program. A thousand villages in the more devastated Tamil areas are paired with a thousand in the Sinhalese areas. The latter will bring materials and skilled and unskilled labor, so that both parties can work together to rebuild homes and schools, wells and toilets and places of worship destroyed in the fighting. I heard of a village in the South, that, just on hearing of this program, immediately loaded two lorries with roofing materials to take north.

Today, to symbolize this partnership, a village from each side had been selected, and after the temple bell was rung -- at the precise moment bells were rung that day across Sri Lanka, young people from each of these two villages came forward. They bore round trays of special, festive food they had prepared, and they fed each other.

The plates were then passed among the rest of us gathered there. Even if the cease-fire is sabotaged, I want to remember that taste of sweet rice and coconut. It told me that this is what we really want, most of all. To stop the fighting and feed each other.

3) To build enduring peace, restore the land

Sarvodaya's peace plan includes grassroots development strategies for the dry zones, the most economically hard-pressed areas of Sri Lanka. It features locally generated energy from biomass as well as sustainable irrigation, soil renewal, and the community-controlled microcredit schemes the Movement has pioneered in the last decade.

The aim of the Movement, as ever, is a "no poverty, no affluence" society to reduce the disparity between rich and poor brought about by late capitalism and corporate globalization. The priority placed on care for the land reminds me of Sarvodaya's list of Basic Human Needs, the very first of which is "a safe and beautiful environment."

4) Think long-term

Peace does not happen with the signing of documents; the effects of war continue to fester far into the future, often to erupt again in violence. Sarvodaya points out that the seeds of Sri Lanka's civil war were planted 500 years ago with European colonization, and estimates that its healing will require an equal amount of time. So the peace plan it brings embraces the next 500 years.

To give you a rough idea: Five years to put Dry Zone development measures in place; ten years to resettle all the refugees; fifty years to achieve the lowest poverty rate in the world and abolish Sri Lanka's standing army. The vision continues beyond that: By 2100, Sri Lanka becomes "the first country to eliminate poverty, both economic and spiritual." By the year 2500, "Global climate warming may cause changes to Sri Lankan environment; but because of the history of working together over hundreds of years, these changes will not be disasters. In 500 years, people might be living on other planets; however, Sri Lanka will retain their image of Paradise on Earth."

I think of the tightrope walker who, to maintain her balance and move steadily forward, must raise her eyes, keep looking ahead. When we do that in our work for peace and justice, when we feel our connections to future generations, we can stay steady and determined, despite the immediate challenges we face. My friends in the Sarvodaya Movement have shown that we ordinary humans are capable of that.

9/11 and the Heart of the World

by Joanna Macy
EarthLight Magazine #43, Fall 2001

When 9/11 riveted our lives, I assumed at first that mine would go on as before. There were immediate gatherings, of course, vigils for peace instead of vengeance, and visits on Fridays to a mosque for solidarity with local Muslims. But soon I wondered how to proceed as I'd planned with a teaching trip to Germany: With my country going to war, dare I travel so far from my family? Dare I presume to teach about deep ecology and justice, as my government bombed civilians in Afghanistan, and my own heart with shame?

I am glad I went. The journey taught me a lot about the Great Turning.

I stopped in New York en route. Standing with those most affected by the tragedy, I learned that the grief that united them was not a call for retaliation. I went to pray at Ground Zero, where beyond the barricade the mountain of rubble still burned, then at Union Square, its expanse transformed into one vast altar for the dead, with flowers, candles, models of the Twin Towers, pictures of faces, names, prayers, drawings, scrawled messages. "Our grief is not a cry for war;" and "Do not dishonor the dead by bombing the innocent." I felt as if I'd entered some inner heart of the world, where the greatest loss ignites the deepest wisdom, and horror melts into compassion.

In Germany the next three weeks, giving workshops near Frankfurt and then in Freiburg in the Black Forest, I discovered that this inner heart is truly global. Burdened as I was by a sense of shame over American militarism, I had not expected my country's shock and grief to be so totally, compassionately shared by people half a world away, whose souls still bear the scars of war. The tears that came, as sorrow was spoken, had no nationality, nor did the resolve to walk new paths for a just peace.

As my German colleagues and I worked together, we found, once again, that the Great Turning provides a good conceptual framework for seeing the opportunities present now and guidance for the way ahead. An antidote to panic and paralysis, it lifted our sights, cleared our vision, ignited our energy and will. It was particularly helpful to discern the three dimensions of the Great Turning, as they continue to unfold even in the present crisis.

The first dimension, resistance to violence stemming from the industrial growth society, was most visible in mass demonstrations against the war. At the time of my workshops in Germany, scores of thousands of marchers in Berlin, Stuttgart, Nuremberg, protested the Schroeder administration's support for the bombing of Afghanistan. Along with quieter vigils for peace in uncounted small towns, these rallies occurred in spite of the media's enthusiastic alignment with President Bush as "the leader of the free world" -- with dissenting voices reprimanded, and little if any coverage given to peace sentiments in the U.S. As I had experienced at home, many small acts of friendship and protection were being extended to local Arabs and Muslims; and ordinary folks were finding ways to raise money for deliveries of food and medicines inside Afghanistan, through such agencies as Doctors Without Borders.

Creation of alternative structures is the second dimension of the Great Turning: new ways of meeting our needs for food, housing, health, and a safe environment. Given Germany's achievements in composting and fossil-free energy, I was not surprised to see the elegant, ubiquitous measures for recycling, and the high blades of windmills turning above the plains of Schleswig Holstein -- but

still they made my heart sing. In Freiburg, I saw how an old French military base, established after the second World War, has been converted to a lively housing complex for five thousand people, soon to number 7,500. Vauban, as it's named, features single and multiple dwellings with the latest in passive solar and photovoltaic energy, car-free enclaves with fanciful gardens and playgrounds, and toilets that generate gas for cooking. North of there, in central Germany, a young biologist wades through streams counting the endangered freshwater mussel. I learned how his passion for the fate of this lowly creature is contagious: local schools are creating curricula around its preservation (great for teaching everything from math to writing, ecology, social studies); local townspeople and farmers, learning how and why their freshwater supply is disappearing, are taking measures to protect it.

The third dimension of the Great Turning is the shift in consciousness that is required for a life-sustaining civilization. Unless deeply grounded in our radical interdependence in the sacred web of life, all our protests, all our new approaches and technologies, will avail us nothing. This tidal change of spirit may not be featured in the news, but it sweeps in on us now in countless ways. I sensed it in the Sufi dance we offered before the Freiburg cathedral and in the faces of the dozens of passersby who joined us. I feel it in the courage of all who are searching their own souls and culture to plumb the roots of terrorism. I see it in ***EarthLight***, as it draws from science, cosmology, and faith traditions, to enliven our understanding of our place and our calling.

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our grief
is not a cry for war

Message left
at Union Square,
New York City, after 9/11

Chapter 7: The Ten Commandments of Ecological Spirituality

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What is the relationship between an increasingly endangered planet and religious institutions and movements? How are religions challenged to re-interpret their myths, rituals and practices by growing ecological crises? Can ecologically reformed religious traditions make a significant contribution to social survival, not just human survival? These interrelated questions shape the framework of my remarks today as the world around us faces ever more massive environmental problems. Scientists are in general agreement about global warming; expanding populations strain and deplete finite resources; air, land and water are polluted by chemicals and radioactive waste; consumerist market systems plunge ahead heedless of long term consequences to biotic systems. Scientific study, governmental policies and public education are crucial elements for addressing these problems. But the environmental challenge today is so great that it calls for a revised human consciousness of what it means to be a creature of earth. This demands a new spiritual understanding and experience of bonding with nature. It is what the socio-biologist, E.O. Wilson terms "biophilia", an attitude of profound respect for and attachment to our natural surroundings.

I would like to approach this topic by presenting ten propositions or "command-ments" that I have derived from a broad sweep of contemporary literature in the area of what we might call ecological spirituality. Spirituality, a wider concept than religion, embraces ideologies, attitudes and actions that motivate humans in their quest for deeper meaning and experience about life. Religion tends to be more confined to traditional institutions, theologies, rituals and other practices. Religion and spirituality overlap in various ways, but they also differ in historical origin and purpose. I do not pretend that the ten commandments I've chosen completely or adequately represent ecological spirituality, but they are frequently discussed in literature ranging from Arne Naess, the Norwegian eco-philosopher and founder of the "Deep Ecology" movement, to Thomas Berry, the cultural scholar and Catholic priest who calls himself a "geologian" rather than a theologian.

These ten themes appear in various ways in ecofeminist writings as well as in the works of animal rights thinkers. In discussing each of the commandments, I will ask how traditional religions have hampered or have facilitated the realization of ecological spirituality. I will focus mainly on Christianity, but I will also refer to Buddhism and Taoism, and bring in references to American Indian religion, especially on the subject of the sacredness of land. Of course, I will have to be very selective and brief in dealing with such an array of religions when asking how they help or hurt ecological spirituality according to the ten commandments. I am also aware that a number of scholars have been exploring new modes of understanding specific religions, (see author-title list attached) such as Christianity, in an ecological perspective; their efforts, however, still remain on the periphery of church life. As a scholar of religion, I must be careful not to play God in these matters; yet I thought I might get away with playing Moses. But this Moses does not go up Mount Sinai to receive the tablets from a sky god, but rather he descends into the depths of the earth to discover the new commandments.

1. The universe, our solar system and the earth, as well as our human evolutionary emergence from animal ancestors on this planet constitute the primary sources of revelation of the ultimate mystery.

Christianity, following on Judaism, has always maintained a doctrine of creation which upholds the goodness of all beings. But there are at least three aspects of this new commandment that challenge traditional Christian ways of understanding creation. First, the focus of the statement is this-worldly; indirectly it says that "salvation," however one understands that term, is to be found principally in this universe, not in some realm beyond it. Through Gnostic and Manichean influences from earliest Christianity, many Christians have understood liberation from the body, earth and death as a removal from the present order of reality to a heaven, usually conceived of as a spiritual realm removed from the material world. The dramatic suicides of the thirty nine Heaven's Gate members in San Diego recently would certainly be an exaggeration of Christian perspectives, and yet this incident graphically represents the powerful desire to abandon earth because it was not their true home. Christians would reject the means of suicide, and they probably would not expect to rendezvous with a spaceship in the wake of the Hale Bopp comet. But escape from the travails of earth has long been a compelling theme in Christian preaching and iconography. By drawing Christians away from full involvement with this earth, the church has contributed to an anti-ecological attitude; many viewed bodily life as a testing ground for the virtues that would permit entrance into an unearthly estate.

Green World of Life Ofelia Pagani

Secondly, the evolutionary aspect of the commandment has been a stumbling block for many Christians. Since Darwin, liberal Christian thinkers have made their peace with evolution, but to this day many conservative believers resist or reject our long mammalian provenance. This may not be as true in Europe as in the United States where millions of evangelicals still deny evolution and propose that creationism be taught in the schools. Reasons for such thinking are complex, but they relate to a literal interpretation of creation stories and a distaste for seeing humans as mere animals. To the conservative mind, evolution seems to diminish the power of God and it does not sufficiently elevate humans above their animal kin. Some important negative consequences for ecology result. A totally dominating God works arbitrarily outside the natural system, imposing his will on things. In imitation of this deity, his followers, too, can manipulate the earth at will; it is, after all, a zone outside of the realm of salvation, an objectified resource for human utilization. Thirdly, the commandment drives the beginnings of religion and spirituality far back into prehistory, implicitly claiming that our primordial religiousness was very earthbound, intimately connected with the sun and the seasons, with the spirits of mountains and rivers. Christianity has tended to remove religion from space, from the here and now concreteness of our earliest ancestors and confine it in the history of home sapiens,

especially in a time frame called salvation history. It is hard for many Christians to take the relativizing step of understanding their religion as a less decisive moment than they thought in the very long historical march of hand and brain creatures.

2. The universe is a unity of matter and energy; it is an interacting community of systems; in its earthly dimension, the psychic and the physical are intimately integrated and operate according to laws of differentiation, subjectivity and communion.

This unified vision of reality orchestrated by ecological spirituality stands against many dualisms that have pervaded western philosophy and theology. Many writers in Christian history are dualists who virtually separate body and soul, matter and mind, the spiritual and the physical. In a way reminiscent of A. N. Whitehead's process philosophy, inter-subjectivity and inter-communion are key features of the new ecological spirituality. Christianity has not accepted the subjectivity of non-human animals and much less the subjectivity of other parts of nature. There are always exceptions like St. Francis Assisi, but such rare proto-ecologists only prove the rule. Contrast the Christian perspective on this point with that of American Indian religion which honors the subjectivity of the spirits in animals, trees, streams and mountains. When all reality outside the human is reduced to merely objective relations, there is less possibility for communication; the non-human is easily reduced to things, to non-sentient entities to be dominated at will for human gain. Think of Descartes' analysis of animal pain as the mere squeaking of a machine; this master of dichotomies had managed to reduce even sentient beings to unfeeling objects. Buddhism has been more open to a unified view of reality because of its teachings of impermanence and the lack of any solid self; all existence is profoundly interconnected and changing. Sunyata or emptiness means lack of a separated self and, therefore, it encourages a fundamental sense of interconnection with other entities, as exemplified in the Buddhist image of the Jeweled Net of Indra where all the pieces of the net reflect all the others. And yet, the unified outlook of ecological spirituality would press even Buddhism to rethink its boundaries for what constitutes sentient beings. Among eastern religions, it is perhaps Taoism that ties in most closely with ecological spirituality on the point of unified and inter-communing systems. It is not incidental that the ancient Taoist sages reacted against a very stratified Confucian culture in their return to nature to unlock the ultimate secrets of existence. The commandment on the intense unity of all reality challenges Christianity to reexamine the many dichotomies that still hold sway in its theology, liturgy and morality.

3. A main task for humans is to assist the intercommunion of living and non-living components of the earth community. This involves moving from an exclusively anthropocentric to an organic perspective, one that appreciates the intrinsic not just the instrumental value of nonhuman reality. This requires a profound reorientation among people toward an integrated human-earth relationship.

Science and technology for at least two hundred years, while bringing humanity great benefits, have also drawn people away from a sense of belonging to the earth. Industrialization, urbanization and now cybernetics increasingly isolate us from the rhythms of the seasons and from an awareness biotic networks. We have become alienated from the earth as our true home, our native place. Ecological catastrophes, impending or already present, are beginning to awaken governments, private groups and individuals to issues like global warming and nuclear pollution. Institutional religion, however, is still lagging in bringing its influence to bear on these problems. A good example of such

shortcomings can be found in typical Christian liturgies. For the most part, these services of preaching and eucharist do not portray humans with clear connection to earth or with strong responsibilities toward ecologically justice. On the contrary, most liturgies concentrate on interhuman questions or on the relationship between individuals and God. Hymns, preaching and prayers focus on the relationships between a parental God and his children or on a divinized Jesus and his adherents. The general tone of the liturgy is one of a salvation history removed from the needs of the earth itself. References to nature in the liturgy do not focus on the sacredness of the natural; rather nature is used figuratively to enhance religious beliefs that have little to do with the earth. In light of the third commandment, Christianity on the whole does not yet make the contribution it could to sensitizing people to assisting the communion of living and nonliving components of the earth community. This is not seen as a primary goal of being religious, because the sacred is not understood to reside in the earth itself.

Desert Spiral Ofelia Pagani

A few Christian theologians are moving against this still general trend by reinterpreting the doctrines of creation and incarnation. The whole universe is seen as the locus of creation, as the body of God, bringing the divine down into a radical immanence without resulting in pantheism. Such thinkers distinguish pantheism from panentheism in which the divine is immersed in creation or the latter in God without an absolute identity of God and the world. From this perspective, God has always been "incarnate" in the world. In some ways this newer Christian thinking is similar to Buddhist teaching about the discovery of Buddha-nature already present in all reality. If more Christians reinterpreted their doctrine in this way through preaching and liturgies, they could become more sensitized to the third commandment's task of assisting in the communion of living and nonliving components of the earth. Christians formed in such theology could better appreciate the intrinsic value of nature so that their instrumental uses of it might be more mindful and respectful.

4. The primordial components of earth: land, air and water are sacred.

It is instructive to compare Christian attitudes toward wilderness (land) with those of American Indians. Puritan colonists in America saw their task, their "errand into the wilderness" as one of heroic warfare with the untamed spirits of an unruly forest. Wild animals as well as native Indians were seen as savage elements, enemies of European, that is, Christian virtue and culture. The errand into the wilderness consisted in taming and converting these vicious spirits, these wild, animalistic entities into godly beings. Since violence was thought to originate in these devilish environments, or at least to be propagated there, it became legitimate for Christian soldier-missionaries to use violence to curb what was interpreted as a violent realm. This attitude is epitomized in the story of the while maiden, symbol of Christian Europe, abducted by "savage" Indians and saved by a heroic Daniel Boone whose violence was justified by its goal of

reclaiming the Christian maid. Contrast this view of the wild land to be tamed by gun and plow with that of Indians in both tribal rituals and in more common activities. The Indian brave went into the wild on his vision quest to discover his true spiritual identity, to communicate with the spirits of animals, trees and streams. He fasted as a holy act waiting for the revelation of his name and life vocation, waiting for his personal song to emerge from this very wilderness, often in some animal guise. In less ritualized actions, Indian men and women would sit reverently on the ground aware of contacting the holy in the earth. They dug kivas into the ground for rites in which the Great Spirit would be invoked from the center of the circle, the "sipapu," rising like smoke to encircle them in the embrace of earth. Now the descendants of the Puritans have turned land into a commodity, a dead object for exploitation as real estate development, endless highways, and as turf for noisy and ruinous dirt-bike riding.

There have always been among American settlers a few prophets of the land, but they were not closely associated with Christian churches. Henry Thoreau wrote at Walden Pond that "in wilderness is the preservation of the world," reflecting his own journey into simpler living close to nature. John Muir walked the wilderness of Yosemite and other wild places to alert the nation to its magnificent natural heritage. Walt Whitman, the quintessential American poet of the last century, sang incessantly of the union of humans with the land, the air and water. This tradition continued in this century with Aldo Leopold, especially noteworthy for his land ethic which held that things were right when they preserved the integrity, stability and beauty of biotic communities. Such spirituality was hard to come by in Christian churches which were so deeply impacted by an other-worldly eschatology. This eschatology or vision of future saw the earth consumed in flames while faithful believers ascended away from it into God's realm. To honor earthliness was seen as a depreciation of the sky God; it was a descent into the flesh which warred against the spirit. Again powerful dichotomies divided humans from their native milieu. To rediscover in our time a fuller sense among Christians and other religionists of being children of the land, it may be most important to concentrate on spiritual aesthetics. Of Plato's trilogy, the true, the good and the beautiful, Christian theologians have traditionally emphasized truth and goodness, understood as vera doctrina and morality; they have for the most part notoriously neglected the beautiful as a source of the sacred. Painters, writers and musicians have broken through to the beautiful, but church theologians have looked suspiciously on beauty as a source of holiness. Reasons for this exceed the scope of this presentation, but they are often connected with dualistic thinking that separates the sensuous and earthy from the zone of spirituality. Beauty appeals to the "soft" emotions and the passionate mind, aspects of the human that are particularly hard for religious institutions to control.

5. The richness and diversity of all life forms must be preserved in a way that upholds ecojustice; the expansion of human population and its interference in nature is excessive.

The growth of human populations is closely related to the decline in the variety and health of animal and plant species. From the standpoint of ecological spirituality, all species have intrinsic and not just instrumental value. This does not mean that humans are forbidden to use nature in useful ways, just as other species do. But our greater mental abilities allow us to foresee the consequences of destructive ecological choices and acts. We must extend our sense of ethics toward a responsible use and preservation of natural diversity. It is beyond the scope of my paper to explore the ethical particulars that honor intrinsic value and sanction wise use of nature.

But it is becoming ever clearer that growing human populations coupled with the consumerist mentality of market capitalism are deducing species diversity on earth. Occasionally, we see the instrumental value of a species like the yew tree whose chemicals assist in the cure of certain cancers. But on the whole, we are still conditioned by our culture to sacrifice whales and dolphins to maximize profits. How often do we hear a sermon or a major church pronouncement on the interrelated problem of species diversity, burgeoning populations and the market ethos? In fairness to Christianity, we should acknowledge that mainline churches have developed strong positions in social ethics from the early days of the Protestant social gospel to the long line of Catholic social encyclicals. But this social teaching focuses almost exclusively on human rather than ecological justice. This is a good example of how an organization's ethics is deeply affected by a more basic attitude or worldview that has typically excluded nature from both subjectivity and sacredness. In this view, nature has no standing in terms of rights and of justice.

Sunlight on the River Ofelia Pagani

A number of Christian ethicists and theologians are attempting to correct this situation today; some of their thinking makes its way into seminary training, especially on the controversial subject of population control. One of the more compelling approaches of this new thought brings the justice dimensions of Liberation Theology to bear on ecological dilemmas. Liberation Theology, originating in Latin America, has focused on the structures of human oppression and an interpretation of the gospels as God's call to liberate people from systems of alienation and subjugation. In this theology, Jesus becomes a prophetic liberator inspiring his followers to analyze and change society while working on behalf of and in solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Applying this approach to ecology makes endangered species and other aspects of beleaguered nature equivalent to the human poor and oppressed. Against the tendency in Christianity to spiritualize Jesus into a quasi non-earthly entity, this application of liberation thought pictures him as identified with the suffering and the vulnerability of nature. The Christ image in drawn down to earth, incarnated in a struggle for justice that includes the environment. Another important aspect of ecojustice involves both poor people and a polluted earth. Hazardous waste dumps and nuclear facilities, for example, are frequently located in areas where the poorest people live; many see a racial discrimination component in these developments.

6. People must rethink their consumer habits and move toward styles of simpler living to preserve the earth and establish more enhancing forms of community life.

Although this commandment of ecological spirituality is universally valid, it has special relevance for those living in wealthier situations throughout the world. The mandate for simpler living, a difficult concept to define for most of us, has both material and spiritual ramifications that are closely interlinked. Excessive use or destruction of earth resources, still so very

prevalent everywhere but especially in advanced technological societies, proceeds from human attitudes, lifestyles and worldviews. In this sense, the material problem is at root at spiritual one. For example, in the United States, where gasoline is relatively cheap and seemingly plentiful, the automobile is developing into a truck of ever greater proportions. This increased consumption of fuel, steel and other resources is driven in large part by attitudes that associate outward signs of bigger, more physically impressive materiality with personal worth and status. This vehicle example moves beyond the personal to major social mindsets affecting industries, commerce, the media, advertising, lobbyists, politicians and economists. The automotive instance can be multiplied in many other sectors of society. Simpler living, based on acquiring and enjoying the things one needs and not the endless array of what one wants or is made to think one wants, has negative connotations in the minds of most people. It is seen as a summons to poverty, to lessened personal and social esteem, to becoming marginalized and vulnerable. Simpler living is hardly ever understood as a path toward psychological and spiritual growth.

Religions have a mixed record concerning simple living. There is certainly a long history, especially in eastern and western meditative traditions, of renouncing material goods or of using them sparingly in order to focus energies of mind and soul on spiritual development and service to neighbor. Christian movements like the Quakers (Society of Friends) and the Catholic Worker (U.S.A.) present examples of intentionally simple living. But Christian churches have also been drawn into the "gospel of wealth" in various ways. In the aristocratic European mode of past centuries, churches often fostered an image of riches in their physical structures, institutional alliances and in the personal lifestyles of the higher clergy. Ecclesial power and prestige frequently mirrored the ostentatious ways of secular monarchs. In North America many Christians have uncritically embraced the ethos of market capitalism which largely denies any value to simple living, because the success of the market is based on maximizing production and consumption for the sake of ever-increasing profit.

Ecological spirituality urges religionists and secularists toward a constant reassessment of exaggerated uses of the natural world and its resources. Buddhist spiritual psychology, in ways similar to western religious traditions, offers a kind of voluntary simplicity that has not only benign material consequences but also stimulates the growth of mind and spirit. Commitment to simplicity in a complex world demands a delicate balancing act amid responsibilities to self and others. But those who practice such mindfulness derive important spiritual benefits: the process of attempting to live more simply makes them more aware of the things that truly count in life such as relationships and service. And the practice of simple living also heightens one's sense of the interconnectedness of all beings, since one's choices concerning resources impact the wider world. Buddhism also teaches that the practice of simplicity is far more important than entertaining the concept of it; for it is in actual practice that we experience valuable results that are not attainable in mere notional thinking.

7. Humans need to re-learn ways of communicating with nature via dialogue and not coercion, thus recovering their true relationship with the life of earth.

On the whole, the human attitude toward nature has been that of a master toward a slave or an owner toward an object or commodity. This outlook tends to be very violent and uncaring, not only toward animals but toward other living entities like oceans and rivers. Until this century. science and technology have tended to remove any sense of a subjectivity from the natural world, as

subjectivity implied communication between two intelligent beings. A mechanistic viewpoint has ensued in which the world outside the human and that of a few other mammals is an objectified realm suitable for manipulation but not meaningful communication. The very idea of communicating with nature seems very strange to many people in our time; to dialogue with trees (Stephanie Kaza, The Attentive Heart, 1995) would seem truly bizarre to the average person. Yet subatomic physics and quantum mechanics have stretched the limits of our imaginations since the early part of the century. This more organic and systemic approach to understanding the world has opened the possibility of viewing nature as alive and dynamic at its core with strong elements of creative chaos and order. There seems to be an element of "freedom" or indeterminacy in nature; moreover, all entities are caught up in a unified energy system (e.g., wave-particle theory of matter) which precludes easy separations or hierarchies of being, so popular since the middle ages.

Canyon Dream Ofelia Pagani

For the most part, religions have restricted communication to that between people or with a deity or perhaps with one's inner self. Outside of a few mystical religious virtuosi like Meister Eckhart, St. Francis Assisi and Julian of Norwich, traditional religionists in the West have confined nature to foreground or background scenery for the communication of human or divine persons. At its best in the religious perspective, nature became a treasury of symbols for what was not nature. Most Christians would suspect a form of paganism if they were urged to communicate spiritually with the natural world. The clearest example of an ancient nature religion is Taoism which locates and experiences the Tao, the underlying, ineffable, mysterious source of all reality, through its myriad manifestations in nature. American Indian religions also find the Great Spirit in just about every aspect of the natural realm; African primal religions have similar tendencies.

Perhaps the best way to rediscover and experience again the meaning of dialogue with nature is through the voices of modern nature writers. These authors act like seers for us, helping us to break through the barriers of technological objectification to make real contact with the natural realm. They allow us to touch nature in a new way, to listen to its peculiar languages. Learning to move away from noise and chatter, we let the forest or the river come to life in us. Such dialogue with nature is a form of meditation or contemplation which calms our scattered minds and makes it possible for us to "talk" with animal species and other parts of a living cosmos. Our schools and churches fail badly in their educative tasks when they do not teach people how to meditate, how to unlock their mystical potential suppressed and even mocked in a culture of frenzied activity. Erazim Kohak (From the Embers to the Stars) describes this process as a re-personalizing of our

relationship with nature through mutual respect and empathetic understanding. He is able to listen to the messages of dawn or dusk, to the sounds of birds and creeks in ways that shape for him a moral sense of the natural world.

Four brief selections from poetic writers alert us to the wonderful possibilities of contemplative communication with nature. Dag Hammarskjold underlines our mystic capacity for such communication: "In the point of rest at the center of our being, we encounter a world where all things are at rest in the same way. Then a tree becomes a mystery, a cloud a revelation..." Henry David Thoreau teaches us how to renew ourselves: "When I would recreate myself, I seek the darkest wood, the thickest and the most interminable....the most dismal swamp. I enter the swamp as a sacred place, a sancta sanctorum. There is the strength, the marrow of Nature." And Rene Dubos urges us to see beyond our human exploits to experience mystery in nature: "The wooing of the earth thus implies much more than the converting the wilderness into human environments. It also means preserving natural environments in which to experience mysteries transcending daily life, and from which to recapture....the awareness of the cosmic forces that have shaped humankind." Finally, Walt Whitman pulls us away from human words to listen to other spiritual realities in nature: "This is thy hour, O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless, / Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson done./ Thee fully forth emerging silent, gazing, pondering the themes thou lovest best,/ Night, sleep, death and the stars." (all citations from The Soul of the World, ed. by Phil Cousineau, Harper-SanFrancisco, 1993)

8. A new ecological ethic needs to be founded on a deep sense of bonding with nature, as a basically aesthetic experience. Ethical principles and applications can be positively influenced by a prior affective knowing of the natural world.

When we refer to ethics, we usually think about right and wrong choices or actions; we go back to principles and to their applications in moral situations. We ask about the ethics of global warming, of polluting the air and water, and about those responsible for such actions. Ethics has both individual and social dimensions. While all of this weighing of responsibility and accountability is crucial to working out an ecological ethic, it tends to stay on a rational or mentalist level. Ecological spirituality urges us to develop a more adequate foundation for such ethics by cultivating a prior affective bonding with the natural world, by re-experiencing ourselves deeply and symbiotically joined to our natural matrix. Science and technology, for all their indisputable benefits, have for three hundred years drawn us into a self-experience apart from nature. Ecological spirituality maintains that this separate existence, this dualistic (Descartes) and mechanistic (Newton) worldview, provides a superficial basis for the kind of environmental ethic we need today.

We must learn to re-experience in an aesthetic and affective manner the mystery and wonder of nature. Only then will we be sensitive and humanized enough to construct diverse ethical principles for the ecosystem. We have good resources for developing this ground work for ecological ethics in the newer science of subatomic physics, in certain philosophical systems that link us organically and dynamically with the natural world, and also in the work of thinkers who explore intersubjective dialogue, an intersubjectivity that can be extended to our relationship with nature. Moreover, if we envision ourselves bonded with nature on all levels, we will want to find a substratum for environmental ethics that arises from nature itself. Exploring such a natural moral order complements and enriches our mental systems of obligation imposed on nature. The task is to move away from an

ethic of intellectual distance toward an ethic of participation. This psychology of participation becomes the basis for an ethic when we introduce the idea of worth. As nature writer, John Hay, puts it, worth is defined by participation. At their deepest levels, ethical systems proceed from experiences of worth or value. When we develop greater respect for the worth of non-human nature through participation, we are engaged in environmental ethics. Such an approach to ethics is also aesthetic in that it prompts us to open ourselves to the beauty as well as the worth of the natural world.

Religious traditions have largely fallen short of preparing people for a participatory ethic regarding nature. Outside of the Taoist and American Indian heritages, most long-established religions focus on human and divine relationships usually removed from the sphere of earth itself. As I said earlier, religions use nature to find symbols for that which is beyond nature; often enough nature is simply ornamental or background music for something else. These deficiencies of religions are understandable in historical terms, because only in our time are people coming to understand the great crises of our ecosystems. Jesus, Buddha, and Moses were not aware of worldwide environmental issues. A major task, therefore, of rethinking and re-education faces world religions as they look toward the new millennium. Religions could re-shape their visions to foster an undergirding for a new ecological ethic, a task which is in itself spiritual. For no entity on earth is merely instrumental. A contemplative perspective teaches us that all beings have intrinsic value. But to approach this level of ethical insight, we need to experience again that all things indwell one another in different degrees. Religions could help humans realize that the earth is sacred, that this very world is a miracle.

9. Ecofeminism provides a negative critique of patriarchal structures that have oppressed both women and the environment; this movement also offers positive insights from the experiences of women and nature to enhance ecological spirituality.

The literature of ecofeminism projects a negative assessment of the relationships between women, nature and patriarchy. A good historical example of this can be found in Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature*. She argues forcefully that since at least the sixteenth century, women and nature came to be seen as symbols of disorder to be controlled and exploited by a dominant patriarchy. Later as scientific technology developed, she points to a new image of nature as female that could be controlled and dissected through empirical experiment. This experimentation then legitimated the exploitation of natural resources. The medieval perspective of a chain or hierarchy of being continued into the modern era; in this context, women, partially because of the mysterious and powerful natural process of birthing, were classified as closer to the animal realm. Women, in the patriarchal mind, represented graphically the earthly processes of birth, decay and death. Patriarchal religion also associated women with evil earthly powers during the centuries of witch hunting.

On the positive side, ecofeminists explore the experiences of both women and nature, develop themes of interconnected-ness, immanence and new ways of empowerment. Rosemary Ruether, for example, in expanding on the goddess theme, points out that spirit and matter must not be dichotomized, but rather these terms depict the inside and the outside of the same entity. For her, the earth goddess imagery moves us away from rootless transcendence toward creative immanence in nature. This sense of the immanence of the spiritual and the material is characteristic of various schools of contemporary creation theology. For Starhawk, the goddess is embodied in all

natural systems. Her vision is akin to Lovelock's Gaia thesis, imaging the world as a living, adapting entity. If one cultivates a sense of immanent value in nature, says Starhawk, sources of inner power are unleashed. A person thus empowered can move beyond modern power relationships based on dominance over others and over nature toward a new kind of empowerment of responsibility towards others.

Traditional religions are increasingly impacted by the modern women's movement, which did not originate in religion but in society at large. One of the most important developments in this century has been the growing emancipation of women in terms of education, status and opportunity in the public sphere. The record of institutional religion in this regard is certainly mixed. In more progressive religious circles, women are gradually rising to leadership positions, but among more fundamentalist religions the role and status of women are still marked by subordination. Within a major tradition like Catholicism, for example, both ends of this spectrum can be observed. Women have taken on more pastoral and leadership functions in the church, but they are shut out from positions of higher responsibility because of their gender. Ecofeminism, of course, is just one aspect of a much broader women's movement. But in as much as religious institutions incorporate egalitarian or democratic ways concerning women, they will minimize the patriarchy that has linked women with nature in pejorative modes.

10. Humans must learn to relate to the animal world in ways that lessen cruelty and violence, while enhancing interspecies relationships with animals that benefit the whole biotic community.

Ecological spirituality calls for a reconsideration of our relationship to animals by valorizing them as intrinsically worthy and not simply as commodities for market and other human uses. Factory farming and animal testing for cosmetic purposes inflict great suffering on animals; most of this is hidden from people today who do not reflect on the origins of their packaged meats in the supermarket. Ecologists and nutritionists point out the anomaly of using ten or more times as much in the weight of grain to produce one pound of meat, when more people could be fed directly by the grain products. About 40% of the grain produced in the world is fed to meat animals. Moreover, we know that humans could avoid a number of diseases by eating a more vegetarian diet. Factory farming of animals contributes to the destruction of forests in order to provide grazing areas, while using an extraordinary amount of fresh water, itself a scarce item in the world. Pollution from feed lots contributes to contamination of arable soil and underground water reservoirs. This situation calls for changes on many levels from business to government to education. If humans could come to regard animals with greater respect and understand the ecological outcomes of present systems, they might be more willing to change their life styles for environmental motives.

Traditional religions, with the exception of a few like Hinduism and American Indian spirituality, virtually disregard animals as spiritual beings. One can search the best theological libraries and find little or nothing on this subject. Some of the most sensitive material on the richness of animal life comes not from theologians but from scientists who explore the personal and social life of primates. A few contemporary religious authors, however, spurred on in part by the animal rights movement, have begun to challenge Christian churches on this neglected topic. These writers extend God's covenant with humans to all animals and to the natural world, and they point out God's presence and pain in the suffering of animals. There are many related problems concerning the instrumental use of animals, issues both of ethics and of spirituality, that exceed the scope of this paper. But the general trend in the new

literature about ecology and animals connotes a greater awareness of their intrinsic value and a commitment to lessen the violence surrounding our animal kin. A dramatic example of the latter appeared on public television recently, depicting the domestication of wild horses through tactics of gentleness and communication rather than the extreme violence of past methods of "breaking" horses.

These ten commandments of ecological spirituality summon traditional religions to a profound re-interpretation of their doctrines and practices. This task is only starting, but it should be encouraged, because institutional religion can make valuable contributions to the social survival of the planet. Social survival goes beyond just human welfare to encompass the wellbeing and sustainability of all the biotic systems of this beautiful planet.

Related Titles:

Allan H. Badiner, ed., *Dharma Gaia*, 1990
Michael Barnes, ed., *An Ecology of the Spirit*, 1990
Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 1988
Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story*, 1992
David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 1980
Frans De Waal, *Peacemaking Among Primates*, 1989
Irene Diamond and Gloria F. Orenstein, eds., *Reweaving the World: the Emergence of Ecofeminism*, 1990
Rene Dubos, *So Human an Animal*, 1968
Richard Fragomeni and John Pawlikowski, eds., *The Ecological Challenge*, 1994
Paul Gruchow, *The Necessity of Empty Places*, 1988
Eugene C. Hargrove, *Foundations of Environmental Ethics*, 1989
Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce*, 1993
Stephanie Kaza, *The Attentive Heart*, 1993
Erazim Kohak, *The Embers and the Stars*, 1984
Belden Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, 1988
Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, 1987
Jay B. McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans*, 1989
Jay B. McDaniel, *Earth, Sky, Gods & Mortals*, 1990
Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: an Ecological Theology*, 1993
Ed McGaa, *Mother Earth Spirituality: Native American Paths*, 1990
Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 1980
Judith Plant, *Healing the Wounds: the Promise of Ecofeminism*, 1989
Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 1983
John Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, 1987
Theodore Rozak et al., *Ecopsychology*, 1995
Rosemary R. Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 1992
George Sessions and Bill Devall, *Deep Ecology*, 1985
George Sessions, ed., *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, 1995
Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island*, 1969
Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Sun, My Heart*, 1988

Chapter 8: Eco-Spirituality in a Latin-American Context

an excerpt from

Eco-spirituality: The humble way of caring for the Earth. By Sophie Jakowska Ph.D.
http://www.here-now4u.de/eng/eco-spirituality_-_the_humble_.htm

The Catholic Church in the Dominican Republic has been involved for many years in preaching in favor of nature and the environment, also within the social context of the Church doctrine. In 1987 the Bishops of the Dominican Republic produced an unprecedented document in Spanish on the relation of [people] with nature, which analyzes the situation in their country, presents the doctrine that applies to the issue, and suggests the conduct to prevent further destruction of God's given resources. It is a call for ecological morality and action (Jakowska, 1988a).

It is against this background that we decided to introduce nature among those dedicated to preparing children for the First Communion and teaching religion in local communities. The existence in the Youth Ministry, Patoral Juvenil Arquidiocesana, of an ecologically-oriented group, permitted presenting some ideas.

However, it was an International Consultation on God, People and Nature, held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 1988, that stimulated an experimental project in a small parish in Santo Domingo. It was meant to bring closer to nature, in a theocentric context, a small group of practising Catholics (Jakowska, 1988b).

It became apparent to us that the message of the Pastoral Letter of 1987 needed immediate "translation" into terms intelligible to children and newly alphabetized persons if it is to become known and applied.

In this small community we became convinced that the future of the country depends on individual "ecological conversion", on a drastic change of attitudes towards nature and towards all forms of life, as well as on new ways of using resources, especially food and water.

It appeared obvious that this can be accomplished only by accepting the moral implications of our responsibility for God's heritage, rather than on our use of science and technology, which have failed us to a great extent. We also believe in prayer as an instrument of social change.

A plan was designed to help achieve an individual "ecological conversion" in six simple steps, on the way to collective awareness raising. The plan was used in different format and circumstances: as week-end retreat, as one day retreat, as half-day sessions and even less than one hour treatment, depending on specific needs, in Spanish.

Earth from Space - NASA photo

The most beneficial circumstances were in a chapel-garden setting, with brief introduction to each of the six themes, and individual meditation (in total silence and freedom of using the chapel or the garden) on brief quotations from the psalms, and other parts of the Scriptures.

We tried to bring about the understanding that Nature is the first book of the human kind, and that God reveals Himself in all things and beings that He created, in the universal order, and in the mysterious processes of continuity of creation through evolution.

We pointed out that God requires that we care for this legacy, recognizing how small we are in reference to the universe. Ours is the moral responsibility as heirs of God the Father, as the most privileged creatures on Earth, who recognize the rights and the obligations of each human generations for the just enjoyment of Earth's treasures, preserving the environment clean and healthy, trying to eliminate or to diminish pollution, and even modifying our way of thinking and talking about Nature, applying moral principles to our relations with Nature.

We also stated that God offers to us a legacy for legitimate use, for our sustain, and for the enjoyment of the beauty and other features of the natural world that appeal to our senses. With these privileges we have the obligation to preserve life in every form, not only for our own good, but also for the generations to come.

Theme 1 refer to the greatness and the beauty of Creation, which calls for the adoration and praise of the Lord. Among the quotations are the verses from Psalm 19, 24, 29, 33, selection from Job 12, 7-12 and Revelation 4,11.

The topic is introduced with some familiar examples to which persons may relate easily, as they are asked to seek out the reasons for adoring and praising the Lord of all Creation.

Theme 2 concentrates on the great diversity of the gifts of Creation, what scientists refer to as biological diversity or biodiversity. We must give thanks to the Lord for all we personally experience as gifts of nature, starting with our own life as God's gift, and for all that makes life on Earth possible for people in different parts of the Earth.

Selections for meditation include among other Psalms 104, Psalm 50, and other forms of thanksgiving from the Scriptures. But it is also important to awaken at this point a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation of the natural world.

Earth from Space - NASA photo

Theme 3 brings us to consider the damage caused by humankind to the integrity of Creation, the disappearance of so many plant and animal species, and a profound sorrow for any personal involvement with damaging God's world, and also a shared guilt for all the damage to the environment that occurred in the past and occurs now, e.g. Through area destruction and pollution of air, water, and soil.

We consider here some of the problems close to home, of pollution and of deforestation, of garbage accumulation and excessive consumerism among those who can least afford it. We try to bring in some consideration for defenseless creatures people use and abuse.

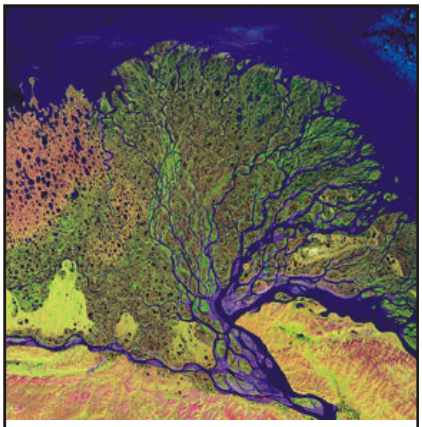
Theme 4 is the essential part of this activity - it must bring about a personal conviction that we cannot continue to be active and/or passive participants in the destruction of the Earth, a sort of "ecological conversion" based on our responsibility to

the Lord, the Creator. This personal act must involve repentance and the sincere commitment to sin no more against Nature.

The selections to guide towards this "ecological conversion" may include quotations from the Pastoral Letter of the Dominican Bishops of 1987, also from Rom. 8,20 and other texts that may inspire us.

Theme 5 is the product of this conversion and determination to collaborate with the Lord in the protection and restoration of Nature. We must accept the responsibility on a personal level and establish a link between God-directed wisdom to carry out His work.

Psalm 104,30 etc. may inspire us to consider some matters to prepare us for a wiser use of natural resources, the true gifts of the Earth. We may also consider our role in terms of the document of Vatican II called Gaudium et Spes, 35. We may orient towards developing solidarity with the Earth and its creatures.



Earth from Space - NASA photo

Theme 6 calls for us to translate our Faith into action. This is often considered beyond individual power because people think environment can be saved only by government or other massive effort. But we often forget that small humble acts may lead to great changes that are appreciated by many. This is the moment where the entire program must come to fruition in small acts on personal level that will add up to visible appreciable results.

We may seek inspiration in 2 Cor. 6, 1-2, or in Isaias 58,12. Psalm 84 may help us to meditate. We must remember that every creature is here to serve, in life or in death, the rest of the living community. We, too, are called to serve and to improve the natural environment for which we are responsible before God our Lord. We cannot achieve perfection without service to others, including the Earth that needs us. The Pastoral Letter of 1987, 55, may help us consider our role and direct our thoughts towards many small ways in which we can contribute.

How can we judge the value and the effectiveness of this modest program aimed at raising of individual spiritual awareness of the natural world?

This depends on many factors, on the leaders and the participants, on the frequency of the "good" message and the sincerity in the acceptance of the six guiding steps toward change. It may be manifested in small victories in the war between the material and the spiritual forces.

Today, in growing cities, full of rural "refugees," where the quality of life is rapidly spiralling down, we are only armed with prayer.

We also have experience that tells us what the Earth needs and how it can be helped and healed.

Yet, we face the ignorance and greed of powerful modern "pirates" who constantly attempt against the remaining natural green areas and bodies of water still left relatively healthy to sustain the future health of its growing human population. Every day we learn about destruction and pollution, and public indifference to the slaughter of the sacred.

But green is the color of Hope, and we must be sustained by this virtue, necessary to

carry on our mission. Only with Hope, and our Faith to guide us, we can hold on to our values and pray for the spiritual strength to resist the attacks against our Mother Earth.

Permit me to finish with a prayer, reproduced in Sacred Spaces, a publication of Canadian Coalition for Ecology, Ethics and Religion (Jakowska, 1993).

> Lord, you gave us this planet on which we live with all it contains as a common inheritance to share with other creatures and other human beings.
>
> Help us understand the mysteries of nature in order to respect your Creation and to use your creatures according to your laws.
>
> Help us use your gifts wisely and justly, thinking not only of ourselves but also of other people in other parts of the world who have the right to share them.
>
> Do not permit that through our greed and negligence the Earth becomes poorer in forests and rivers, in plants and animals, and other wonders of nature that glorify you with their presence.
>
> Help us love your Creation in every form of matter and in every form of life, but especially in our human brothers and sisters.
>
> Help us serve one another as other creatures do according to your will, using wisely what we may use of your gifts and sharing them with all the living creatures of our planet.
>
> Help us preserve our environment clean and healthy for all and make the right decisions to restore what has been destroyed,
>
> So that we may serve you better in harmony and peace with nature. Amen.

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Chapter 9: An Introduction to Native American Spirituality

by Donna Ladkin

from the GreenSpirit web site
http://www.greenspirit.org.uk/resources/NatAmerSpirit.htm

There were over one thousand different tribal peoples[1] indigenous to the North American continent when Europeans first arrived in that territory. Each tribe had its own set of festivals, rituals, and spiritual beliefs, therefore to write of 'Native American spirituality' as one entity would be erroneous. However, common features are apparent across tribal peoples, pointing to some of the assumptions which inform the spiritual beliefs and practices of those indigenous to the North American continent[2]. Spirituality played a central role in the lives of many of these peoples, for as Angie Debo writes:

> he [the Indian] was deeply religious. The familiar shapes of earth, the changing sky, the wild animals he knew, were joined with his own spirit in mystical communion. The powers of nature, the personal quest of the soul, the acts of daily life, the solidarity of the tribe -- all were religious, and were sustained by dance and ritual.[3]

This piece attempts to highlight some of the key aspects which Native American peoples share in terms of their spirituality. There is much that has been written in this area, and the brief list of suggested books I offer may provide a starting point for those wishing to pursue this area further.

Land-Based Spirituality

Above all else, Native American spirituality is a land-based spirituality. The relationship between the land and the people was one of mystical inter-dependence. Perhaps this is best expressed by Geronimo, the Apache leader when he says:

> For each tribe of men Usen created He also made a home. In the land for any particular tribe He placed whatever would be best for the welfare of that tribe…thus it was in the beginning: the Apaches and their homes each created for the other by Usen Himself. When they are taken from these homes they sicken and die.[4]

This quote provides a clue to the reason why there should be a proliferation of so many different festivals, rituals and rites among Native American tribes. Each tribe's rituals were tied to the specific qualities of the land the tribe called 'home'. For example, Great Plains Indians such as the Sioux and the Apache celebrated elaborate festivals worshipping the sun and the great sky they experienced in their daily lives. Native Americans who were agriculturalists worshipped the corn god, and for those peoples who relied upon the buffalo for their food, clothing, shelter and implements, the buffalo played a central role in their cosmology.

One of the difficult aspects of this relationship with the land to understand for Westerners is the literalness of the connection between the Native Americans and their land. Debo suggests, for instance,

> When Garry, of the Spokanes of eastern Washington said, 'I was born by these waters. The earth here is my mother,' he is not using

> a poetic figure of speech; he was stating what he felt to be the literal truth.[5]

Perhaps a place to start in developing an understanding for this interconnection between the Native American and the land, is to consider his mythology around Creation, and how it is human beings and the land first came to know one another.

Native American Creation Mythology

Although many differences can be seen between the creation myths of different tribes, two similarities stand out in sharp contrast to those of us who grew up with Judeo-Christian creation mythology: 1) there is no concept of original sin, no initial wrongdoing by humans which has resulted in our being cast out of the place we truly belong, the Earth home, and 2) there is no 'Kingdom of Heaven' awaiting us which is our true spiritual home, with time on Earth to be used as a 'testing ground.'

In his book, *The Earth Shall Weep*, James Wilson expands on this point:

> Yet for all their range and variety, these stories often have a similar feel to them. When you set them alongside the biblical Genesis, the common features suddenly appear in sharp relief; they seem to glow with the newness and immediacy of creation, offering vivid explanations for the behaviour of an animal, the shape of a rock or a mountain, which you can still encounter in the here and now. Many tribes and nations call themselves, in their own languages, 'the first people', the 'original people', or the 'real people', and their stories place them firmly in a place of special power and significance…Far from telling them that they are locked out of Eden, the Indians' myths confirm that (unless they have been displaced by European contact and settlement) they still live in the place for which they were made; either the site of their own emergence or creation, or a 'Promised Land' which they have attained through long migration.[6]

Critically, as opposed to those of us who grew up influenced by the Western Christian tradition, the Native American experienced earth as HOME. The Earth is perfectly adapted to all of our requirements as human beings. The implications of this are huge in the way in which the Native American treated the Earth from day to day. First of all, the 'Kingdom of Heaven' is actually happening here and now, not in some mythical place in the future. It also means the earth is definitely NOT a dumping ground, a waystation on our way somewhere 'better'.

Native Americans' creation myths also portray a different understanding about the place humans occupy vis-à-vis their animal, plant and mineral co-inhabitants of the earth. Rather than being given 'dominion' over all other creatures, the animals, plants and minerals are companions to learn from and live with. The stories stress the mutuality and interdependence between people and other forms of life. There is a mutual respectfulness required when interacting with trees, birds, and plants, and also natural forces such as the wind and the rain.

Finally, these myths inform us that creation itself is an ongoing process. All that is, is part of an ongoing Creation Story, it didn't just happen millions of years ago and end there. Most importantly, the Spirit that first infused the world is still with us now, and can be experienced as 'immanence', spirit which imbues all things.

Immanence

According to Native American spirituality, everything is imbued with spirit. Furthermore, there is a constant dialogue between all of these manifestations of creation.. In order to survive, human beings must understand this dialogue, and they must be careful not to insult the spirits of the wind, or the earth. Everything is seen to have its own volition, and spirit. Consciousness is also not just the province of human beings in this world view. Winona LaDuke articulates this belief when she writes:

> According to our way of looking, the world is animate. This is reflected in our language, in which most nouns are animate...Natural things are alive, they have a spirit. Therefore, when we harvest wild rice on our reservation we always offer tobacco to the earth because, when you take something, you must always give thanks to its spirit for giving itself to you.[7]

Perhaps John Mohawk most eloquently expresses the indigenous relationship to creation when he writes:

> The natural world is our bible. We don't have chapters and verses; we have trees and fish and animals. The creation is the manifestation of energy through matter. Because the universe is made up of manifestations of energy, the options for that manifestation are infinite. But we have to admit that the way it has manifested itself is organised. In fact, it is the most intricate organisation. We can't know how we impact on its law; we can talk only about how its law impacts upon us. We can make no judgement about nature.
>
> The Indian sense of natural law is that nature informs us and it is our obligation to read nature as you would a book, to feel nature as you would a poem, to touch nature as you would yourself, to be a part of that and step into its cycles as much as you can.[8]

Although within the indigenous cosmology everything is endowed with spirit, it is also recognised that certain landscapes, land formations, and types of matter embody a special quality of sacredness. Native American cultures are full of stories about the particular significance of certain rocks or hills, and these are often used in key rituals and rites of passage. These places, especially mountaintops or isolated areas of wilderness, are where, in indigenous cultures, initiation ceremonies take place, people go to fast and pray, and visionary dreams are revealed. Unfortunately, this kind of sensibility is lost on modern peoples, who consider such beliefs to be nothing more than 'superstitions'.

Arthur Versluis, in his book, *Sacred Earth*, challenges us 'moderns' to think again, when he tells the story of a huge water tank being built in the Shunganunga Bluff, overlooking Topeka, Kansas,

> A sacred high place, where for ages people have gone to fast and be alone with the spirits - a point at which above and below meet - must not be dug into and damaged, for it is charged with spiritual power. When a sacred place is desecrated -- which is what the great disk-like water tank gouged in the side of the hill entails -- one can expect that there will be consequences. One can feel the disturbed energy in the air around the water tower; there is wild

> graffiti completely encircling the tank, and everywhere around that bluff one feels the sense of desecration.[9]

Which brings us full-circle, back to the basis of Native American spirituality, which is the relationship between human beings, the land, and all of Creation. To end, I'd like to offer this quote from Weatenatenamy, Young Chief of the Cayuse nation, which seems to encapsulate this feeling which is at the heart of Native American spirituality:

> I wonder if the ground has anything to say: I wonder if the ground is listening to what is said…the earth says, God has placed me here. The Earth says, that God tells me to take care of the Indians on the earth; the Earth says to the Indians that stop on the Earth feed them right. God named the roots that he should feed the Indians on; the water speaks the same way … the grass says the same thing… The Earth and water and grass say God has given our names and we are told those names; neither the Indians nor the Whites have a right to change those names, the Earth says, God has placed me here to produce all that grows upon me, the trees, fruit, etc. The same way the Earth says, it was from her man was made. God, on placing them on the Earth, desired them to take good care of the earth do each other no harm. God said.[10]

Suggestions for Further Reading:

(In addition to those references which are footnoted, the following would be of interest to those who would like to pursue this area further:

Jane Alison (Ed.). *Native Nations, Journeys in American Photography* (Barbican Art Gallery, London: 1999).

Richard Erdoes & Alfonso Ortiz (Eds.). *American Indian Myths & Legends* (Pimlico, 1984).

Vine Deloria, Jr. *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Fulcrum Publishing, 1994).

Alice Marriott & Carol Rachlin (Eds.). *American Indian Mythology* (Mentor Books, 1968).

Carol Lee Sanchez. *Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral*. In Carol J Adams (Ed.). *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (Continuum, 1999), pp. 207-228.

Steve Wall. *Wisdom's Daughters: Conversations with Women Elders of Native America* (HarperPerennial, 1993).

Notes

1. Angie Debo, (*op cit*, below) estimates there were over two hundred and fifty different tribes in what is now the state of California, alone.

2. Although 'Native Americans' existed on North, Central and South American territories, this piece uses as its basis those peoples of the North American continent.

3. Angie Debo. *The History of the Indians of the United States* (Pimlico,1995), p.4.

4. Lee Miller, (ed.). *From the Heart, Voices of the American Indian* (Pimlico, 1997).

5. Debo, *op cit*, p.4.

6. James Wilson. *The Earth Shall Weep* (Picador, 1998), pp8-9.

7. Winona LaDuke. *Resurgence*, Sept/Oct, Issue 178, p.8.

8. John Mohawk. *Resurgence*, Sept/Oct, Issue 178, p11.

9. Arthur Versluis. *Sacred Earth; The Spiritual Landscape of Native America* (Inner Traditions, 1992).

10. Miller, *op cit*, p.333.

Chapter 10:
What Spirituality is All About

by Rabbi Michael Lerner

The first few decades of the 21st century may see the deniers of Spirit retaining cultural hegemony—they will continue to deny and ridicule those who champion Spirit, to define them as the enemy, even as the harbingers of a new Dark Age.

The forces of cynicism will continue to insist that spirituality is fine "in its place," but that it has no relevance to "the real world," that it is not a fit subject for the evening news, for the world of public policy, for the corporate boardrooms, or for the shaping of our culture. But all that can change.

In fact, it has already begun to change. There are growing signs of a spiritual renaissance in western societies as more and more people seek some way to understand their world and find moorings that are not provided by the one-dimensional media, the technocratic politicians, or the frenetic religion of marketplace competition and the consumption of material goods. No matter how often people hear that salvation is at hand if only they get a better car, a newer computer, faster access to the World Wide Web, a more splendid cell phone that can read their e-mail and even put them into television contact with people around the world—the emptiness at the center of being and the nagging questions about what all this frantic life is really about push more and more people to seek some form of spiritual life.

One reason this spiritual turn is taking place right now is the growing awareness of impending ecological catastrophe in the 21st century. By viewing the planet as a resource to be exploited, by denying that we could possibly have a collective responsibility to treat the earth as sacred ground, the champions of ever-expanding growth have created a worldwide ecological crisis. The facts of this crisis have been available to us for at least the past fifty years. Yet the economic, political and media forces that control basic decision making have been unable to come to grips with the way their thinking has contributed to this massive danger to our planet.

The very people who claim to be the embodiment of rationality are unable to provide us with the intellectual categories we need to reorganize the way we misuse the planet's resources or to stop the way we are destroying its air and water. The logic of narrow self-interest mitigates against ecological consciousness. For the person who has learned the logic of the marketplace, why not maximize one's own pleasures without regard to the consequences for the future? After all, we will be dead before the worst of the ecological crisis hits, and when it does, it will hit poor people in the Third World countries far more than it will the American elites. If you don't have categories that encourage a spiritual as opposed to a narrow utilitarian attitude toward the earth, if you don't have an intellectual framework that can justify social responsibility, how in the world do you imagine you are ever going to convince people growing up in a society that proclaims "he who dies with the most toys wins" to change their patterns of consumption?

You won't… Which is one major reason lots of people who care about ecology are also opening to spirituality.

What you won't hear on the evening news is that people are increasingly turning to spirituality at least in part because they suspect that in the spiritual world there is a different way of orienting to reality, a way that is based on awe, reverence, and a deep appreciation of

the Unity of All Being—and that these spiritual categories are necessary if we wish to produce a society that behaves in ecologically sustainable ways.

All around you, people are beginning to reject the old societal notions that were most spiritually deadening: that there isn't enough, that we are all separate from each other, that to get ahead we have to leave others behind, and that some of us are superior to others. Instead, millions of people are recognizing that there is enough, that we are not separate, that we are all One.

Spirit Matters—and more and more people are noticing.

So, what exactly is Spirituality?

Spirituality is a lived experience, a set of practices and a consciousness that aligns us with a sense of sanctity of All Being. It usually involves:

- an experience of love and connection to the world and others,
- a recognition of the ultimate Unity of All Being, and through that, of the preciousness of the earth and the sanctity of every human being on the planet,
- a conviction that the universe is not negative or neutral but tilts toward goodness and love,
- a joyous and compassionate attitude toward oneself and others,
- a deep trust that there is enough for all and that every human being deserves to share equally in the planet's abundance and is equally responsible for shaping our future,
- a sense that the world is filled with a conscious spiritual energy that transcends the categories and concepts that govern reality and inclines the world toward freedom, creativity, goodness, connectedness, love, and generosity,
- a deep inner knowing that our lives have meaning through our innermost being as manifestations of ultimate goodness of the universe (or, in theistic terms, through our connection to and service of God).

This is what spirituality is about.

Religions on the other hand, are the various historical attempts to organize a set of doctrines, rituals, and specific behaviors that are supposed to be "the right way to live."

Some religions may embody spiritual-ity. Many have encompassed spiritual moments or spiritual practices at one time or another. But many religions have little to offer today in the way of spirituality, except in isolated corners of their traditions.

Religion may exist without spirituality. Spirituality may emerge without or divorced from religious communities. Many people who have been persecuted by religious institutions have been those who embodied a spiritual world view. Many religious leaders speak the language of spirituality but feel threatened by those who have a genuinely spiritual outlook. Embedded in systems of power and control, they have no use for those who talk about sharing and who embody generosity toward other human beings, not just those who are part of "our" group.

Some people reject religion entirely because of this hypocrisy. But another option is to think of spirituality as a higher developmental stage—a stage in which fears and hurts of the past are overcome and we open ourselves up to the goodness of the universe and respond to it with awe and wonder and love.

This article was printed in New Renaissance, Volume 10, No. 2 and was excerpted, with permission , from Spirit Matters by Michael Lerner. The editor of Tikkun magazine, and author of the acclaimed book The Politics of Meaning, Michael Lerner has been described by some as America's preeminent Jewish intellectual, and by others as one of the most significant spiritual innovators of our time.

Chapter 11: My Journey Into the Heart of Nature

A Visionary Artist Describes Her Path
Paintings and text by Francene Hart
(Adapted from text & images available at www.francenehart.com. Please visit site for more images, info, cards & prints of paintings.)

Life is magical and also impermanent. In June 2001 I took a giant leap of faith and followed inner guidance and relocated to the Big Island of Hawaii. For a shy reclusive artist this constituted absolutely stepping to the edge, yet I know that this is exactly where I need to be at this time in my life.

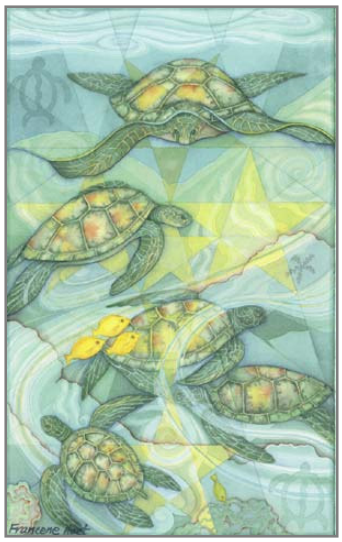
For the previous 25 years I made my home in the woodlands of northern Wisconsin with husband and son, hand built a beautiful log home and gardens, and little by little created a personal paradise in that beautiful forest.

Forest Cathedral

Listening to the voices of nature helped me find my own artistic voice. The trees and animals, the water and rocks, sun and wind, moon and stars all speak clearly if we take time to listen. I seek to honor this connection by creating works of art that celebrate these experiences of nature's wisdom.

Living in a place with a vital Native American community helped me realize their connection to Mother Earth is also something that lives in my bones. This kindled exploration of indigenous cultures, both of the local Ojibway people, but also first peoples from around the planet.

I returned to a childhood fascination with the mystery of the Maya, people of Mexico and Guatemala. Several trips to the region, and exploration of Maya sacred sites deepened respect for that ever unfolding mystery.



Gentle Spirits

An incredible journey to Nepal , including a transformational trek over an 18000-foot pass in the Himalayas, demonstrated to me the power of spirit, both in my life and in the amazingly beautiful people of that ancient land. Namaste.

From there it was a short leap to the study of shamanism. I have been blessed to work with native shaman from Peru, Paraguay and Ecuador as well as several modern shaman teacher/healers from this country.

Ka

These studies and additional exploration into metaphysical thought, yoga and Sacred Geometry have deepened the realization that we exist in a multi-dimensional reality and that we can access other dimensions in various ways.

I have developed a love of Sacred Geometry that has become, in a sense, a pilgrimage. It is a vast and fascinating field of study. It has added another layer to the artmaking I have done before, and a piece of left brained information that has brought great excitement and balance into my life and constant inspiration to my artmaking.

Swimming With Dolphins

I now live on an active volcano named Hualalai on the Big Island of Hawaii. I know that I was summoned by spirit to this incredibly activated pinnacle on the earth grid to be a part of birthing new consciousness. I honor that sacred responsibility. Exploration of the culture and beauty of this island paradise unfolds as daily wonder.

When I came to Hawaii I considered myself a non-swimmer yet have since become a "born again mermaid". Being in the ocean and swimming with her multitude of creatures, including the spinner dolphins and sea turtles has become an important part of personal wellness and one of the greatest joys I have experienced in this lifetime. I am immensely grateful to my mermaid "sistahs" who have helped me become comfortable in the ocean.

I also have come to realize that this salty medium is the planetary superconductor and that as we "pray peace" and offer the vibration of universal love into the ocean it is quickly transmitted around the world. Imagine the possibilities.

All of these influences are evident in my paintings. It is my intention to honor the many gifts that life has provided through the visions I have been given. I am heartened to have my paintings and prints hang in the offices and sacred spaces of healers and seekers in far flung places. It honors me greatly to know that the passion and intention I put into my artmaking also touches their lives and serves as a catalyst for healing and transformation. I hold in esteem and offer gratitude to all of nature, my traveling companions, metaphysical teachers, dear friends, spirit guides and to those who I left behind in Wisconsin.

June Friends

It is with great humility from an ever opening heart space that I embrace this sacred journey. My intention remains to follow my passion and life path as an artist and to continue to create paintings that bring forth healing and transformation for myself and for the planet.

Francene Hart

Chapter 12

An Ecology of Devotion

A Personal Exploration of Reverence for Life
EarthLight Magazine, Issue 49, Summer 2003

revised February, 2004

by Dennis Rivers

Somewhere in his essays about the ecological crises of our time, I remember Wendell Berry writing "What we do not love, we will not save." One of the many possible implications that I draw from his statement is that the eco-spiritual life is breath-like: the more we want to reach out to nurture the web of life (and save our own species along the way), the more deeply we will need to journey into our own hearts to connect with love's sustaining energy.

Although Planet Earth needs love the way a person lost in the desert needs water, love cannot be summoned by a simple act of will. Love, in my experience, is not like an object already in our possession, that we could give if we chose to do so. Love seems to me much more like a garden that will eventually bear fruit if cultivated in a spirit of apprenticeship, taking the time to learn about each tree and plant.

In this essay I will explore a five-fold vision of what might be called an ecology of devotion: a way of seeing how our various loves, concerns, gratitudes, adorations and celebrations are all part of a larger organic unity.

These many loves and concerns call to us, often in a chaotic din, urging us forward in many directions, appealing to us at many levels: friends need comfort, a new baby is born, the forests are dying, the dolphins are beaching, millions of landmines wait silently for human or animal footstep. Where and how shall we turn toward life and begin (or continue) the labors of "mending the world," the *Tikkun Olam* of Jewish tradition, which would also constitute the mending of our own broken hearts? As I have experienced the web of life being threatened by the explosive mix of greed, fear and technology, I have been challenged to find inside myself a love stronger than all fears, a deeper reverence for life that could be my compass through the chaos of a world unraveling.

Pilgrim Marion C. Honors

Over the past year, in dialogue with a community of supportive friends called Turn Toward Life, I have been exploring a kind of mental rosary of our various loves and devotions, reverences that span the spectrum from gratitude to care to adoration. Like a garland with five flowers arranged in a circle, this five-fold rosary holds the various loves that struggle to be born in me. Here is how I see them, and how I will discuss them in the pages that follow:

reverence for the life that lives within us,

reverence for the life that unfolds between us,

reverence for the life that surrounds and sustains us,

reverence for all the life of the future,

reverence for the source of all life

1. Reverence for the life that lives within us.

The closest life for which we can have reverence is the life that lives within us, our breathing, moving seeing, hearing, tasting, hoping, loving, yearning, and reaching; all the direct experiences of being alive, and those moments, often out in nature, when we suddenly feel good about being alive. I remember as a child the thrill, the infinite, bodily well-being, of running down a long beach near my house.

The Universe has labored mightily that we might breathe, and see the light of morning. The calcium, carbon and iron that support these processes were made in the hearts of ancient stars. The caloric energy that lets us run is compressed starlight, the light of the sun conveyed to us from leaf to corn and wheat through countless hands.

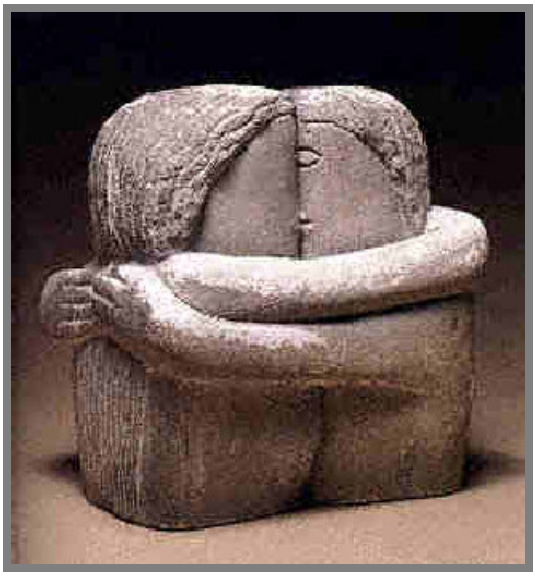
I have never felt more alive in my life than when I have been in love. For most of my life I took these feelings as revelations about the person with whom I was in love. Only in recent years have I begun to realize that these feeling were also saying something to me about my capacity to love, inviting me to get more acquainted with my own heart, with this intense aliveness. How is it that compressed starlight found this way of expressing itself? At times in my life I have complained bitterly to the Universe that love was not more evident in life. At some point the gestalt shifted and I suddenly realized how extraordinary it was that a universe composed mostly of rock and gas could have given birth to any experience of love, anywhere. And even more extraordinary was the fact that I was a carrier of this capacity, however clumsily I might carry it.

Our seemingly mundane existence, looked at from this angle, is a miracle of mind-boggling proportions. However ordinary or unworthy we may feel, we are nonetheless recipients of this galactic grace. Coming to understand how much we have received, beyond any measure of earning (for who could earn sunlight, or a billion years of evolution), sets the stage for us to give something back to life out of the fullness of gratitude, delight and awe. We are the Milky Way with arms and legs, eyes and ears, and hearts yearning to love. What will we create with the creative energy that the Universe has poured into us?

2. Reverence for the life that lives between us

There is a paradox at the heart of human unfolding: We can only love others to the degree that we are capable of loving ourselves. But, on the other hand, we are not born loving ourselves; we develop self-love by internalizing the love of all those who have loved us. As infants, we do not make our own food; neither do we make our own love.

Later in life, having been given the template, we may become bestowers of kindness; having been fed, we will feel the rightness of feeding others; having been nurtured by someone along the way, we will find a way to nurture others.



The Kiss Constantin Brancusi

Like day and night, summer and winter, the nature that lives and breathes through us is full of polarities. I come into the fullness of MY personal being in relation to many YOUs. To cherish life at a deeper level is to accept this web of interwovenness, of land and sea, yes… of lake and forest, yes…but also, of <u>you</u> and <u>me</u>. This

fragile human co-arising is as much a part of nature as spiderweb, wildebeeste or waterfall.

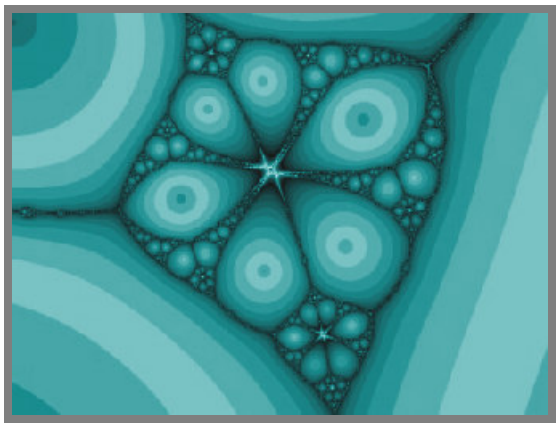
The life that emerges between us… The partnership of bodies brings forth new bodies. The partnership of minds, brings forth new minds. Hearts joined in love invite everyone to love more. "Love one another," Jesus said, "as I have loved you," not only counseling his followers but also describing the path love travels down the generations, if we let it, because we let it. So also do hatred and oppression travel down the generations.

And how beyond the circle of our human lives, one well might ask, is this related to ecology and reverence for life? In more ways than one would imagine. Perhaps the most dramatic link is that our human conflicts are having catastrophic impacts on other species. Driven by greed and unskilled in sharing, human beings are emptying the sea of fish and emptying the mountains of trees. Elephants in the jungles and forests of Indochina step on landmines just as people do. Our fears of our enemies, and their fears of us, have left the world awash in nuclear waste, which damages the gene-pools of human and animal alike. Ultimately, as Wendell Berry observes, we treat the natural world with the same love or disregard that we bestow on one another:

> *The Earth is all we have in common. We cannot damage it without damaging those with whom we share it. There is an uncanny resemblance between our behavior with each other and our behavior toward the earth. The willingness to exploit one becomes the willingness to exploit the other. It is impossible to care for each other more or differently than we care for the earth.*

To cherish the web of life, to protect life, it is now clear that we must necessarily face the shadow side of our own temperaments and our own cultures, the life that unfolds between us. For it is we humans, moved by various greeds and fears in relation to one another, who make and use these technologies of contamination and death.

The extremity of our predicament -- that we are destroying our own life-support system as we drive many species over the brink of extinction -- draws us toward the life that lives between us, not only as a source of despair, but also as a source of hope. Just as it is true that two together can carry a larger object than either would be able to carry alone, it is also true that in the company of supportive friends we can bear sorrows that are more than one heart can contain. I have become deeply convinced that creating an ecologically sustainable civilization will require creating a web of emotionally sustaining friendships, full of gratitude, listening and celebration. Gandhi would say start with yourself, be the change you want to see. A more intimate way of expressing this might be to say, embody the love, gratitude and compassion you want to promote.

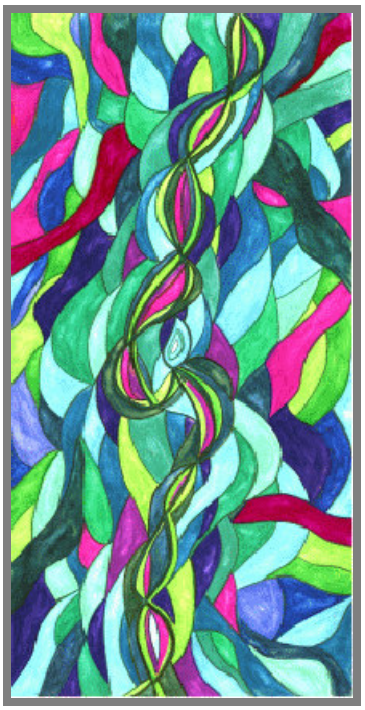


Fractal Mark King

3. Reverence for the life that surrounds and sustains us

This is the dimension of reverence for life that is most familiar to us, having been lived and expressed so beautifully by such eco-advocates as Albert Schweitzer, Rachel Carson, Jane Goodall, John Muir, Matthew Fox, Joanna Macy and Thomas Berry. Along with being great lovers of nature, these guiding lights were and are great students of nature.

A path of devotion in relation to the web of life around us is something more than just having a well of good feelings toward all creatures great and small, although that would be a great place to start. Feelings arise out of understandings. The more we under-stand about the history of each bite of food we take, the more likely we are to be filled with awe and gratitude. The more we know of fruit trees, the more each peach feels like a miracle. But if all of this is true, and the path toward a respectful partnership with the rest of nature is so straightforward, why is the world still falling apart. What is the problem? What follows is one approach to an answer.



Life Lila-Hog

Early in the twentieth century, the philosopher Martin Buber introduced what may be one of the most important distinctions in the history of human thought. Buber proposed that human beings do not have a sense of "I" in isolation. Rather, we have a sense of "I" in relation to someone or something. When we relate to another person as having experiences, feelings and purposes in the same way we do, we have an "I-Thou" sense of self. We strive to acknowledge the other person as an end in themselves, not merely as a means to the satisfaction of our own needs or desires. When we relate to an object that we experience as having no will, desire or consciousness of its own, we have an "I-It" sense of ourselves in relation to that object. We see the object as material for our use, as is often the case in relation to wood, food, oil, the ground that bears food, and members of ethnic groups other than our own. Buber acknowledged that we could not survive without using at least some of the objects in our world to sustain our lives. But he felt that we become truly human only when we are able to grant humanness to others, are able to feel others as worthy of our care and not just see others as sources of care, food, resources, power, status, etc. A healthy person would shift back and forth as appropriate, not treating a chair as if it were a person, but also not treating a person as if he or she were a chair.

The decades that followed the publication of Buber's book, *I and Thou*, developed the "I-Thou" and "I-It" ideas in two important ways. Within the field of human development, significant thinkers concluded that the ability to value other people as ends in themselves, distinct from oneself and yet worthy of care, was one of the central features of mature human development. And in the field of psychotherapy, there was a related realization that the inability to feel the personhood of others, as a consequence of severely disturbed early relationships, was one of the major character disorders of our era (including the "narcissistic personality"). People suffering from narcissistic personality disorder experience an inflated sense of entitlement in which everyone and everything are reduced to the status of furniture to be used at will. (Think of a mountain with all the trees cut down.)

I have given this extended introduction to Buber's ideas about the "I-Thou" and "I-It" ways of being a person because they describe the central area of problems for people in societies experiencing runaway industrial-ization. Runaway industrial-ization turns every person, plant and animal on Planet Earth into a heap of inert raw material, into psychologically dead stuff, all the better to plan for how it may all be used for the only source of purpose and value left in the world: profits in capitalist societies, the triumph of the state in totalitarian ones. This is the "I-It" sense of self writ large across the world, leaving behind a trail

of clear-cut mountains and flooded lowlands. Capitalism, communism and totalitarianism agree deeply on one thing: living nature is really just dead stuff in motion, therefore we may do with it whatever we please.

The problem with this view is that, from a Buberian perspective, in "deadening" or de-personalizing the world in order to use it for our ends, we have deadened and depersonalized ourselves. We harden ourselves to not feel the pain of whomever and whatever we use, exploit and/or consume. And once having thus hardened, deadened and depersonalized ourselves, no amount of cars and refrigerators and 60-inch television sets can ever make us happy. We may not even feel the ecological cliff toward which we are racing.

In his book, *The Dream of the Earth*, Thomas Berry describes how interwoven our personal development is with the web of life on Planet Earth. To grow up in a world that includes whales and tigers and elephants is to have evoked in oneself a very specific sense of beauty and majesty. When those creatures are gone, that specific sense will be gone, and the personhood of humanity will be radically diminished.

Seeing the no-win nature of the "I-It" path can be a shock, but can also free us to explore more sustainable and fulfilling ways of living. There are two sides to this realization: a warning and a promise. The warning is that whatever we inflict upon the world around us we inflict upon ourselves in a variety of ways. The promise, full of transformational possibilities, is also two-fold:

First, the more value, beauty, depth of experience and purpose that we recognize and nurture in the world around us, the more of these we will be able to recognize and nurture in ourselves and in one another.

And the converse is also true:the more value, beauty, depth of experience and purpose that we recognize and nurture in one another, the more of these we will be able to recognize and nurture in the larger web of life around us.

This suggests to me an almost-haiku:

start where you are
the path
is wherever you are standing

4. Reverence for all the life of the future

Like a pregnant woman big with child, the web of life today holds all future generations of life on Earth. Life blossoms forth through an endless spiral of eternal pregnancy, birthgiving, nurturing, coming together (of earth and seed, of egg and sperm) to begin again, and dying away to make way for the new.

Pregnant Woman Sigrid Herr

Into this steady progression of ebbs and flows something new has entered, something that holds both promise and peril. In recent eras of evolution, *evolution itself has begun to evolve,* evolving from adaptation to adaptability, from the perfectly adapted claw to the hand and brain that can learn many new ways of holding many new things, and the evolution of a temperament to love one's offspring and teach them these new ways of holding.

We humans are not alone in this development; we share this evolution toward learning and creativity with many species, especially our primate brothers and sisters, chimpanzees, gorillas and bobonos. And we are

far from fully understanding of the intelligence of creatures quite different from us, such as dolphins and bee colonies. But we have gone further on this path of open adaptability, as far as we know, than any other species, and therefore our freedom and capacity to make catastrophic mistakes is much greater than that of any other species. No other creature, for example, leaves behind leaking piles of radioactive waste, slowly destroying the genetic integrity of all life as the radioactive contaminants circulate more and more widely through the biosphere.

Because we alone have developed the power to destroy all life, we alone are challenged to love all creatures intensely enough to want to save them, to love all creatures intensely enough to be willing to restrain our own appetites, to understand our own hatred and greeds. That, I submit to you, is a very intense devotion, a trans-formational gratitude, and, paradoxically, in this era of technological might, that all-embracing love has become the assignment of every human heart. As the cosmologist Brian Swimme has noted, from the point of view of species extinction our present era is the worst time in the last sixty-five million years. Without some deep transformation, it is not clear how life on Earth will continue. If there are going to be living plants and birds and fish and human beings in the future, it will be because we work to protect the seeds of their existence today, and the land and water that will make their lives possible. It will be because we open our hearts to love them now.

5. Reverence for the source of all life

In this exploration of reverence for life, I have deliberately shifted among a family of related words: love, reverence, devotion, gratitude, respect, service, celebration, nurture, protection, adoration. Other times and cultures would add such words as *agape*, *bhakti, karuna* and *caritas*. I used this wide variety of words out of my feeling that reverence for life is larger and more complex than any one word would suggest. I am deeply convinced, for example, that when we reach toward the source of all life, we are also reaching toward the ultimate source of love, because love is the core of our aliveness. In a fertile arc of self-referentiality, our capacity to love life is something that life itself is exploring and developing!

As children it is very difficult for us to imagine how we might have come out of our parents' bodies. Later we understand that, but struggle to bring into focus the way our personalities emerged from the matrix of personalities surrounding us when we were young. Eventually, we face the deepest mystery of all: how all of us, the family of life together, are continuously emerging out of the womb of an endlessly pregnant Universe. In the galactic unfolding of life, the life webs and planets that may survive are those who learn to love and nurture the ongoing miracle of their own co-emergence!

Spiral Galaxy Image Courtesy NASA

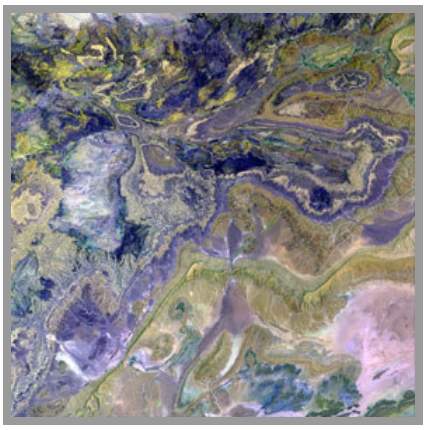
As our reverence for life deepens, it often deepens to include that something (or someone) larger than us, of which our lives are felt to be a creative and loving expression. The influence of science over the last few centuries has been to rule out such feelings of connectedness to something larger, because the science of that era could only look <u>down</u> the scale of connectedness at what were our "parts" and how those "parts" were hitched together. The emerging science looks both up and down and asks: what larger

system enfolds this element (you and me), and how does this element function in relation to that larger system? Parts imply wholes, as your hand implies every bit of the rest of you, raising the extraordinary questions of what *we together* imply and what life implies.

We may never be able to fully grasp the larger system that enfolds us, but we have many hints and many suggestive analogies. Consider the fern in your garden. The tiniest part of a fern leaf bears the shape of the entire fern branch. When we turn to nature, we find that there are many such "fractal" examples, from trees to rivers to blood vessels, in which the very small mirrors the shape and function of the very large. So it is much more thinkable today than it was half a century ago, for us to feel that the noblest impulses in us express a larger nobility that enfolds us.

In my own life my sense of "the larger something of which I am a part" have been deeply influenced by the teaching, affirmed by many faiths using different vocabularies, that "God is love, and whoever dwells in love, dwells in God and God in them" -- a truly fractal mysticism. For me, this teaching of lovingkindness, and the people who have embodied this lovingkindness, complete the spiral ecology of devotion.

In reaching toward the infinite,
I am brought back to my own heart,
to the life that lives within me as love,
to the life reaches toward people and plants and animals as caring,
to the life in us capable of cherishing the presence in the now of all future generations,
to the life in you and me that intuits and celebrates the presence in us of a life and love greater than our own.



Earth from Space NASA Photo

Dennis Rivers lives, writes, and teaches in Santa Barbara, California. Dennis is one of the founding participants in Turn Toward Life, an eco-spiritual, anti-nuclear affinity group and community-without-walls dedicated to exploring reverence for life as a spiritual path. A slightly shorter version of this essay appeared in the Summer, 2003, issue of *EarthLight* Magazine and is part of *Turning Toward Life*, a free web book about reverence for life as a spiritual path. available at www.turntowardlife.org. Dennis's various books and essays are available free of charge in the Library section of www.coopcomm.org.

Notes

Chapter 13.
EARTH
AS SACRED SPACE

by Vijali (edited by Patricia Sanders)

first appeared in *Earthwalking Sky Dancers: Women's Pilgrimages to Sacred Places,* edited by Leila Castle, published by Frog, Ltd, 1996.

I flew! The thirteen hours of driving from the Hopi Reservation, seemed like three. The spirit of the Kachina dances, the rhythm of the drum, the earth's heartbeat still surged through me. But as time passed on the road, I could see and feel the light buoyancy of the northern Arizona air thicken and congeal around me as I drove into the Los Angeles basin. Breathing became an effort. My shoulders tightened. Heavy, brown smog obscured the horizon. My car joined the growing swarm on the freeway pressing forward relentlessly as if herded toward our destiny by some unknown slaughterer. As I turned of the freeway, high-rise buildings enveloped me, blocking out the sky that had been so close to me on the reservation. I looked out the car window....people appeared sandwiched between smog and pavement. "How absurd! What am I doing here?" wailed some indignant voice within me. "Where is our power place, our Hopiland filled with meaning, our mountain peaks to summon the Kachina spirits? Where is OUR spirit-based community in Los Angeles? Where is OUR sacred mountain?"

Days passed. Early one morning, before sunrise, I sat up in bed with a start. "Yes, we do have our sacred mountain", I thought out-loud. I remembered the first time I laid my eyes on Boney Mountain, its backbone of twelve-storey high stone pillars rising like a row of deities. It was love at first sight.

I jumped out of bed, grabbed my sleeping bag, climbed into my car and drove toward the Mountain, pulled by the spirit of this sacred place. Driving up the long, winding earth road, I thought back to the Chumash medicine man who had told me that this peak, the highest ridge in the Santa Monica Mountains, was the power place of this area. The range runs east and west, sacred directions for Native Americans. I found the cave I remembered from my last trip....a cave filled with Chumash pictographs....and prepared to stay the night in quest of my own way to live in harmony with the earth.

Boney Mountain

The mountain gave me an answer. I stayed on Boney Mountain from 1982 to 1987, trading the comforts of my Santa Monica home and the companionship of my husband to live alone in an abandoned trailer. My life took on a new simplicity. I began to synchronize with the rhythms of nature. Each morning I rose early to greet the sun from a high plateau and at the end of each day I returned to wish the sun farewell. Every simple act became a ritual....hauling water and bathing outside using a bucket and ladle, gathering wild greens for salads and sage for tea. I made peace with the

rattlesnakes that lived beneath my trailer and the bobcats and mountain lion that roamed nearby.

By living close to nature in this way, Boney was transformed into sacred space for me. I believer that a sacred space may be any place, not just ones designated by our ancestors. We may create them as I did on the Mountain by entering into the spirit of a place through simple actions performed in a reverent way. Every object of my daily life took on a special meaning. The trowel I used for the toilet was as sacred for me as a chalice used in communion.

Even as a child I knew the sacredness of personal space. I remember going behind my grandmother's house in Dallas to a place where I could hide behind tall weeds. I would sit for hours in my circle of stones. As a ritual I placed dandelions and honeysuckle blossoms on the ground. That space was so special I never revealed it to anyone, not even my closest playmates. How comforting to be there by myself as I mourned the death of a girlfriend or wept for my mother and father who had abandoned m at the age of two.

Sacred spaces can be created even in cities. In the late 1970's I felt a need for a sacred simplicity within my Los Angeles home. On a sudden inspiration, I took everything out of a closet and painted it white. Within this purified space I placed a stone, a leaf, a bowl of water and a sitting cloth from the Amazon....things special to me at that moment. I had create my own sacred space, my power place right there in the city.

For me as a sculptor, the process of carving and painting is itself a ritual. When I became frustrated with the commercialism of the art scene, I closed my studio and started carving stone outcroppings in wilderness areas. The first one was the Winged Woman carved in the Simi Hills outside of Los Angeles. I found a group of large sandstone boulders that suggested a woman's face and a wing. Beneath her lay a stone shaped like a man. By the time I completed the sculpture, I realized the woman reflected the need for feminine spirit to emerge in our society. One day I returned to the Winged Woman and found people sitting in front of her and meditating. I realized, then, that art can be used to create sacred spaces.

Winged Woman Vijali

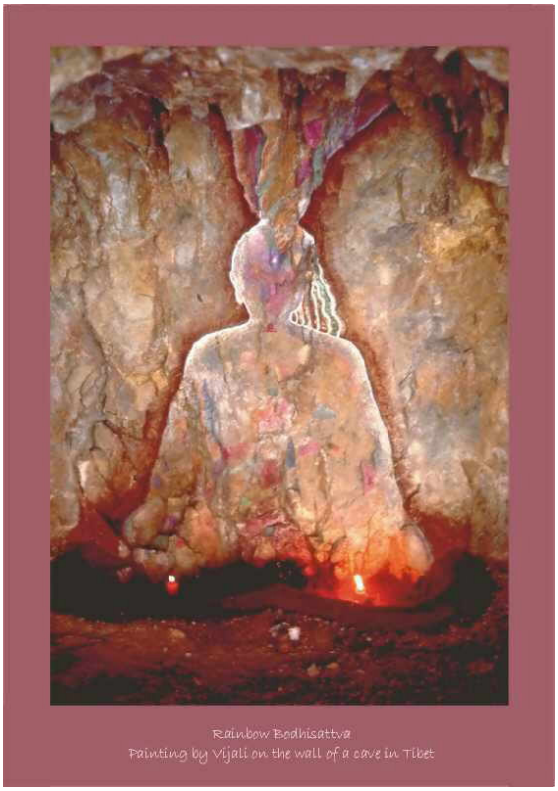
Years later....after my five-year retreat on Boney Mountain....I began an art project of creating sacred spaces through sculptures and performances at twelve sites circling the globe. I hoped these would help recall communities around the world to the sacredness of the earth itself. Boney had taught me that a sacred space was not just a personal power site, but that the whole earth is sacred ground. It no longer seemed enough to sit on a stone and feel the interconnectedness of all life. The need to transfer the experience of a private sacred space to all of nature led me to begin the project called the World Wheel: Global Peace through the Arts.

My journey has taken me from Malibu to the Seneca Reservation upstate New York, to the Alicante Mountains by the

Mediterranean Sea in Spain, the Umbrian forest in Italy, Tinos, an island in Greece, the desert of Egypt, the Dead Sea in Palestine and Israel, a tiny village in West Bengal, India, Shoto Terdrom in Tibet, Kunming in South West China, Lake Baikal in Siberia and the first wheel culminated in Japan. I have now begun a second wheel around the planet running through Ecuador, Brazil, Nigeria, Kenya, India, Australia, the waters of the South Pacific, Tuvalu and California.

One particular World Wheel experience shows how art can contribute to making a place sacred. In May, 1992, I created a painted relief in a cave at 16,000 feet on the Tibetan Plateau in the Terdrom Valley. My Rainbow Bodhisattva is a female figure, filled with prisms of color and seated in the lotus posture. Her legs are molded from the red clay of the cave floor. Neither a Buddha nor a Quan Yin, this is an energy body. I wanted to do a work traditional enough that the Buddhist nuns and hermits living in near by caves could identify with it, but I also wanted to embody a universal image that was not limited to any one concept of wholeness.

This light-filled figure symbolizes, instead, the underlying energy connecting everything, merging our innerspace with the space around us. I made my Bodhisattva feminine because I was saddened to find the image of Yeshe Tsogyal, the most prominent female holy figure in Tibet, shoved into an obscure corner of the shrine in Shoto Terdrom. It was in the feminine folds of this valley that she had lived in the 7th century for many years in a cave and received her final illumination. I longed to see Yeshe Tsogyal represented in shrines as an equal beside her spiritual mate, Padmasambhava, reflecting that harmony and balance that is so necessary today for the health and continuation of life on this planet.



I did not know whether my creation would be recognized as a sacred site by Tibetans in the area. The answer came on the day I completed my work. Two nuns who were walking in the canyon came up to the cave. When they saw the figure they burst into tears, flushed and flung themselves face down on the ground in three, full-length prostrations. That moment was my reward; I knew that this image had touched something within them that was needed to be addressed and that this cave would be for them, from this moment on, a sacred space.

The reverence expressed by these nuns is something most Tibetans carry naturally in their lives. They may were only patched clothes against the freezing cold, but they regard themselves as blessed to live on their sacred land. We have much to learn from them. If I can generate even a fraction of

their respect for the sacredness of nature through the process of creating the World Wheel, I will feel that it has all been worthwhile.

Creating art works is not the only way to acknowledge the sacred. Truly, the objects of ritual are always at hand. Stones are altars. Sunlight shining through leaves is stained-glass. Trees are pillars holding up the vaulted sky. Rivers are baptismal waters. Flowers are incense of the earth. I worship the sacred when I lie with my back against the soil, my eyes gazing into the blackness of night.

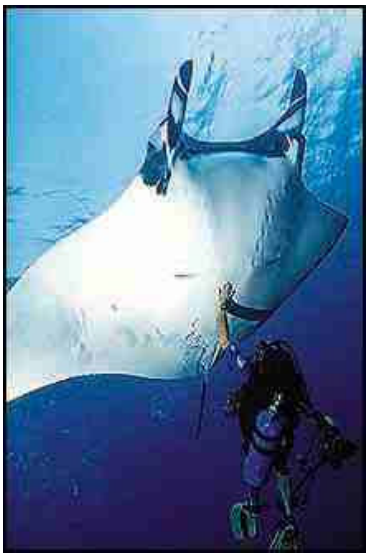
The World Wheel is my way of walking in the world. It is my way of saying let's expand the idea of sacred space. Let us walk together the sacredness of the earth.

Notes _____

This Magic Moment

By Jennifer Anderson (2003)

It was like many Maui mornings, the sun rising over Haleakala as we greeted our divers for the day's charter. As my captain and I explained the dive procedures, I noticed the wind line moving into Molokini, a small, crescent-shaped island that harbors a large reef. I slid through the briefing, then prompted my divers to gear up, careful to do everything right so the divers would feel confident with me, the dive leader.



The dive went pretty close to how I had described it: The garden eels performed their underwater ballet, the parrot fish grazed on the coral, and the ever-elusive male flame wrasse flared their colors to defend their territory.

Near the last level of the dive, two couples in my group signaled they were going to ascend. As luck would have it, the remaining divers were two European brothers, who were obviously troubled by the idea of a "woman" dive master and had ignored me for the entire dive.

The three of us caught the current and drifted along the outside of the reef, slowly beginning our ascent until, far below, something caught my eye. After a few moments, I made out the white shoulder patches of a manta ray in about one hundred and twenty feet of water.

Manta rays are one of my greatest loves, but very little is known about them. They feed on plankton, which makes them more delicate than an aquarium can handle. They travel the oceans and are therefore a mystery.

Mantas can be identified by the distinctive pattern on their belly, with no two rays alike. In 1992, I had been identifying the manta rays that were seen at Molokini and found that some were known, but many more were sighted only once, and then gone.

So there I was: a beautiful, very large ray beneath me and my skeptical divers behind. I reminded myself that I was still trying to win their confidence, and a bounce to see this manta wouldn't help my case. So I started calling through my regulator, "Hey, come up and see me!" I had tried this before to attract the attention of whales and dolphins, who are very chatty underwater and will come sometimes just to see what the noise is about. My divers were just as puzzled by my actions, but continued to try to ignore me.

There was another dive group ahead of us. The leader, who was a friend of mine and knew me to be fairly sane, stopped to see what I was doing. I kept calling to the ray, and when she shifted in the water column, I took that as a sign that she was curious. So I started waving my arms, calling her up to me.

After a minute, she lifted away from where she had been riding the current and began to

make a wide circular glide until she was closer to me. I kept watching as she slowly moved back and forth, rising higher, until she was directly beneath the two Europeans and me. I looked at them and was pleased to see them smiling. Now they liked me. After all, I could call up a manta ray!

Looking back to the ray, I realized she was much bigger than what we were used to around Molokini - a good fifteen feet from wing tip to wing tip, and not a familiar-looking ray. I had not seen this animal before. There was something else odd about her. I just couldn't figure out what it was.

Once my brain clicked in and I was able to concentrate, I saw deep V-shaped marks of her flesh missing from her backside. Other marks ran up and down her body. At first I thought a boat had hit her. As she came closer, now with only ten feet separating us, I realized what was wrong. She had fishing hooks embedded in her head by her eye, with very thick fishing line running to her tail. She had rolled with the line and was wrapped head to tail about five or six times. The line had torn into her body at the back, and those were the V-shaped chunks that were missing.

I felt sick and, for a moment, paralyzed. I knew wild animals in pain would never tolerate a human to inflict more pain. But I had to do something.

Forgetting about my air, my divers and where I was, I went to the manta. I moved very slowly and talked to her the whole time, like she was one of the horses I had grown up with. When I touched her, her whole body quivered, like my horse would. I put both of my hands on her, then my entire body, talking to her the whole time. I knew that she could knock me off at any time with one flick of her great wing. When she had steadied, I took out the knife that I carry on my inflator hose and lifted one of the lines. It was tight and difficult to get my finger under, almost like a guitar string. She shook, which told me to be gentle. It was obvious that the slightest pressure was painful.

As I cut through the first line, it pulled into her wounds. With one beat of her mighty wings, she dumped me and bolted away. I figured that she was gone and was amazed when she turned and came right back to me, gliding under my body. I went to work. She seemed to know it would hurt, and somehow, she also knew that I could help. Imagine the intelligence of that creature, to come for help and to trust!

I cut through one line and into the next until she had all she could take of me and would move away, only to return in a moment or two. I never chased her. I would never chase any animal. I never grabbed her. I allowed her to be in charge, and she always came back. When all the lines were cut on top, on her next pass, I went under her to pull the lines through the wounds at the back of her body. The tissue had started to grow around them, and they were difficult to get loose. I held myself against her body, with my hand on her lower jaw. She held as motionless as she could. When it was all loose, I let her go and watched her swim in a circle. She could have gone then, and it

would have all fallen away. She came back, and I went back on top of her.

The fishing hooks were still in her. One was barely hanging on, which I removed easily. The other was buried by her eye at least two inches past the barb. Carefully, I began to take it out, hoping I wasn't damaging anything. She did open and close her eye while I worked on her, and finally, it was out. I held the hooks in one hand, while I gathered the fishing line in the other hand, my weight on the manta.

I could have stayed there forever! I was totally oblivious to everything but that moment. I loved this manta. I was so moved that she would allow me to do this to her. But reality came screaming down on me. With my air running out, I reluctantly came to my senses and pushed myself away.

At first, she stayed below me. And then, when she realized that she was free, she came to life like I never would have imagined she could. I thought she was sick and weak, since her mouth had been tied closed, and she hadn't been able to feed for however long the lines had been on her. I thought wrong! With two beats of those powerful wings, she rocketed along the wall of Molokini and then directly out to sea! I lost view of her and, remembering my divers, turned to look for them.

Remarkably, we hadn't traveled very far. My divers were right above me and had witnessed the whole event, thankfully! No one would have believed me alone. It seemed too amazing to have really happened. But as I looked at the hooks and line in my hands and felt the torn calluses from her rough skin, I knew that, yes, it really had happened. I kicked in the direction of my divers, whose eyes were still wide open from the encounter only to have them signal me to stop and turn around. Until this moment, the whole experience had been phenomenal, but I could explain it. Now, the moment turned magical.

I turned and saw her slowly gliding toward me. With barely an effort, she approached me and stopped, her wing just touching my head. I looked into her round, dark eye, and she looked deeply into me. I felt a rush of something that so overpowered me, I have yet to find the words to describe it, except a warm and loving flow of energy from her into me.

She stayed with me for a moment. I don't know if it was a second or an hour. Then, as sweetly as she came back, she lifted her wing over my head and was gone. A manta thank-you.

I hung in midwater, using the safety-stop excuse, and tried to make sense of what I had experienced. Eventually, collecting myself, I surfaced and was greeted by an ecstatic group of divers and a curious captain. They all gave me time to get my heart started and to begin to breathe.

Sadly, I have not seen her since that day, and I am still looking. For the longest time, though my wetsuit was tattered and torn, I would not change it because I thought she wouldn't recognize me. I call to every manta I see, and they almost always acknowledge me in some way. One day, though, it will be her. She'll hear me and pause, remembering the giant cleaner that she trusted to relieve her pain, and she'll come. At least that is how it happens in my dreams.