The Case for a Spiritual Environmentalism:
Why A Spiritual Approach to Solving Environmental Problems Works

A thesis presented by

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Table of Contents

Preface .............................................................................................................................................. 4
Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 6
Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 7
Review of Evidence-Based Research .......................................................................................... 10
  Conservation Behaviors ................................................................................................................ 10
  Healing Effects - Physical ............................................................................................................. 11
  Healing Effects - Emotional ......................................................................................................... 14
  Healing Effects - Spiritual .......................................................................................................... 18

Popular Thought Trends Relating Spirit and Nature ................................................................. 22
  Nature Deficit Disorder .............................................................................................................. 22
  Sacred Gardens and Therapeutic Horticulture ......................................................................... 24

Review of Literature, Philosophical, Theoretical and Religious Thought .................................. 25
  Literature .................................................................................................................................... 25
  Native Traditions ......................................................................................................................... 28
  Non-Denominational & Grassroots Eco-Spirituality ................................................................. 31
  Ecopsychology ........................................................................................................................... 32
  Con-Bio Convertees .................................................................................................................... 33
  Christianity .................................................................................................................................. 35
  Judaism ......................................................................................................................................... 38
  Taoism ......................................................................................................................................... 40

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 42

References ...................................................................................................................................... 46
It is a soggy, rainy night and I am thinking about Hurricane Katrina and how I first came to the idea of helping people make spiritual connections with nature. The rain is good because we’ve been dry all winter. The streams and rivers are low and the ground is as hard as the asphalt that cuts through it in every direction. If we actually had to farm this suburban soil we’d have to ship in useful earth from farther flung locations. But in suburban America, we still mostly don’t concern ourselves with how our food gets to our plates, nor how our shoes and sweatpants are made.

I’ve just read an article that was the cover piece of the New York Times Magazine on Sunday, April 19th about why humans aren’t inclined to be “green.” A recent survey indicated that climate change was 20th on the list of the respondents’ most important priorities. The article states that since we’ve had no cataclysmic events to rally around, we simply haven’t woken up to the need. Haven’t we? Have we so easily forgotten Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma? Recent torrential flooding in North Dakota? Heat waves that killed in Europe in 2007? Massive glaciers melting in Greenland? Ice sheets falling off the Antarctic coast? A brutal war in the Middle East coincidentally located over the Earth’s largest reservoirs of oil? I could go on but realize I needn’t bother for this audience. What I am trying to say is that Katrina was my own personal wake up call, and for reasons that will never be illuminated by the academic lens, I knew deep in my being that many other people had woken up with this event too, and that much as we had suspected all along, there is indeed a spirit in nature that is worthy of our respect, and that our deep disrespect was
beginning to cost us in dramatically painful and unforgettable ways. We all bore the shame of the devastation and our collective inability to respond quickly enough as families clung to rooftops and the bodies of lost humans and animals bobbed and wasted away like driftwood on the boggy lagoon that was newest New Orleans. In that moment of time and human history, my psyche would not let me turn away and go back to business as usual. So here I am, here we are, and here is what I have to say about it. May it serve the positive universe.
Abstract

This paper will examine evidence-based research, literature, theories and popular thought trends that either directly address spirit and nature or touch upon it in meaningful ways. It will begin with a review of relevant evidence-based research in conservation and environmental psychology, move on to a discussion of what writers, thinkers, religious leaders and community-based non-denominational spiritual organizations have had to say on the subject, and conclude with an analysis of gaps in research and theory that may suggest some ways for this field of thought to move forward. For while we are beginning to prove that intimate, personal contact with nature leads to better stewardship, we have only begun to touch upon the deep and complex relationship between humans and the natural world. If we are to help people improve this relationship, we must first gain a better understanding its true nature.
Introduction

This paper will discuss the current and perhaps understated trend towards a spiritual environmentalism. My thesis postulates that invoking our spiritual connection to nature will result in stronger beliefs and more beneficial behaviors that create the deep shifts necessary to amplify the works of environmental teachers, activists, scientists and philosophers.

But first, if we are to engage in an intellectual discourse about how humans make spiritual connections to nature, we must first define spirit, define nature and finally, outline what it means to make a “spiritual connection with nature.”

Spirit is frequently defined as a super-natural force or being. The root of the word comes from the ancient Greek spirare, meaning “to breathe” and by no coincidence is found in the words conspire, respire, inspire, perspire, expire, and aspire. Humans, like animals, are creatures of the air – our breath is essential to our life force. We can exist for days without water, longer without food, but only moments without air. Tracing the etymology of the word “breath” does not reveal how the action of breathing is tied up so tightly to the concept of a supernatural being, but here is a quote by Zen Buddhist monk and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Thich Nhat Hanh to consider:

“Breathing is a means of awakening and maintaining full attention in order to look carefully, long, and deeply, see the nature of all things, and arrive at liberation” (1996, p. 19).
For the purposes of this paper, I believe we can state that spirit, like the air, lives both within and without us, and that we touch upon in all things, but also in non-things, such as when we encounter the membranes that separate ourselves from everything else. In the delicate bronchial passages of the lungs, the gap of space between our nerves called a synapse, the empty spaces inside every atom… these are perhaps some of the places where spirit lives – a non-physical, but nonetheless extant reality.

Nature includes both the earth and the cosmos. Environmentalists are understandably focused on the planet, but in a wider sense, the environment also includes the air, the atmosphere, other planets, the stars and all the spaces in between. It’s important to draw this distinction now since humans resonate spiritually with the night sky, the clouds and the sun as much as they do the animals, trees, water and mountains. When we talk about nature and spirit, it’s good to bear in mind all the relevant elements and aspects. A wild thunderstorm can say as much to us as the rolling surf on a sunny beach.

A spiritual connection with nature is a moment when we perceive that something greater than a physical process or ecological dynamic is at work. In these moments, we sense that an intelligence is behind the process, the organism, or the phenomenon – like a thunderstorm perhaps. Sometimes this dynamic occurs within us as a pleasant feeling, or even as something unpleasant, such as an illness that in time we may come to understand was triggered by more than an injury or chemical imbalance. Or in the subtle communications between a mother and the child growing within her womb. For the purposes of this paper, a spiritual connection
with nature will be defined as an experience where the human interplay with the natural world outside ourselves leads to an insight or feeling that shatters our sense of separation and reveals to us our interconnectedness, interdependence and proper proportionality within the universe at large. Because these sensations are deeply personal, highly variable and subjective, they are difficult to quantify, however there has been some evidence-based research that does just that, and this paper will explore the results of that research.

This paper will also examine literature, theories and popular thought trends that either directly address spirit and nature or touch upon it in meaningful ways so that a wide spectrum of experience and relationships can be revealed and conveyed.
Review of Evidence-Based Research

Conservation Behaviors

The relatively new fields of conservation and environmental psychology are helping to establish proven causal relationships between beliefs and behaviors. Through this work, the common wisdom that beliefs lead to values which ultimately lead to behaviors is being given the hard scientific evidence that some require in order to change entrenched styles of education and other institutional patterns such as outdated forms of urban development.

A 2005 study on the effects of outdoor education programs for children in California found a significant .51 percent increase in concern about conservation. Furthermore, “According to parent reports, students who participated in the program had significantly larger gains in environmental behaviors ($p < .05$), compared to children who did not attend the program. In other words, parents of children who attended outdoor school observed children engaging in positive environmental behaviors (e.g., recycling, etc.) at home, whereas a statistically significant finding was not observed for ratings by parents of children in the control group” (American Institutes for Research, 2005, pp. 37-40).

Urban planners recognize the impact that nature has on human behaviors. The Berkeley Planning Journal (Knecht, 2004) published an article which reviews much of the theory and research on urban nature and well-being, tracing the beginnings of such thought in 1865 with Frederick Law Olmstead who is often cited as one of the first writers to proclaim the restorative effects of nature, and carrying
us forward to the contemporary ecologist, E.O. Wilson who in 2001, expounded upon the need for “a sound conservation ethic grounded in the deep psychological and spiritual needs of human beings” (p. 104). Knecht concludes that providing both urban green space and wilderness makes “urban life more livable and environmental protection more instinctual” (p. 104).

Some of this research is able to go further, and explicitly draw out predictable patterns of belief that engender pro-environmental behavior. A 2007 study of 494 Swedish residents showed “that benevolence is related to social-altruistic awareness-of-consequence beliefs and environmental concerns, whereas universalism is related to biospheric awareness-of-consequence beliefs and environmental concern” (Hansla, et al., 2008, p. 6). Simply stated, values such as being helpful, forgiving, loyal and responsible (“benevolence”) lead to actions that benefit the local environment and values such as tolerance, equality, social justice and peace (“universalism”) lead to actions that benefit the environment on a global scale.

**Healing Effects - Physical**

Although it may sometimes be dismissed as mystical or unscientific, nature is a proven healer. Recent research is proving again and again that immersion in nature - even something as subtle as viewing a picture of nature - has measurable physiological impacts on humans that result in greater well being.

The field of medical geography has discovered that “specific places developed and have subsequently sustained a reputation for healing. In particular, many healing places were located in areas close to springs and other sources of
water, a precious resource for sustaining life and consequentially, central to many religious and spiritual ceremonies” (Smyth, 2005, p. 489). To personally verify this, one need only to think of the Ganges in India; Lourdes, France; hot springs in the United States, or the sacramental use of water in Baptism.

A Japanese study took the ancient concept of “shinrin-yoku,” (forest-air bathing and walking – wherein the subject “bathes” themselves in the forest air and elements) and measured “salivary amylase activity,” a measure of stress, and found that “the forest was a good environment in which people could experience much less environment-derived stress (Yamaguchi, et al., 2005).

The Center for Health Design at Texas A & M University, headed by Dr. Roger Ulrich is the leader of evidence-based research in the healing effects of both the man-made and natural environments. Research Dr. Ulrich published in Science in 1983, View through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery has become the seminal work in environmental psychology and is referenced in nearly all subsequent research. In this experiment, one group of patients was given a room with a window facing a brick wall, and the other one that looked out on a natural scene, with results proving that the group with a window to nature had fewer “negative evaluative comments in nurses’ notes and took fewer potent analgesics” (p. 420).

Later research by Dr. Ulrich found that stress recovery was “faster and more complete when subjects were exposed to natural rather than urban environments” (Ulrich, et al., 1991, p. 201) based on several measures: heart period, muscle
tension, skin conductance and blood pressure – all of which are used as measures of activity in the autonomic nervous system, and are indicators of physiological stress.

The National Wildlife Federation has compiled research showing that breast cancer patients who spent only half an hour watching birds or strolling in a park three times a week “had increased attention span and significant gains in quality of life ratings, compared to patients who did not take these actions” (Baker, 2005, p. 66). The article also mentions other research that found workers with a window view of nature experienced less stress, and that patients undergoing an uncomfortable bronchoscopy procedure experienced less pain while viewing a scene of nature.

Furthermore, such benefits to the individual accumulate related benefits for the community at large, including the natural environment. At Australia’s Deakin University, Maller, et al. (2005) compiled a public health research paper concluding that “nature may provide an effective population-wide strategy in prevention of mental ill health, with potential application for sub-populations, communities and individuals at higher risk of ill health.” They point out that a “triple bottom line” effect occurs when the natural environment is integrated into public health strategies, whereby the “approach promotes enhancement of individual and community health, well-being, and welfare by following a path of economic development that does not impair the welfare of future generations; provides for equity between and within generations; and protects biodiversity by maintaining essential ecological processes and life support systems.” Deakin University Australia - Parks Victoria thus concluded that parks are a “fundamental health resource,
particularly in terms of disease prevention” (Maller, Townsend, Brown & St. Leger, 2002, p. 2).

Science and psychology continue to explore this area, and some interesting initial research is showing even deeper connections than we might have thought. Recent research indicates that exposure to ‘friendly bacteria’ can be linked to increased levels of serotonin (the human hormone often related to good mood), and reports of increased quality of life among cancer patients. According to Dr. Chris Lowry, who conducted the research, the results “leave us wondering if we shouldn’t all be spending more time playing in the dirt” (Bristol University, 2007, p. 1).

**Healing Effects - Emotional**

Even more compelling than the research that proves the physiological benefits of nature, the emerging field of Ecopsychology uses traditional tools for brain measurement and developmental assessments to show us how deep these impacts are. This research expands upon the common knowledge that most of us experience in our everyday lives by contacting pets and plants, and supports the trend to aid the elderly and infirm by bringing well trained dogs and cats into health care facilities.

Dr. Aaron Katcher of University of Pennsylvania demonstrated that the “introduction of animals into a school or clinical setting will lead to improved attention, increased laughter, more speech, improved sociability and decreased aggression, even among the most withdrawn” among his autistic, elderly and patients suffering from organic brain disease (White, 2005, p. 58). Classic research by Roger Ulrich of Texas A&M University is also quoted in this article showing that
two groups of patients, one with a view of trees “requires fewer painkillers, develop fewer complications and will check themselves out of hospitals more quickly than the group with an urban view.” “And in a long term study that looked at which pieces of wall-art were being destroyed by psychiatric patients, researchers found that while patients attacked the abstract art, not once in 15 years had a patient destroyed a picture of a natural scene” (p. 59). There is a tendency to take such behaviors and attitudes for granted as natural, predictable reactions, however, we could build upon these innate tendencies by consciously incorporating them into our strategies for creating environmental change.

Central to much of the research revolving around the therapeutic benefits of nature is the Attention Restoration Therapy model developed by Steve and Rachel Kaplan of University of Michigan. This model is provides a theoretical framework for research that shows the restorative effects of nature, particularly in terms of everyday human fatigue. Working with this model, research conducted in Taiwan confirms a relationship between “psychological measures of restoratives and three physiological responses” based on EMG (electromyography - that measures mental and emotional stress based on facial muscles), EEG (electroencephalography - to measure alpha brainwave activity) and BVP (blood volume pulse - a measure of cardiovascular changes such as pulse). Their findings “support and extend previous findings related to stress recovery and restoration in natural environments (such as those by Ulrich and others) where the authors have found faster, more complete and longer lasting improvements in physiological conditions after viewing natural-restorative environments. More specifically, measures in autonomic activity (for
example, blood pressure) have decreased while somatic activities have increased.” (Chang, et al., 2007, p. 483). The significance of this research is that we now have measurable proof that nature heals and improves the human ability to regain focus for important matters such as work, family and community life. Such insight provides the concrete evidence needed for many businesses, institutions and organizations to integrate natural elements into work environments, healing centers, schools and places of worship – to the benefit of all.

In a 2005 study on the effects of “green exercise,” where natural scenes where projected onto a wall while subjects exercised on a treadmill, significantly greater self-esteem measures were produced by pleasant rural or urban scenes than by unpleasant scenes or exercise alone (Pretty, et al., 2005). Furthermore, “all subjects exposed to pleasant rural scenes experienced a decline in blood pressure, whereas only 60% of the subjects experienced such declines” when shown “urban pleasant,” “urban unpleasant” scenes, or no scenes at all. If we feel valued and accepted by even so much as a picture, then clearly nature holds great meaning to us.

However, in contrast to research showing the healing effects of nature, there are thoughts emerging around “the idea that ecological strain might translate into psychic distress” (White, 2005, p. 58). Perhaps depression is a “legitimate response to the loss of places that we need to be joyful” (p. 59). It is logical that if nature heals, separation from nature may harm us in ways that we as yet do not fully comprehend. While disheartening, more research in this area may provide insights and deeper understanding of this human-nature healing dynamic.
In a 2000 study of the long-term benefits of wilderness outdoor adventure programs, results showed “a significant and enduring increase in the participant’s self-efficacy,” defined as the ability to execute control over one’s level of functioning and the events that affect our lives (Paxton & McAvoy, 2000, p.203). Subjects’ measures of self-efficacy increased during a 21-day wilderness course and continued to increase for six months after completion of the course, reflecting an ability to transfer skills learned in the wilderness to some new challenge or experience in their lives. Some of the testimony from this research is striking:

“I would say definitely it has had a major impact on all aspects of my life... I’ve just learned to take everything one step at a time and it is so much easier to do it that way and it makes you feel so much better. I tell myself when I face challenges now, I did that, I can do this. I have learned to trust in myself and my abilities. I know I can do it” (p. 204).

And further:

“I want to enjoy my time out. I have already tested my skills and I know that I can accomplish what I want to or need to in the wilderness. What I want to do is understand myself and that can only come from being in the wilderness” (p. 205).

Such anecdotal evidence is itself enough to justify a spiritual approach to changing environmental behaviors and recalls the work of some of the great early American nature writers such as John Muir and Henry David Thoreau.
In a study of the psychological benefits of habitat restoration among volunteers for such projects, Miles, Sullivan and Kuo (2000) found a positive relationship between restoration activities and “enhanced life functioning.” Volunteers who participated more often for such projects reported higher for positive life functioning ratings and lower for negative life functioning than those who volunteered less often. Volunteers in the study reported qualitative data as well: “There is an immediate, tactile connection to nature – a hands-on activity that is gentle and pleasant. It’s peaceful, close to nature in an almost intimate relationship. There is a sense of communion; it is fulfilling and self-transcending” (p. 223).

**Healing Effects - Spiritual**

Restoration ecology research has explored the notion that cultivating spiritual connections with the land not only heals humans but also “play[s] an important role in helping the land heal,” (emphasis added) stating that the parallel between our natural ecosystems and healing the body “begins with the observation that the human body is a system with many parts that all have their own function or niche, as do species in nature” (Schaefer, 2006, p. 1). Schaefer goes on to state this dynamic “operates at a meta-level where there is a gestalt view of nature that is difficult to articulate but nonetheless is very powerful in motivating people to take action (p. 3).” Schaefer also points to “Traditional First Nations” techniques that “include an element of respect for the land and a spiritual connection with an ecosystem” (p. 3) that includes not only what is done, but *how and why* it is done. In other circles this is referred to as *intent* and is a large part of how traditional Native
American medicine people approach healing human problems, and would be one that might be beneficial to include in restoration ecology practices. As Schaefer notes, a holistic approach similar to that used in alternative medicine could be applied to restoration ecology whereby “an integration of mind and body” aligns with an “integration between human and environmental health” (p. 3). For example, when we begin projects such as habitat restoration and invasive species removal, we would use not only a materialistic, object-oriented approach, but a spiritual one that conveys healing energy into the sites targeted for restoration.

Spiritual experiences abound and in my practicum work, I was able to explore such stories. Commonly, the experience of an animal approaching someone in an unexpected and inexplicable way creates an insight that can only be attributed to a kind of psychic communication between the two. One woman I interviewed finds herself frequently in the company of crows, whose presence alters her ordinary, everyday experiences into numinous moments of insight and clarity about her place in the world. Describing a moment while taking a daily jog at the local high school track with her husband, a crow lingered and cawed at her as though keeping her company during her run until her husband finally intervened and told the bird that she was his mate, at which time the crow flew away. Another time, while describing her experiences with crows to a friend, a crow appeared just as she was leaving the place where they had lunch, to wait for her on the roof of the car parked next to hers, watching her until she drove away (personal communication, August 2008).
Another interviewee described her first experiences walking a labyrinth, whereupon her first attempt to walk it, she found it so distracting and uncomfortable that she stepped out and didn’t finish. However upon returning to make a second attempt, she described feeling as though she were “walking in a beam of light” and “as if that wasn’t enough” felt a hand lift her up and joggle her like a doll, giving her an internal mental message to relax, lighten up and simply enjoy life (personal communication, August 2008).

People often have deeply memorable experiences at the Grand Canyon. A friend describes a two and half hour nighttime hike down to the bottom of the canyon where she experienced the profound emptiness and a sense of “the ancientness” exposing a “whole different character to the canyon” from how it was in the daytime that “shifted” her. When she arrived at the bottom for a Thanksgiving meal with friends, she experienced a natural high unlike any other that she can recall then or since (personal communication, August 2008).

Breast cancer survivor, Sue Conklin reports her experience hearing the voice of Mother Earth in an suburban park while recovering from breast cancer –

“It was so clear and the voice said ‘What is happening to you is happening to me and it has to stop - it has to stop now,’ with the emphasis on NOW. And I was sitting on a mossy area in the middle of some woods - and when I heard the voice - I felt a surge of energy come up through me. That was in April 1994 and yes - I was undergoing BOTH radiation and chemo at the time and still healing from the second surgery. Slashing, burning, poisoning - all happening to me AND Mother Earth. In that moment - I felt the connection. I will
never forget that day - it was truly life changing” (personal communication, March 2009).

Sue changed her life after her recovery, and moved away from a career with NASCAR racing and refocused her life on conservation efforts with the National Wildlife Federation, Native wisdom - studying with Eastern Cherokee Medicine people J.T. and Michael Garrett, and nature-based spirituality, hosting an annual “Prayer Vigil for the Earth” on the National Mall, working with long time Native American activists Clyde and Vernon Bellecourt, and a diverse set of international spiritual leaders from tribes and cultures around the world (www.oneprayer.org).

By far, some of the most convincing evidence-based research was conducted by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999) in which they studied the effects of a deep-wilderness experience in the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness Area in Minnesota and the Grand Canyon in northern Arizona among two groups of women. The researchers’ working definition of a spiritual experience was one that “is typically characterized by a sudden illumination of individual consciousness, where the experience itself is somewhat fleeting or momentary and lacks specific content, yet leaves the individual with an overwhelming feeling of having made contact with a power much greater than the self” (Frederickson & Anderson, 1999, p. 37). Using thematic coding of words recorded in the personal journals of the women, they were able draw strong correlations between features of the natural environment and spiritual aspects of the trip. Scores for the “spiritually inspirational” elements of natural features ranged from 16 to 18 whereas other elements – such as events, general perspective, activities, relationships and feelings ranged only from 0-8.
They were also able to signal the importance of a “bona-fide wilderness” stating that “it appeared that it was the biophysical attributes that rendered each site as spiritually inspirational, and presupposed a more contemplative and self-reflective interpretation of the trip experience overall. One of the themes that consistently arose in the individual interviews was the importance of being in a bona fide wilderness area; in other words, that the trip itself had taken place in a pristine setting, away from the trappings of modern civilization” (p. 30). Qualitative aspects of the research study involving in-depth interviews with the subjects further revealed that “direct contact with nature inspired many participants to identify that they very rarely ‘experienced’ the natural world in their every day lives elsewhere, and yet in doing so, it helped them to ‘get in touch’, as one participant stated, with more important spiritual matters” (p. 31). Such research provides proof that ancient practices and rituals such as vision quests are more than residual cultural artifacts relevant only to times past, but rather, are pertinent, potent methods that can be employed in modern times to help individuals, groups and communities more aptly trek the challenges and strains of life in the twenty-first century.

**Popular Thought Trends Relating Spirit and Nature**

**Nature Deficit Disorder**

Currently we are enjoying a kind of environmentalist heyday, where there is growing interest in “green” products, preservation and actions to curb global warming. But much of this thought and action remains somewhat superficial. Institutions are as entrenched in the old model as before. Fossil fuels are still our
main source of energy even though we know they have created irreversible changes to climate patterns and cause us to sacrifice mountaintops in Appalachia and our last remote stretches of wilderness in Alaska. Nonetheless, even these more populist approaches include a spiritual component.

Richard Louv is currently perhaps the best-know advocate for re-establishing outdoors experiences for children as part of their educational and general life experience. His main premise is that children have become creatures of the indoors, with an unhealthy attachment to computers and television and parents who fear nature’s dangers (insect bites, poison ivy and pedophiles). These habits have created a social pattern that has created a generation or more who have no understanding, experience, respect or interest in the natural world. Comparing the lives of these children to the lives of older American generations, whose playgrounds were largely the local woods and streams, Louv points out what has been lost and modifies the familiar medical diagnosis of “attention deficit disorder,” relabeling it as “nature deficit disorder,” suggesting that some of the physical and mental difficulties of children may indeed be rooted in their separation from the natural world instead of a chemical or dietary imbalance. His work is compelling, and has gained respect among educators, politicians and community organizers. Less known are his thoughts about the spiritual benefits of an outdoors experience for children. In his book “Last Child in the Woods” he states “nearly every parent can report some spiritual moment in their own memory of childhood, often in nature. Or they can relate experiencing similar moments in their own children’s early years. Yet the spiritual necessity of nature to the young is a topic that receives
little notice. The absence of research may suggest a certain nervousness. After all, a child’s spiritual experience in nature – especially in solitude – is beyond adult or institutional control” (Louv, p. 298, 2008). Stressing his point further, and after presenting further anecdotal evidence of the ability of nature to move us spiritually, he asserts “most people are either awakened to or are strengthened in their spiritual journey by experiences in the natural world” (p. 302).

**Sacred Gardens and Therapeutic Horticulture**

Another indicator of a cultural evolution that accepts the spiritual, physical and emotional healing aspects of nature is to be found in organizations that create sacred spaces and healing gardens.

The TKF Foundation is an organization in Annapolis, Maryland entirely dedicated to creating sacred gardens in and around the region. They have established gardens near churches, prisons, community centers, and abandoned inner city lots in Baltimore and at hospitals, in an obvious response to Roger Ulrich’s research. It is likely that they are among the first of a growing trend towards creating sacred and healing gardens in urban and suburban areas.

Recent trends in Landscape Architecture are integrating the healing aspects of nature into gardens and landscapes. Naomi Sachs has created a Therapeutic Landscapes database (www.healinglandscapes.org) that compiles hundreds of articles on the psychological, emotional and physical aspects of gardens.

A relatively new branch of horticulture known as Horticultural Therapy specializes in holistic therapies that include working in gardens alongside trained therapists to achieve specific treatment goals. The American Horticultural Therapy
Association (AHTA), founded in 1973, not only encourages the use of gardens as healing spaces, but also promotes gardening itself as a therapeutic practice and is working to define plans for gardens that treat particular ailments, such as “cancer gardens” that are not only therapeutic but safe for sensitive patient groups who may be undergoing radiation and chemotherapy, have special needs for shade and privacy, sensitivity to smells and immunological concerns. The medicinal effects of plants are also taken into consideration whereby their physical properties of the plants as well as their presence alone convey restorative and healing impacts without requiring ingesting them via potions, teas or capsules (Sachs, 2009). AHTA is also conducting research exploring the various effects of viewing a garden, being present in a garden, and best practices for certain populations such as children, the elderly, cancer patients and those with dementia or compromised immune systems.

**Review of Literature, Philosophical, Theoretical and Religious Thought**

**Literature**

Natural History literature abounds with examples of the value that the natural world provides to the human spirit. John Muir’s writings are a rich source of insights based on his own spiritual experiences in nature. In *The Water-Ouzel*, he boldly states that nature is a balm for broken spirits by noting “I have often been delighted to see a pure, spiritual glow come into the countenances of hard business-men and old miners, when a song-bird chanced to alight near them (Finch & Elder, 1990, p. 296).” Henry David Thoreau’s legacy is just as deep. From his *Journals* there exists this entry:
“I think that the most important requisite in describing an animal, is to be sure and give its character and spirit, for in that you have, without error, the sum and effect of all its parts, known and unknown. You must tell what it is to man. Surely the most important part of an animal is its anima, its vital spirit, on which is based its character and all the peculiarities by which it most concerns us. Yet most scientific books which treat of animals leave this out altogether, and what they describe are as if it were phenomena of dead matter. What is most interesting in a dog, for example, is his attachment to his master, his intelligence, courage, and the like, and not his anatomical structure or even many habits which affect us less” (Finch & Elder, 2002, p. 217).

That we still struggle to balance the strictly scientific, analytical view of nature with its aesthetic importance to the human soul is an indicator of the work as yet to be done. Thoreau’s plea to speak of the spirit, intelligence and courage of the more-than-human is as relevant to conservation work of today as it was in 1860.

Aldo Leopold wrote of the importance of deepening our conservation efforts in *The Sand County Almanac*. “No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet
heard of it. In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial” (Finch & Elder, 2002, p. 387).

Arne Naess, founder of the Deep Ecology movement, spent his lifetime attempting to bridge the scientific, atomistic worldview with the aesthetic meaning of nature. Working with George Sessions in 1984, he developed the eight main tenets of Deep Ecology, the first and most overarching principle being that “the well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth; intrinsic value; inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes” (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 70). Here we find the deepest kind of support for a non-materialistic value in nature. There are aspects to this philosophy that seem to lead us to a kind of ‘hands-off’ approach, instead of a respectful and appreciative communion with the aesthetic and spiritual elements of the natural world. Nonetheless, the earnest respect that the Deep Ecology principles endorse reflect the understanding that nature is more than a vast complex of raw material resources.

Working from the inspiration and groundwork of the Deep Ecology movement and Buddhism, Joanna Macy & John Seed invented “The Council of All Beings,” a ritual in which participants become the voice of a non-human being, speaking for them and stopping first to enact an experience their “mourning and remembering.” Once the losses have been grieved and the interconnectedness of all beings “remembered,” some of the participants are called forth to speak before the Council of All Beings on behalf of humanity. Rather than ending in a condemnation
of exploitation by humans, the Council speaks again to human to offer the lessons that each non-human has to offer the human tribe. For example, the Mountain offers “solidity and deep peace” and the Condor offers its “keen, far-seeing eye” (Macy, 2009). Such rituals act as a balm to weary activists and also act to open the hearts and minds of non-environmentalists to the possibility of greater advocacy.

**Native Traditions**

There is an elegant simplicity to many Native American spiritual practices that honors and cherishes nature as it exists in its untouched, pristine condition. This is appealing to many environmentalists and nature lovers, so these traditions continue to hold a reverenced place among many.

A friend recently declared a new church to be an eyesore, bemoaning the loss of more open space in her suburban neighborhood. While she respects her neighbor’s rights to practice their own beliefs, she wished for a faith that did not require taking down trees, paving the ground for a parking lot and re-grading the natural flow of the land so as to maximize drainage for the new building. Such development wrecks the inspirational value of the natural landscape. In Native traditions, the land itself and its component objects are the tools of worship. Altars and Medicine Wheels built from river stones have been placed throughout the Mid-Atlantic in areas surrounded by trees, usually in level places where people can easily congregate to enjoy a cathedral of oaks, sycamores, hemlocks or pines. Whenever possible, there is usually a creek, stream, river or lake nearby to convey the reflective and meditative qualities that water provides, as well as fresh drinking water. Such places can still be spotted by a seasoned eye, and those attuned to the
special energies that emanate from Medicine Wheels that have been installed with sacred intents and in place for thousands of years. In some cases, there are no modifications to a place at all since it is unconsciously recognized as sacred and whole in its original form, as created. Sacred pools of water such as hot springs, or stands of trees, open land by rivers and other natural features of all kinds were intentionally left untouched by Native people as places to worship the vast beauty and generosity of nature or Earth Mother. Returning to an approach that reiterates this spiritual value of nature might well serve modern environmentalists who wish to preserve dwindling urban green spaces, such as the one in my friend’s neighborhood. Perhaps we do not really need a building in which to worship the Creator.

In the practices of Native Sweat Lodges (or as some prefer, Rainbow Lodges) and vision quests, the elements of nature provide the environment and the means for spiritual and bodily purification, prayer and insight. Wood, water, fire, air and earth are all present in a Rainbow Lodge made of saplings bent into a dome, and heated rocks sprayed with water to create the steam that clears the mind and body of impurities, helping to open us to any messages that Spirit has to share. Similarly, a vision quest provides time alone and away from the human-made world so that the Questor can hear their own internal voice, or still the mind to experience visions and dreams that provide direction, insight and wisdom. Such rituals are as rich as any Mass or sermon, and are open to all, even the uninitiated and unbaptized.

Environmentalists and those who don’t label themselves as such often participate in or emulate these Native traditions in order to broaden and deepen
their appreciation and understanding of nature. While some judge this interest as superficial “wannabee-ism,” in the words of Pam Montgomery in *Plant Spirit Healing* “this is not an appropriation of an indigenous culture’s customs or beliefs but rather is a natural progression of human evolution to live within a spiritual ecology” (XXXX).

In *God is Red*, noted Native American historian and theologian Vine Deloria, Jr. points out that “creation is an ecosystem present in a definable place,” (1973, p. 91) not a specific event, as in the Judeo-Christian tradition. The value of this approach for environmentalists is that it allows us to step away from the concept of a “lost Eden” that is only to be regained at some future date, and to instead view the natural world as perfect and holy in its native state, at all times.

Celtic spirituality, as a kind of native European tradition, has much to offer to heal the human-nature split as it is also based in the natural world. It shares the concept of a “universal mind” that acknowledges a spirit in all things as does Native American tradition. In building their sacred places over sources of water such as springs and wells and orienting doors to the East to take in the morning sun, Celtic spirituality was intentionally linked to the natural elements of water, fire, light and the directions. Contrasting even more deeply with modern modalities that focus on the economic value of land, property, territory and maps, the people of “the Celtic world were not necessarily interested in getting from point A to point B! Their meaning as a people was held more in the cyclic nature of the ongoing story than in the clear cut boundaries of time and space” (D’Arcy, 1991, p. 31). A spirituality that
emphasizes the rhythms of the days and seasons holds great potential to reconnect us more deeply with the earth.

**Non-Denominational & Grassroots Eco-Spirituality**

These aforementioned spiritualities feed and enrich informal grassroots rituals and help to personalize the ways that people make spiritual connections to nature. In the United States, the Creation Spirituality movement, begun by Matthew Fox in the 1970s has close to 400 members today and extends to a total of fourteen communities including those in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. These communities sponsor online discussion forums, annual conferences and informal gatherings and produce newsletters and journals that keep members creatively engaged and feed the movement from the bottom up.

Also in the United Kingdom, at a community-supported farm in Gloucestershire a kind of “earth healing” is practiced by Laurence Dungworth who “enables a healing process to occur in individuals with special needs” (ECOS, 2005, p. 68). Helping them to “experience the rhythm of the seasons, traditional festivals, and harvest for example, has enabled many of these young people in Camphill communities to come to terms with themselves, their fellow human beings and the world around them“(p. 68). Furthermore, Dungworth reports that “this healing often leads to a complete transformation of the individual” wherein “they gain a new and more balanced relationship with their environment” (p. 68). This is indeed a good way to work with upcoming generations – to teach them the value of the environment as a tool to help them to cope with modern stresses. This feeds back into Richard Louv’s work and simply makes good sense.
Ecopsychology

This is an emerging field that blends wilderness experience and shamanic traditions with western style psychoanalytical practices in the tradition of Freud and Jung and attempts to create a new model for healing that honors the best of all traditions. Whereas “modern psychotherapy is almost universally practiced during a fifty-minute hour in an office, in a building, in a city or suburb... that must usually be reached by driving a car along a congested freeway through a threatening city” (Roszak, Gomes & Kanner, 1995, p. 183), practitioners of this field engage healing by letting the wilderness do most of the work. According to Steven Harper, a California-based wilderness leader, psychologist, artist and former Outward Bound leader, “it was perhaps necessary to leave much of our instinctual selves behind as we evolved, yet we did not need to deaden ourselves in giving up our instinctual self. It is crucial that we reclaim our wildness, because this is where vitality lives” (p. 195).

Ecopsychology also contains within it the potential to balance out some of the “whiteness” of the environmentalist movement as described by noted environmental justice advocate, and past president of Earth Island Institute, Carl Antony. “The mythology of pure whiteness is destructive. We have to find a way to build a multicultural self that is in harmony with the ecological self. We need to embrace human diversity in the way we deal with each other – as opposed to the notion that white people are mainstream and everybody else is “other.” An ecopsychology that has no place for people of color, that doesn’t deliberately set out to correct the distortions of racism, is an oxymoron” (p. 277). Part and parcel of this
effort is the need to spare urban green spaces from overdevelopment, and to establish urban habitats, walkable communities and expand public transportation. Anthony has dedicated much of his life work to these very issues. In latching environmental issues into the complex web of human issues, ecopsychology helps to link environmentalism – an issue traditionally seen as a white, middle-class issue – to issues of poverty, social justice and living in peaceful community with others. It will be exciting to see how this field evolves in the coming years.

**Con-Bio Convertees**

There is increasing interest in the spiritual implications of ecological wisdom among tradition scientifically-based ecologists and conservation biologists such as Daniel Botkin and Gary Nabhan.

In his 2001 book on Thoreau, “No Man’s Garden,” Daniel Botkin recalls the Transcendentalist movement and seems to predict that a second wave of metaphysical ecology is appropriate for our times. Quoting Emerson, Botkin reiterates the importance of strengthening the relationship between people and nature – “nature is the opposite of the soul, answering it part for part. One is seal and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind and the ancient precept ‘Know thyself,’ and the modern precept ‘Study nature,’ become at last one maxim” (p. 70). Ultimately, Botkin concludes that we can step away from our technologically obsessed culture to “a new aesthetics, an understanding of the value to people of the intangible qualities of nature and, as Thoreau’s experiences suggest, even a sense of fun. With this perspective, we may
be able to see civilization and nature as interconnected systems that are both of value” (p. 243).

Gary Nabhan dexterously relates the inner and outer realities of human existence not as a duality, but a dynamic in his “Cultures of Habitat” (1997, p. 11). He states “it would be more fitting to imagine each human corpus as a diverse wildlife habitat than to persist in the illusion of the individual self” (p. 12). While at the same time denouncing a repetitive and jaded spiritual view of nature’s “mystical oneness,” he whips up even more mystical intrigue by pointing out that each species has a story to tell that can inform and educate the mere, tiny human. It’s interesting to note how his observation of the “illusion of the individual self” parallels so easily with the Buddhist notion of the “emptiness of inherent existence” and the inescapable interdependence of all beings. Both of which are much akin to the Native American concept of the web of life.

David Suzuki, a well-known science journalist based out of Canada has also recently embraced the importance of a spiritual approach to environmental problems and began a series called “Sacred Balance” in which he explores the “interconnectedness of all things” through a series of educational television programs, webcasts, daily spiritual exercises and web-based forums. Suggesting a simple daily practice, he quotes Brian Swimme (a mathematical cosmologist who also takes a spiritual view of nature and has collaborated with Matthew Fox): "one way to think about the sun, every time you see it at dawn, is to think of it as an act of cosmic generosity” (Sacred Balance website, 2009).
What this teaches us is that even our brightest, most well-trained scientific minds are proponents of embracing the reality of a spiritual value in nature, one that holds great potential to move our cause forward.

**Christianity**

Christian traditions have spawned their own ecology-based thinkers such as Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox, who are worthy of mentioning here and will be discussed below. But an even more common, grassroots trend has begun which is referred to as Creation Care – caring for God’s creation as good caretakers, who show gratitude, appreciation, respect and restraint towards environmental resources. For example, a Creation Care Study Program sponsored by several independent Christian colleges provides a year abroad for students to work on ecological restoration projects. Within the Mennonite Church, the Creation Care Network is involved in everything from planting gardens near churches to provide “soul-healing” and add life to their places of worship, to sponsoring “Buy Nothing for Christmas” campaigns. There is even an Evangelical Environmentalist Network that produces a “Creation Care” magazine premised on the following line of reasoning:

“When we explore what the Bible says about creation, we interpret each text in light of our relationship to Christ and his relationship to all of creation. If the Bible teaches us that Christ has created the universe, gives it life and sustains it, and has reconciled everything to God, then our actions should participate in Christ’s creating, sustaining, and reconciling work. We certainly shouldn’t be doing things that thwart this work!” (Evangelical Environmental Network, 2009).
There are similar efforts too numerous to mention here, but it is clear that the life work of Thomas Berry is coming to fruition. Writing since the late 1970's on the philosophical, historical and cultural importance of the natural world to human well-being, his opening work “New Story” laid much of the ground work for the Creation Care movement we are experiencing today as well as clarifying the importance of a psychic connection with nature that is currently lost:

“Children who begin their Earth studies or life studies do not experience any numinous aspect of these subjects. The excitement of existence is diminished. If this fascination, this entrancement, with life is not evoked, the children will not have the psychic energies needed to sustain the sorrows inherent in the human condition. They might never discover their true place in the vast world of time and space. Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events of their lives. The secular school as presently constituted cannot provide the mystique that should be associated with the story. Nor can the religious-oriented school that has only superficially adopted this new story of the universe evoke this experience in the child” (1988, pp. 130-131).

I would argue that this experience/disconnect is as relevant to adults as to children.

Similarly, former Dominican priest Matthew Fox has sparked a Creation Spirituality movement based on his work that begins with traditional Catholic theology and enlarges it to include a Mother God and has re-framed the old mythology of original sin into an “original blessing” that attempts to shift us out of a
spirituality of crime-and-punishment into a spirituality that views life as a blessing – greatly facilitating an openness to appreciation of the natural world. In The Hidden Spirituality of Men, he further urges men to embrace nature-based archetypes such as the Green Man, an ancient pagan symbol. He describes the Green Man as an embodiment of feminine wisdom/goddess energy in man “holding sway over mere knowledge” (2008, p.19) and a “spiritual warrior” that will “defend and protect the Earth and her creatures for the sake of future generations” (p. 31).

Noted environmental philosopher, Max Oelschlaeger, recognizing the importance of spirituality to the environmentalist movement, wrote “Caring for Creation” in 1994 in which he reviews much of the thought to date on spirit and nature. Describing a “continuum of ecotheologies,” he traces how the natural world underpins much theological thought in nearly all spiritual traditions – whether tribal, Wiccan or Christian (pp. 118-183). Quoting the work of Francis Schaeffer in Pollution and the Death of Man (1970), he describes the story of original sin as the foundational allegory that separated humans from nature and that “substantial healing can be a reality here and now” by healing the “fissure between man and nature.” Oelschlaeger’s assessment is that Schaeffer’s thesis is the earliest and strongest defense against Lynn White’s 1967 essay and devastating condemnation of Christianity’s ecological legacy, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.”

In his review of the creation stories of various traditions, he describes the work of liberal Protestant, Rosemary Ruether who he describes as a “postpatriarchal Christian feminist who offers alternatives … and attempts to integrate feminist theory and ecological insight in a way that amends the biblical
Recalling a truth that reverberates in the words of the deepest spiritual leaders and traditions, Ruether urges recognition of a “thou-ness” in all beings and a “life energy” that belies a consciousness as deep and numinous as any human’s. This reintegration of spirit and matter, according to Ruether, will create a “God/ess” that represents the coming evolution of humans and human spirituality – where we are fundamentally healers, liberators and nurturers instead of dominators, exploiters and destroyers. In other circles, this is called Sophia, Shekinah, Divine Wisdom, the Divine Feminine or the Feminine Principle. Whatever we choose to call it now is the time to bring it on.

**Judaism**

Michael Lerner, a rabbi and deep thinker, holding double-doctorates in both philosophy and psychology has developed the concept of a “Unity of All Being” in which the universe and all it contains compose a transcendent consciousness of which all are a part, including humans. This is similar to the Native American concept of the web of life in which humans are but a part of the consciousness of creation, and similar also to the Buddhist concept of dependent-origination and emptiness. In Buddhist thought, since “there are no phenomena that are not dependent-arising, there are no phenomena that are not empty of inherent existence” (His Holiness the Dalai Lama quoting Nagarjuna, 2006, p.60). In this philosophy, we all exist in relation to each other and we are in fact nothing at all (empty) unless we can be observed in relation to something else within creation.

By contextualizing modern spirituality within this larger consciousness, humans are no longer independent objects with control over themselves and the
world, but are subject to and actors upon the totality of all existence. Lerner eloquently draws out the implications of this philosophy in 300 pages of *Spirit Matters*, but the end result is that for our own well-being, we must consider the whole and the impact of singular actions upon the well-being of the whole (2000, pp. 33-37). Lerner distinguishes how this philosophy differs from conventional western spiritual traditions by pointing out “Spirit has been identified only with the realm of transcendence, as a powerful being that exists outside our bodies and beyond the Earth. The result has been patriarchal spiritual traditions that denigrate the Earth, the feminine, the body, and nature” (p. 36). Summarizing the current multiplex of environmental and human crises, he affirms, “building a social world based on the denial of Spirit can cause tremendous pain” (p. 37).

Lerner contends that a spiritual approach will become core to solving environmental problems since current political and social activist strategies are failing to gain sufficient momentum. He states that such a climate has forced a situation whereby “environmental visionaries transform themselves into lobbyists fighting for narrow victories that cannot possibly save the planet from ecological destruction because they’ve given up their dreams and despair of ever obtaining support from the majority of people” (pp. 156-157). No doubt many activists have felt this psychic tear many times over when forced to prioritize multiple environmental issues – whether to save a woodland from another highway or to lose suburban green space for the sake of the practical smart-growth approach to urban development. Lerner predicts “in the course of the next fifty years, more and more environmentalists will come to understand that Spirit Matters. They will
make the spiritual transformation of our consciousness the linchpin of their strategy to save the environment” (p. 157).

Not surprisingly, this approach is already manifesting. In a lecture to a group of activists and religious at a church in Columbia, Maryland in July 2009, noted environmental philosopher, Dr. Mark Sagoff asserted that in order for the environmentalist argument to move forward, nature must begin to be espoused for its intrinsic aesthetic and spiritual qualities, much like fine art. Quoting from an article in Philosophy and Public Policy Quarterly he states,

"Environmentalists generally regard intrinsic properties of nature as sources of reverence and obligation. Society has a duty to preserve the wonders of nature for what they are in themselves, that is, for the properties through which they appeal to moral intuitions and aesthetic judgments. Biodiversity—the variety of living things—provides the standard illustration of the glories of nature that move us to feelings of curiosity and respect. As the philosopher Ronald Dworkin points out, many of us believe that we have an obligation to protect species that goes beyond our own wellbeing; we ‘think we should admire and protect them because they are important in themselves, and not just if or because we or others want or enjoy them’” (Sagoff, 2007, p. 2).

**Taoism**

In using nature as a model of human experience, Taoist thought often becomes a helpful touchstone for an environmentalism that wishes to include the sacred aspects of the natural world in the conversation. Taoism, like Buddhism, recognizes an interdependence in nature and advocates that humans accept and
emulate this natural dynamic. To work in opposition to this principle would be foolish. Taoism encourages an individualized attention to the natural world as a source of guidance for the human in both practical and spiritual matters. Indeed, this may make it the singular most ecologically based spirituality of all. In a gracefully reflexive twist of integrity, Taoism, while advocating flexibility in all acts as modeled by nature, also includes as a main tenet “the Tao” - the concept that all paths are sacred, and that all objects in nature have a spiritual right and obligation to find and follow that path.

Many would now agree that working in opposition to natural forces has made fools of us. In considering how spiritual outlooks have contributed to the crisis, we can consider aspects of the Christian religion, such as the Puritan ethic of demonizing nature as aptly described in Sagoff’s “The Economy of the Earth” (1988, pp. 124-145). Or in Lynn White’s classic essay, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” in which White traces how Christian thought, beginning with the story of Adam, has created an ethical foundation for human dominion over the world. This is not to say that all modern Christian thought advocates disrespect for nature. In the words of Catholic monk Thomas Merton, “faith enables us to come to terms with our animal nature and to accept the task of trying to govern it according to the Divine will, that is, according to love” (1961, p.138).

In point of fact, Taoism originated in the midst of one of the world’s oldest ecological crises, during the Han dynasty (2 C.E.) in China, when a growing population and poorly drained cultivation systems created floods and droughts. A massive campaign to develop agriculture ensued and coincided with the
development of Taoist texts emphasizing nature, cosmology and conservation. It is these texts that became the majority the most ancient sources of Taoist wisdom (Girardot, Miller & Xiaogan, 2001, p. 163).

**Conclusion**

The modern environmentalist movement is striving to incorporate spiritual wisdom, but remains overly attached to a reductionist empirical model. Even hopeful trends such as conservation and environmental psychology remain locked in this outdated framework. Conservation psychology looks at how people are using natural resources – especially parks and so forth, and how they value them, but not why, or how to help people value them more than other places. Environmental psychology studies how humans make decisions about the environment – also very important, but frequently does not address the hows and whys of creating motivation for change. Interestingly, it also often defines “environment” as any place where a human may find oneself – even if it is not the natural world, and even if the context is utterly unrelated to conservation. Recent articles published in the Journal of Environmental Psychology include topics such as “Wayfinding with a GPS-Based Mobile Navigation System: A Comparison with Maps and Direct Experience” and “Scenes from a Restaurant: Privacy Regulation in Stressful Situations.” Clearly this work has much further to go.

In *Greening the Blues*, author Emily White points out that “compared with medication and the possibility of genetic splicing, fields and forests seem insignificant, we don’t even bother to study their effect on us” (2005, p. 60). Doing
so might “help situate depression in a broader cultural context, giving us a better understanding of the affliction” (p. 60)

As ecologists we are both philosophers and scientists. To move beyond, we must blend science with wisdom. Our focus, after all, is learning from nature how best to care for her. On one end of the scale this is all biology, exploration and inquisitive quantitative research, but at the other end of the scale, we must engage each other as humans in contract with our surrounding environment, who must both give and receive the riches of the natural world. To regain balance the analyst must marry the aesthetician. Ultimately environmentalists must attain spiritual enlightenment and integrate that wisdom into all aspects of their work.

**The Limits of Science – Scientific Materialism is not a way to live**

Perhaps the Dalai Lama says it best:

“In the current paradigm of science, only knowledge derived through a strictly empirical method underpinned by observation, inference and experimental verification can be considered valid. This method involves the use of quantification and measurement, repeatability, and confirmation by others. Many aspects of reality as well as some key elements of human existence, such as the ability to distinguish between good and evil, spirituality, artistic creativity – some of the things we most value about human beings – inevitably fall outside the scope of the method. Scientific knowledge, as it stands today, is not complete. Recognizing this fact, and clearly recognizing the limits of scientific knowledge, I believe, is essential. Only by such recognition can we genuinely appreciate the need to integrate science within the totality of human knowledge. Otherwise our conception of the world,
including our existence, will be limited to the facts adduced by science, leading to a deeply reductionist, materialistic, even nihilistic worldview” (His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 2005, pp. 206-207).

Why does all this matter? What is this thesis really about? What has it to do with Environmentalism? Where I am coming from is this: if we are to build a new world, we must learn to live less alienating lives, to be better partners with each other, within our neighborhoods as well as at the geo-political and cultural boundaries that divide countries. Environmental change is not just about understanding the chemical-biological processes that affect nature. It is about human processes within us and between us. Some of the change will have to be internal to each of us, and is as personal and unique as every individual. That is where and why understanding and applying the healing abilities of nature can serve us, and I would argue, is greatly underutilized. Once we have achieved some control over our own issues, we can then begin to work with others with confidence, knowing when an interpersonal issue is really just a personal one – for us, or the other person before us. By gaining this greater emotional maturity we learn when to back off, and when it is ok to push someone past their comfort zone. This is why spiritual and cultural contexts matter, and must be incorporated into environmentalist modalities. It is important to understand the differences that drive our difficulties in coming together, and important to see deeply enough to know that much spiritual thought emerges from the same roots, the same universal truths. To achieve lasting sustainability, we must all cooperate under new rules, rules that are profoundly different from the way that we have lived our lives in the
Western European world for the last two thousand or more years. Learning to emulate lifestyles that were at one time more sustainable is a wonderful place to start, but does not go deep enough and will not last long enough for the kinds changes that are really needed to make the big differences that we need now.

To reach this new world - what some might even call a new stage of human evolution - requires spiritual growth beyond our old boundaries as well. As environmental leaders, I would argue that the onus is on us to take the higher ground and learn how to do so without arrogance and pretention. We must become more than teachers and preachers, we must become the role models to follow. We must become peacemakers and community builders who are able to create places that sustain the environment as well as the human soul. Then perhaps we can appreciate the maxim that we are spiritual beings having a physical experience. It is the work we were born to do.
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**Montgomery, P. (XXXX) NEED REST OF REFERENCE**


