

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

**A thesis presented by**

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## **Preface**

April 20, 2009

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 19<sup>th</sup> about why humans aren't inclined to be "green." A recent survey indicated that climate change was 20<sup>th</sup> 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 trends in popular thought 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 of its true nature.

## Introduction

This paper will discuss the current and perhaps understated trend toward 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.

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 it in all things, but also in non-things, such as when we encounter the membranes that separate ourselves from everything else. In the gap of space between our nerves called a synapse, the empty spaces inside every atom, the delicate bronchial passages of the lungs... these are perhaps some of the places where spirit lives – a non-physical, but nonetheless extant reality. In the words of David Suzuki “we’re tied together by the matrix of air,” sharing the same pool of atoms with all the other breathing things. The air we breathe in this moment is “the same air that Jesus Christ and Joan of Arc once breathed” (Suzuki, 2003).

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. The research substantiates the idea that a spiritual approach to environmental change is effective in feeding the movement the psychic energy that it requires in order to escalate its work. It also reinforces the concept that individual spiritual development is inextricably connected to an evolution of human consciousness which some argue to be the most essential change needed in order for humans to survive the immense challenges that now face us.

This paper will also examine literature, theories and trends in popular thought 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. Such ideological support reveals the pervasive popularity of a spiritual approach that nonetheless remains curiously undercover and unspoken. This thesis asserts that the urgency of the times requires that we drop the conventional attitudes that make it taboo or politically incorrect to discuss religion and spirituality when we talk about saving the Earth - and ourselves.

Having established the importance of incorporating a spiritual component into environmental work, recommended actions for environmentalists will be made. The resulting “Action Guide for Spiritual Environmentalists” includes an introduction to *integrated environmentalism*, based on Integral Theory as developed by Ken Wilber (Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009) as well as a model for framing environmental messages and actions that incorporate both science and spirit and cast a positive, uplifting valence over the troubled waters.

## **Review of Evidence-Based Research**

What does science have to say about spirit and nature? What effect do personal experiences in the natural world have on our behaviors? Is there a positive correlation between being in the outdoors and pro-environmental behaviors? As a matter of fact, there is.

### **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 affect 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.

### **Nature as Healer**

Can the effects of the wilderness be measured and proven to have positive impacts to human health and well-being? And if so, how can such evidence be used to further the work of environmentalists? This section explores the physical,

emotional and spiritually healing effects of nature. Science can now quantifiably prove the healing effects of nature.

### **Healing Effects - Physical**

Although it may sometimes be dismissed as mystical or unscientific, nature is a proven healer. Recent research shows 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, p. 152).

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 research subjects were exposed to natural rather than urban environments” (Ulrich, et al., 1991, p. 201). Several measures of physiological stress showed improvement: heart period, muscle tension, skin conductance and blood pressure – all of which are used as measures of activity in the autonomic nervous system, the bodily system that registers our involuntary reactions to 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” (Maller, Townsend, Brown & St. Leger, 2002, p. 2). Deakin University Australia - Parks Victoria thus concluded that parks are a “fundamental health resource, particularly in terms of disease prevention” (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 among two groups of patients, the 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, environmentalists might consider building upon these innate tendencies by consciously incorporating them into our strategies for creating environmental change. Perhaps by using pictures to motivate pro-environmental behaviors, or outdoor recreation as a prelude to action.

Central to much of the research revolving around the therapeutic benefits of nature is the Attention Restoration Therapy (ART) model developed by Steve Kaplan and Rachel Kaplan of University of Michigan. This model provides a theoretical framework for research that proves the restorative effects of nature,



particularly in terms of everyday human fatigue. Researchers in Taiwan used the ART model to confirm 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 were 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. It gives one pause for thought –if our

self-esteem goes up and we feel valued and accepted by even so much as a picture, then clearly nature holds great meaning to us.

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, who were early advocates for the benefits of a wilderness experience. The new field of Ecopsychology promises to take this work forward by linking the beneficial effects of nature on the human psyche to beneficial actions on behalf of the environment.

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 ratings for positive life functioning 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). Such emotional shifts nearly always precede an encounter with our interconnectedness, whereby we lose our sense of separation, and become immersed in our deep connection with the Earth and the Cosmos.

## 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*” (Schaefer, 2006, p. 1, emphasis added). 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” (p. 1). Schaefer states that 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).” Pointing to “Traditional First Nations” techniques that “include an element of respect for the land and a spiritual connection with an ecosystem,” (p. 3) Schaefer clarifies the importance of not only performing the activities of the restorative work, but placing it in a spiritual context that sparks an awareness of this gestalt of nature – one that puts us in a mental space of deep connection, where healing the earth helps us to heal ourselves and vice-versa.

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 that seeks only to “root out the enemy invasives,” but a spiritual one that conveys healing energy into the sites targeted for restoration. While conservation biologists may feel a little unsure about employing this approach, generally the public at large has already embraced the idea that our thoughts and intentions affect the outcome

of our work, so we should proceed with confidence by encouraging volunteers to add their own personal healing elements into the process.

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 jiggle 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 professional automobile 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. She has also explored nature-based spirituality and hosts 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](http://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 between two groups of women in the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness Area in Minnesota and the Grand Canyon in northern Arizona. 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 experience" 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. It is exciting evidence that links human spiritual health with nature but leads to more questions. Why does a “bona-fide wilderness” have this effect on us? What about the setting is having this impact? What exactly is going on between the human psyche and the natural world? Ecopsychology is beginning to embrace these questions and ideas.

Clearly, there is much more to explore, but in some ways we’ve also “proven” the obvious – that the good feeling we get when we restore ourselves in nature is more than just a feeling – it *is* actually good for us! While such research helps to justify healing gardens in hospitals, better patient care, and more pleasant built environments and urban spaces, it does not help us to spread the word, gain more devotees, or help us to teach others about the benefits of nature. Nor does it teach those of us who already have a basic understanding how we might deepen our connections with nature. It simply quantifies what we already know. So, what must we do to move this work forward? We must apply the knowledge. The use of nature as a balm for ailments is commonly embraced. In a world overloaded with



human, social and psychological needs - from hungry and neglected street children in the Philippines to forgotten manic-depressives in New York - reaching out to nature for healing is not only practical and possible, but it is also *free!* We might be able to reach to populations in great need of care while also gaining support for environmental change. Environmentalists who stand up for the rights of all people to access the life-spring of health and well-being that nature provides not only protect the environment, but protect human rights as well.

### **Trends in Popular Thought Relating Spirit and Nature**

One way to spread the message is by getting people to talk about it. Public discourse allows us to develop a common interpretation of the science and explore ways to put it to use. And everyone *is* talking about it. From Nature Deficit Disorder to green therapy, the practical uses of nature-as-healer are springing up everywhere. The potential applications are as vast as the human imagination.

#### **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 do in fact include a spiritual component.

Richard Louv is currently perhaps the best-known 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 whose 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, relates interestingly to the work of Kaplan and Kaplan (whose research focuses on nature's ability to improve human attention spans), 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). What is striking about his observations is that we fear the wildness and unrestricted interaction – yet that is the very spiritual food that we seek. Ecopsychology could have a field day with this – a kind of futile, controlling psychological complex with Mother Earth that attempts to keep her at a safe distance, perhaps to more easily exploit her? How much more important it then becomes to find ways to uphold the sacred and spiritual value of nature, and keep such warped tendencies at bay.

### **Sacred Gardens and Therapeutic Horticulture**

Another indicator of a cultural evolution that accepts the spiritually, physically and emotionally healing aspects of nature can 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 toward creating sacred and healing gardens in urban and suburban areas.

Recent trends in Landscape Architecture are also integrating the healing aspects of nature into gardens and landscapes. Naomi Sachs, a landscape architect in New York, has created a Therapeutic Landscapes database

([www.healinglandscapes.org](http://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. Not only are the medicinal effects of plants taken into consideration, but according to Sachs, their simple presence alone is used to convey restorative and healing impacts without requiring ingesting them via potions, teas or capsules (personal communication, 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.

It’s a shame that such simple solutions aren’t already in place in every doctor’s office, hospital, emergency room and school. It’s as if our attachment to the need for scientific evidence has prevented us from employing common sense. Environmentalists are not off the hook either. In our efforts to explain and explore the fascinating details of nature, we have overlooked her awesome powers. Exposing people to the great benefits of nature has taken second place to ecological

cycles and the physiological characteristics of the land, plants and animals. An evolved environmentalism needs to include actions that enrapture participants in the beauty of nature – a beauty that is much more than physical, but also humbling and evocative; recharging us emotionally, spiritually, physically and mentally.

### **The Role of the Feminine**

The Feminine Principle, the Sacred Feminine, the Goddess. Any modern discussion that touches upon the idea of changing human consciousness would be remiss if it failed to mention the importance of valuing feminine principles and energies as a major part of the solution. When we are talking about changing human consciousness related to the environment, we are talking about recalling the great generative power and nurturing influence of the Earth. This paper discusses these concepts in terms of *healing*, for this is a great female power. Nature itself assigns this task to us through motherhood and the rearing of children. Perhaps the tendency to overlook and under-employ the healing power of the Earth is related to our cultural subjugation of women and over-emphasis on the powers of men. Some say that bringing these forces back into balance is directly related to bringing balance and healing back into the environment; that our appreciation of women's bodies, cycles and innately gentle and nurturing tendencies will foster the same respect and appreciation for Mother Earth.

Honoring the Earth as a Spirit that embodies the Greatest Mother we know can be directly related to gaining environmental change. William Coleman of the Global Footprint Network, a sustainability organization in California shares this story.

“My interest in eco-spirituality and eco-feminism has been a personal journey connecting all the way back to Maslow’s work in wilderness psychology (a combination of transpersonal and social psychology), alongside of parallel efforts to get new wilderness protections written into law during the 1970s and ‘80s.

Our group was finally successful in that effort, but only after nearly 10 years of work. I really believe the pivotal moment was an effort (1982 if I recall) to put together a panel of religious leaders for a public hearing held in Little Rock, Arkansas in support of what eventually became the Arkansas Wilderness Act of 1984. For that panel we recruited men and women from the Methodist, Unitarian, Episcopalian and Jewish communities to testify on the spiritual significance of wilderness, and why wilderness protections were in society’s best long-term interests. That testimony is part of the formal record from the hearing as part of the USDA Forest Service’s Second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) hearings for potential wilderness designations in the Ozark and Ouachita National Forests. During this panel’s testimony on these very notions you could have heard a pin drop in the room. The hearing was held in a university amphitheater filled with maybe 200 people, typically restless after a day-long set of presentations for and against wilderness protections. But when these 4 people sat down to speak that afternoon, it was as if time suddenly stopped running. All eyes were zeroed in on their hour-long testimony. The messages were the same: in the experience of wilderness, the solitude of nature, comes our opportunity to connect with the divine. Sure it was the Bible Belt where people are typically attentive to religious leaders. But everyone in the room, including the loggers and industrial lobbyists, the foresters as well as the environmentalists, were rapt and, it seemed to me, won over by the panel’s reasoning: it would absolutely run against the grain of

Scripture to argue that Moses and Jesus had been wrong in choosing the wilderness as settings for their spiritual revelations.

Next day the story was front-page news in the Arkansas Gazette. Not only did I know then that we had won the day, but I knew that we had finally won the war. I knew that new wilderness designations would make their way into law even in the ultra-conservative South. So it was a joyful thing to have moved to D.C. by 1984, in time to for Ronald Reagan to sign the Arkansas bill.

Since then my appreciation for the role of the Feminine in helping facilitate humanity's reconnection with Nature has expanded. I now get the connection between disempowering women and our ability to depersonalize relationships with species, habitats and natural processes. I get the connection between human fear related to the raw sensuality of the natural world and our own mixed up views about women's powerful generative sexuality. These two things are inseparable in my view. To really solve one of these issues we have to solve them both at the same time. But...therein lies the hidden opportunity (personal communication, October 23, 2009)!"

While it may not be appearing in every corner, people are beginning to understand that environmental and human issues are inextricably interwoven and that lasting solutions must address both, as an organic whole. As part of the process, women must learn to embody the Goddess and bring her forth into the world. In order for us to do this, we need the inspiration, light and fire that art, literature and philosophy can provide. Fortunately, there is an abundance to choose from.

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

Art, philosophy and religion have always had much to say about the beauty and power of the Earth and all of creation. Given such an historical precedent for a spiritual view of nature – how much sense does it make for environmentalists to continue to veil it? There is deep support for work that engages the spiritual aspects of nature and the best philosophers and practitioners are refocusing their faith on gratitude, appreciation and reverence for the natural world.

### **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, 2002, 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, when this piece was written.

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). In these words, Leopold clarifies the importance of the spiritual approach as one that can change human values and create a basis for environmental change, moving us away from an overly simplistic problem-solution framework, to one that challenges us to evolve to a new level of consciousness that no longer trivializes nature, but honors its irreplaceable value to the human body and soul.

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. However this philosophy may 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. In striving to assert the inherent value of nature, Deep Ecology may place nature out of the reach of ‘unworthy’ human hands. Nonetheless, the earnest respect that the Deep Ecology principles endorse reflect the understanding that nature is much more than a vast complex of raw material resources.

In 1985, 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 each participant becomes the voice of a non-human being, speaking for them and enacting an experience of “mourning and remembering.” Participants act out the ecological losses that have affected their species – whether it involves loss of life, habitat or other concerns. 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 condemning the exploitation of nature by humans, the Council speaks to

the human tribe in order to offer the lessons that each non-human has to share. For example, the Mountain offers “solidity and deep peace” and the Condor offers its “keen, far-seeing eye” (Macy, 2009). Such formal, elaborate 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. However, they remain on the outskirts of the movement, unincorporated into the educational and practical work. Perhaps if we pause from action long enough to invoke such rituals, we will find new ways of seeing and doing that will make our efforts more effective.

### **Native Traditions**

Native Ceremonies have long revered the Earth’s spiritual value. There is an elegant simplicity to many Native American spiritual practices that honor and cherish nature in its untouched, pristine state. This is appealing to many environmentalists and nature lovers, so these traditions continue to hold a place of reverence among many. However, while environmentalists quietly give this outlook an approving nod, they frequently stop short of including their messages in writing, speeches and actions.

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. And perhaps to add balance by adding the Water element to the Earth, Air and Fire (Sun) elements already present. A seasoned eye can still spot such places, 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 have been no modifications to these places at all by subsequent landowners and custodians over the passage of time since they are unconsciously recognized as sacred and whole. In addition to dedicated spiritual places, 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 Earth Mother, with no need for a human touch. 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. Re-establishing these places as inherently sacred and divine instead of labeling them simply "undeveloped" will aid our efforts.

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, the voice of Creation, or still the mind to experience visions and dreams from the Earth itself 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 even 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" (Montgomery, 2008, p. 73).

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. The expression of this idea to a broader audience will help create foundations for ecological action.

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. In connecting us to the “ongoing story” we are reminded of our connection the past as well as the future, sustainability principles, and the Native American concept of considering the needs of the Seventh Generation.

### **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, 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 suggests that modern, “tamed” forms of “acting out” are perhaps linked to our confined existence. By linking us to our wild selves, wilderness therapy may hold new remedies for human maladies.

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 Anthony. “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 traditional, scientifically-based ecologists and conservation biologists such as Daniel Botkin and Gary Nabhan. This interest further supports the idea of the readiness of the general public, and even scientists to a spiritual approach.

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). It would indeed be a breakthrough to “naturize civilization” in this way rather than to continue to “civilize nature” as we have been, with rather tragic results to date.

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. Perhaps it is destiny that some of the greatest ecological minds have found their way back to these deeply spiritual truths.

David Suzuki, a well-known geneticist and 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).

Even our brightest, most well-trained scientific minds have become proponents of embracing the reality of a spiritual value in nature as one that holds great potential to move our cause forward. It is now time to put the parlance in our educational, political and social movements for change.

## **Christianity**

Christian traditions have spawned their own ecology-based thinkers such as Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox, who are very 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 spiritual connection with nature that remains lost more than 20 years later:

“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 and that as environmentalists, part of our job includes re-engaging all people with the “numinous aspect” of nature.

Similarly, former Dominican priest Matthew Fox has sparked a Creation Spirituality movement. His work begins with traditional Catholic theology and enlarges to include a Mother God, and re-frames the 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 men “holding sway over mere knowledge” (2008, p.19) and as a “spiritual warrior” that will “defend and protect the Earth and her creatures for the sake of future generations” (p. 31). Such archetypes can be useful symbols for sustainable living that honors the Earth and all life upon it. It is perhaps more effective than Saints whose claims to fame are battles (St. George) and intellectual discourses (St. Augustine). The symbology of Green Man speaks more directly to the issues of our time.

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 whom 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 tradition” (p. 159). 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. Like Environmental Justice, this blending of women’s issues and environmental ones under a larger umbrella offers a new outlook that harkens to the idea of an evolution of human consciousness – a fundamental shift in our perceptions that links the well-being of humans to the well-being of the environment. Such shifts are not achieved by politics, science or collective action, but rather through spiritual expressions – and occur mainly at the personal level.

### **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 - the “Unity of All Being,” 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). I wholeheartedly agree.

Not surprisingly, this approach is already manifesting. In a lecture to a group of activists and religious that I attended 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 to enjoy



them” (Sagoff, 2007, p. 2).

If Lerner, Sagoff, Oelschlager and others have already stated the case for us, why should we continue to hold back? If one needs further evidence of the inseparable linkage between spirit and nature, then the ancient, nature-based philosophy of Taoism provides fruitful ground.

### **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 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 natural 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. These very texts became the foundational sources of Taoist wisdom (Girardot, Miller & Xiaogan, 2001, p. 163). Perhaps the time is ripe for a modern version of Earth-centered spiritualities and philosophies to help us face the immense ecological crises of global warming and climate change, not so unlike those in ancient China, where overpopulation and hunger were the epic crises of the day.

Many spiritual traditions are deeply rooted in creation and nature but over time have been changed into religious institutions that set up rules and rituals divorced from the Source. As this paper reveals, current trends are pointing the faithful back to Life and Nature as the purest expressions of the Sacred. Thank God! As environmentalists who treasure nature's inherent worth, we can share these sacred moments with people of all spiritual traditions, and should pause more often

to do so. Prayer can change the world as much as any protest, political maneuver or legal proceeding.

## **An Action Guide for Spiritual Environmentalists**

The ties between spirit and nature are numerous and profound. But what do we do with this information? How can we apply it in practical, meaningful ways? What do we do now? How can we incorporate a spiritual approach into environmental messages and actions? The movement has good solutions and good science but we're still missing much in the way of a spirit of cooperation, commitment and collective action. Can we blend science and spirit in a way that creates a self-feeding nutrient cycle, mimicking the processes we observe in nature? Can we reframe messages in ways to prove that common solutions can solve both human and environmental issues? The following guide will attempt to provide a few means of practicing "spiritual environmentalism." While by no means comprehensive, it attempts to present the most powerful approaches known to this writer.

Actions that invoke spiritual connections to nature can be as simple or complex as you want them to be. Anything from simply breathing to the formal "AQAL" techniques of Integral Theory are all valid. But perhaps simplicity is best. Some call it Ceremony, some Ritual and others call it Prayer – but getting stated is all we really need to do. As environmentalists, we need a practice that will sustain us and help us gather up the energy we need to do the work we are called to do. Such practices also help to keep us in balance and nourish our resilience when times are tough and the battles challenge us beyond our human limits. We can also help others whom we solicit for environmental action by assisting them in making personal, unshakeable connections with nature. This will cultivate a deep

understanding and appreciation for the work, and buffers the effects of personal sacrifice and delayed gratification that are an everyday life experience for environmentalists. When we engage in acts that nourish spirit - both for ourselves and others - our work will be made easier because we will not have to persuade others of the importance of the issues or the gravity of the situation – for they will already *know*. In many ways, we cannot afford to skip this important step.

Simply reaching up to the sun to thank it for another day's work and to receive the energy and warmth it unfailingly sends us is an effective practice. Connecting to the Earth and feeling the powerful energy that flows into us, then reaching back with gratitude and appreciation is just as effective. Some practice the two together, thus making a complete prayer, balancing the masculine energy of the Sun and the feminine energy of the Earth. However, the best practice is one that feels comfortable and natural. In the words of educator and environmental psychologist Dr. Stuart Miller, following our inner voice and intuition is the surest path to "Earth Intimacy."

For those who may feel a bit hesitant or too inexperienced to take a leading role in such rituals, prayers or ceremonies, the best course is to begin a personal practice. While at first it may seem uncomfortable, odd or ineffective, over time an ease and assurance will develop and you will learn to articulate practices and prayers that work in the ways that are needed. Thus begins an internal process, that once strengthened, can be more easily shared with others.

This action guide will start with personal practices then discuss ceremonies that can be shared, or used to precede actions on behalf of the environment. Finally, modalities for leading others in spiritual-environmentalist practices will be shared,

along with suggestions for messaging that includes a spiritual component. An annotated bibliography of reading materials to explore this subject further is provided as an appendix.

### **Personal Practices**

Wong How Man, a noted Chinese conservationist says, “you have to be willing to be lost.” There is perhaps no more apt a description of one’s personal spiritual practices. The willingness to be still, to allow anything to come into one’s mind is so out of step with our routinized, scheduled and goal-oriented culture that it is often an amazingly difficult state of mind to achieve. The very abundance of self-help books, tapes, websites and gurus speaks to our struggle to find spirit in a materialistic world. The recent news of the death and injury of several attendees of a sweat lodge conducted by motivational guru James Arthur Ray speaks to the desperation of individuals to make contact with the numinous aspect of existence (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/18/third-sweat-lodge-death>). Instead of listening to their body’s warning signs, and even perhaps common sense, these people took a chance with their lives in hopes of experiencing the Sacred. This belies a sense of desperation and gnawing hunger for a spirituality that touches us deeply and personally, helping us to find our place in the Universe. It is a terrible tragedy that such losses occur when with a just little gentle guidance, people could find their way back to the Garden in simple and safe ways. Who better perhaps than environmentalists to lead others to this infinite and abundant source? It is also very fitting that when we ask others to give of themselves by making sacrifices and taking

action, that we provide something in exchange - a source of comfort, peace and connection.

Experiences need not be extreme in order to bring us face to face with Spirit. Simply sitting in a favorite spot in nature and writing in a journal can transport us to our higher nature, our deeply spiritual selves. It is foolish to dismiss such practices as unimportant, however, they are typically the first acts sacrificed in order to divert energies to lobbying, phone-banking, letter writing and petition signing. But before we can guide others to this experience, we must gain some familiarity with it for ourselves. We need not be masters, but we will be better teachers if we first spend time in the laboratory.

### **Earth Intimacy**

Earth intimacy refers to the personal, internal process that occurs as one sits quietly in nature and experiences all that surrounds them. This intimacy can occur in a place of incredible beauty, or an ordinary place, or even a place that has been destroyed. What makes the experience intimate is that the person finds that their own feelings, thoughts and experiences parallel to that of their environment. If there is a sense of power and beauty, it is recognized as an inherent quality of the tree, canyon, insect or flower. If there is pain, then one is awakened to the similar suffering of the desecrated woodland, polluted stream or injured animal. In these moments, we lose our sense of separation, and understand that we are on equal footing with all life on the planet, and that for any of us to survive, we must learn to care for “all our relations,” not just ourselves.

Lifelong educator and environmental psychologist, Stuart Miller, has witnessed the profound effects of intimate moments in nature over the course of more than fifteen years as a professor at Towson University in Baltimore, Maryland. In describing the relevance of a spiritual environmentalism, Miller states:

“Sustainable change in the way people relate to the natural world (outer change) may necessitate an evolution of consciousness (inner change: a personal transformation that includes an alteration in worldview, a redefinition of self, and a shift in values. We have found that the sacred act of spending intimate moments with the Earth, sharing these personal stories of nature transcendence, learning to interpret their meaning, and receiving cultural support for this spiritual mode of relating to the Earth provides the healing framework, intuitive knowledge, poetic inspiration, and psychic energy needed to create and maintain meaningful change” (Miller, 2009).

As a result of his observations, he has constructed a theory he calls “Earth Intimacy,” whereby practitioners go through an internal process that brings them into deep, personal contact with the divinity in nature. Starting with the senses, one is attracted and experiences a connection with the “rhythms, patterns and processes of nature.” Next there is an experience of “intimate oneness.” At this point, one typically begins to think about ways of “cherishing and protecting the Earth.” On a feeling level, subjects find themselves in a “serene, blissful, Earth-Whole state,” often with a sense of “loving harmony, well-being and complete fulfillment” (Miller, 2009).



Powerful stuff - accessed as easily as sitting near a tree, in the woods, or on a beach. Miller's research contains countless entries from the journals of his students, revealing that these simple actions spark personal change and commitment to environmental protection. As environmentalists, we can share this theory of Earth Intimacy with others, encourage them to experience it for themselves, and provide the "cultural support" that Miller speaks of by hosting discussion groups, and simply a listening ear when someone shares their intimate Earth experience. We must celebrate these moments with each other. We must take the time to cherish these experiences for the work that they achieve. We can popularize Earth Intimacy as a means of expanding the depth and the breadth of support for the environment. We can also soothe the tendency towards burnout in others and ourselves. The next time we encounter a discouraged, frustrated or angry soldier in the battle, we can remind them that it's time for a little "Earth Intimacy."

Dr. Miller and I have begun Earth Intimacy programs with the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club, which currently includes an Earth Spirituality discussion group. We hope one day be able to create a nation-wide Earth Intimacy program. Currently, Dr. Miller is writing a book compiling the journals of his students along with the observations he has made over the course of his career that together support his theory of Earth Intimacy. His efforts provide important groundwork and direction for the work that will follow.

## **Meditation**

Stillness is the source of serenity. Serenity feeds inspired, creative actions, and allows us to return to familiar situations feeling refreshed - with a new outlook

or a novel approach to solving a problem. The qualities that meditation generates help us to stand calmly and confidently in who we are, so that we can do our best work. And when we are able to stand calmly and confidently in who we are, deeply rooted in our connection to the Earth, we are a force to be reckoned with.

There are countless books and teachings on the value of meditation, and it's typically one of those things that we all know we should be doing more of. The value of meditation is mentioned here because it can feed a moment of Earth Intimacy, or be used to give us the internal stamina, clarity and commitment for anything that we are working on. While some struggle to quiet the mind, others may slip easily into a meditative state. If you are fortunate enough to be one of the latter, your task is to schedule at least a weekly session for meditation. This can be outdoors in a favorite and familiar spot. New and exciting places may be too distracting for stilling the mind, though very tempting! Some find walking meditation to be helpful but the same rules apply. This is not physical exercise or green therapy; this is time for quieting the mind, to feel the Earth underfoot and to focus on breathing. Remember that the benefit of emptying the mind is that it enables us to return to our life with calmness, clarity, and space for new ideas. With such benefits, how can we afford *not* to apply this technique to our work on behalf of the environment?

If meditation is a challenge, then an Earth Intimacy approach may be used. Sit on, near, or in a tree. Reflect on your life, and the life of the tree. Sit on the beach and let the rhythmic flow of the waves take your mind out to the horizon where there is nothing but perhaps the setting sun. Experience the sensual beauty and pleasure of the moment, and let your heart be grateful to the Earth for the gift of life

– for food, air and water. Let your thoughts flow from this place of gratitude and appreciation and after ten or fifteen minutes, or longer, make some notes in your journal about what you have seen, felt, heard, smelled, touched and tasted.

## **Journaling**

Sitting alone in nature and writing in a journal is a great way to develop a spiritual connection to it. Reading passages from natural history writers prior to journaling can also produce great results. For some, simply spending quiet time reflecting by a favorite natural element such as water or trees is sufficient inspiration. Some find it helpful to begin by focusing on sensory experience, and the beauty of their surroundings. A friend who conducts “Sacred Gardening” workshops asks participants to have “Lunch with a Tree.” During this time, they attempt to connect with the tree on any level that they can, even perhaps communicating with it. More formal practices such as these can be an excellent prelude to journaling.

In his many years of teaching college students, environmental psychology Stuart Miller has observed that journaling assists in a “contextualization of the self: a placing of self in its proper context.” This concept recalls our earlier definition of a “spiritual experience in nature” as being “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.” Journaling acts as a catalyst for change at the intra-personal level, then radiates outward in actions that preserve and protect the environment.

## **Differences in the Genders**

Along with honoring your own intuitive sense about how to make contact with the divine in nature, it's good to remember that what works for you may not be what works for someone else. Don't let such differences influence your own personal style. Women tend to relate to nature in nurturing, emotional ways, and have special affinities with animals. "Look at the sweet, fuzzy newborn chicks!" Men tend to explore nature using logic and a utilitarian approach. "What can I do with this rock and stick?" This is perhaps most easily observed in girls and boys – before cultural conditioning and education have altered our thoughts and behaviors. Honor yourself as a sacred expression of the divine and simply do what works best for you, without second-guessing.

## **Tree Breathing**

If you'd like to try something a little more active, tree breathing is a nice transition into establishing intuitive communication with the natural world. While there are many different approaches, I will share what has worked for me. When you've found a tree you'd like to breathe with, before approaching it, first connect with your surroundings – the Universe and the Earth.

1. Reach both arms up to the heavens.
2. Introduce yourself - "Father Creation, this is your daughter/son [state your name]."
3. Thank Creator - reach out in gratitude and love in your own words.

4. Ask to be filled with all that you need. It is best to avoid stating any specific requests and have faith that Creation knows best what can help you and will provide.
5. Take a deep inhale, and as you exhale, let your arms fall slowly to your sides and back up again to Creation (inhaling), then exhale again, drawing down the energy of the Universe.
6. When your arms are at your sides, greet Earth Mother.
7. Introduce yourself - "Earth Mother, it's your daughter/son [state your name]."
8. Thank her for all that she provides.
9. Ask to be filled with what you need - same as above.
10. Breathing in, pull your arms overhead, palms up, drawing up the Earth energy into your aura, circle back down and draw up one more time in the same way, and on the exhale, slowly drop your arms back down for one more drawing up - but this time only half-way up, reach out from your middle to the tips of your fingers. See if you can sense where the outside of your aura is and take hold of it and draw it in to your "womb space," or the area where you know your uterus to be. For men, draw into your heart chakra - at the center of your chest at the latitude of the heart.

Now that you're centered between heaven and Earth (much like trees are), you can approach the tree and place your hands at a comfortable height along the trunk of the tree. Try to keep your feet on the soil and avoid standing on the roots. Close your eyes, and breathe in the energy of the Universe through the top of your head, or your crown chakra. Exhaling, draw up the energy of the Earth from your feet or through your root chakra. Take a few deep breaths in this manner, and as you feel ready, on an exhale; pass the energy from the Earth into the tree through

your hands. Continue breathing in this way for a few breaths. Mentally tune in to the tree, and see if it has any messages for you. If an exchange develops, try to stay with it and don't break away suddenly. When your intuition says it's enough, thank the tree, return to the rhythm of your breath, and step away gently.

You may wish to record your experiences in your journal, as John Muir did after spending an afternoon at the top of a Douglas Spruce, in the midst of a violent wind-storm in Yosemite. As you read, you will see how he begins with sensory experience, and then concludes by drawing parallels between the tree and humankind.

“The fragrance of the woods was less marked than that produced during warm rain, when so many balsamic buds and leaves are steeped like tea; but, from the chafing of resiny branches against each other, and the incessant attrition of myriads of needles, the gale was spiced to a very tonic degree. And besides the fragrance from these local sources there were traces of scents brought from afar. For this wind came first from the sea, rubbing against its fresh, briny waves, then distilled through the redwoods, threading rich ferny gulches, and spreading itself in broad undulating currents over many a flower-enameled ridge of the coast mountains, then across the golden plains, up the purple foot-hills, and into these piny woods with the varied incense gathered along the way...

We all travel the milky way together, trees and men; but it never occurred to me until this stormday, while swinging in the wind, that trees are travelers, in the ordinary sense. They make many journeys, not extensive ones, it is true; but our own little journeys, away and back again, are only little more than tree-wavings – many of them not so much” (Finch & Elder, 2002, pp. 256-257).

## Wilderness Survival Adventures

Many people are inspired by the challenge of living in the wild, and feel the deepest connection comes from submitting the self to nature and scraping out a living from little more than what nature provides in raw form. The popularity of Tom Brown's Tracker School in general, and among environmentalists in particular, speaks to the power of this approach. Brown's teachings are threaded with spiritual truths and are entirely founded upon what he learned over several years of his youth, apprenticing with a traditional Apache tracker, elder and wise man known simply as "Grandfather." Brown relates the story of Grandfather's battle with loneliness in the wild, after spending several *years* apart from any human contact while journeying through Western Canada. Driven by desperation for human contact, and an overwhelming desire to see his tribe again, Grandfather attempts the long journey home, encountering a treacherous, frozen mountain pass. In his death-defying attempts to reach the other side of the mountain, which he ultimately does not achieve, Grandfather overcomes his loneliness by becoming his own best friend and learning to love himself at a deeper level than he imagined possible:

"It was at the point that he was making the journey back to camp that he began to appreciate what his body could do. In that appreciation he also found a love for himself. It was at this point when he stopped being critical of his every thought and action and began to accept himself, value himself, as he would everyone and everything else. That is when his journey became an effortless dance and he felt so much a part of the mountain and snow. That is when the loneliness vanished forever" (Brown, 1993, pp. 8-89).

Being pushed to the edge of our physical limitations can lead to profound shifts in consciousness. While perhaps extreme, if such experiences sound appealing, you might first try being alone in the woods in a tent for a few days, then if that does not seem too difficult, check the Tracker School curriculum at <http://www.trackerschool.com/>.

### **Shamanistic Teachings**

Tom Brown's "Grandfather" was a medicine man in his own tradition. Today, medicine people from many tribes, backgrounds and ethnicities (including native European traditions) are coming forward to share what these ancient Earth-based spiritualities have to teach. There is even a certain urgency to the teachings due to the many prophecies that foretell of hard times soon coming to Earth. Global warming is but one manifestation of these prophecies. Whether this sounds far-fetched to you or not, the benefits of living in close connection with the Earth, and in using as few resources as possible are a core component of such teachings and are generally of interest to environmentalists. There is probably a teacher close to where you live who you can connect with to find out more, and to become connected with a community of like-minded people. Word of mouth and personal reference are the most likely methods of finding such teachers since many don't have "a presence on the World Wide Web," preferring instead the "old ways." The Spirit and Nature website has a community bulletin board that you can use to post requests and questions about teachers, and I will personally monitor the activity there and attempt to provide guidance and references to seekers (<http://www.trunity.net/san>).



## **Green Man**

Matthew Fox, in *The Hidden Spirituality of Men* (2008) explores several archetypes for assisting modern men in deepening their spirituality. Among these, the Green Man stands out as a metaphor for honoring the Earth as a source for the masculine spirit. The image of the Green Man, covered in vines with a scruffy face made of tree bark contains within it both the rough and tumble, ecstatic energy of the masculine as well as the fertility of the Earth as expressed in trees and plants. It can be a powerful metaphor for celebrating these aspects of men, while still honoring the Earth first and foremost, as the source of such energy. Festivals and events can make this icon their central figure and allow men to express their natural, nurturing “Father Earth” side in a culture that otherwise discourages such expressions. As a protective spirit, the Green Man represents “our alliance with the rest of nature, a relationship of friendship, not of overbearing usefulness” (Fox, 2008, p. 30). Interestingly, the Green Man is not just an ancient Celtic image, but a Native Hawaiian one as well. Wearing a cape made of tea leaves, he is known as the “One who Manages the Forest,” who lives camouflaged among the plants, and is fabled to collect only one feather from each bird then releases it, symbolizing restraint in the use of natural resources. Invoking this image in our activist work, using it as an emblem of the spirit of the movement and encouraging the “right relationship” values that it embodies can further our work in subtle yet important ways.

## Integral Ecology

Integral ecology is a concept that has evolved out of Integral Theory, developed by scientist and philosopher Ken Wilber in the 1990s. The theory proposes that everything is both a whole unto itself, while also part of a larger whole. In playing with our perceptions of ourselves, others and things as wholes (holons, as Wilber dubbed them), with both internal and external expressions, we can discover new aspects of reality and spark innovations in science, philosophy, technology and *ecological awareness* based upon these insights.

In its primary application, integral theory explores holons through four quadrants – individual-interior, individual-exterior, collective-interior and collective-exterior. In practice, applying the four quadrants to a situation is known as “AQAL,” all quadrants, all levels.

### The Four Terrains of Ecological Awareness

|            | INTERIOR  | EXTERIOR  |
|------------|---|---|
| INDIVIDUAL | I<br>Integral Identity<br><br>The experience of ecological awareness                  | IT<br>Integral Action<br><br>Behaviors that result from ecological awareness                        |
| COLLECTIVE | WE<br>Integral Communion<br><br>Relationships that emerge out of ecological awareness | ITS<br>Integral Membership<br><br>Roles within eco-social systems that express ecological awareness |

Source: Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009, p. 313

In their book on integral ecology, Sean Esbjorn-Hargens and Michael Zimmerman explain how integral theory can be used to develop and deepen ecological awareness using powerful mental practices that explore these quadrants. By practicing “ROPE Weaving and Climbing,” a formal framework for experiencing the natural world, one is led into deep insight and awareness. Starting in the upper left quadrant, one focuses on the *experience* of self in the world, using introspection. Moving to the upper right quadrant, *observations* are collected through the five senses. In the lower left quadrant, *resonating* with the world around you is the focus, with practices such as “perceiving perceiving,” where the participant not only perceives an animal for instance, but perceives how that animal is perceiving the world – through its five senses. Finally, in the lower right quadrant, *patterns* become the focus, and systematic analysis (compare and contrast, experimentation) is used to explore the world. Esbjorn-Hargens and Zimmerman suggest that one sit quietly, cycling through these quadrants multiple times to deepen awareness and reveal new and interesting insights about nature. This highly structured practice may be very helpful to people who have busy minds, and may struggle with other more passive practices such journaling and meditation.

### **Person to Person Practices**

It may seem very strange, even stupid to focus on something as ambiguous and unquantifiable as internal personal change when the facts about environmental degradation, climate change and unsustainable levels of population are the key problems of our time. But we must remember that people created or greatly contributed to these problems, and so the solutions lie deep within us as well. As

environmentalists we tend to use the scientific facts and arguments to prove our points, and insist from this logical point of view that behaviors change. However as humans with complex motivations and interests, logic has perhaps not been enough to garner the level of support we need.

The fact is that both content and context are required. Environmentalists have tons of content – facts, figures, predictions, empirical evidence... but we are low on context. Context provides emotional and spiritual support for change. These human needs have perhaps been overlooked by the movement's hyper-focus on looming tragedy, loss and fear. I would like to suggest that we refocus our context on the sacred, inherent value of nature, and that we do this as we engage people for action. Cultural and individual heritages are linked to places in nature, to our not-so-distant personal histories as tribal people who once lived in close connection with the Earth. I would argue that we carry ancestral memories of our past, and that whether we are from a European tradition or not, we have all come out of some kind of tradition that valued and lived close to Earth. To a large extent, remembering this connection and bringing it back into our waking consciousness is the most important work that we need to do. Industrial civilization is a relatively new historical anomaly. For thousands upon thousands of years, whether on the European continent, Asia, Africa or in the Americas, we were people who understood that who we are and whether or not we survived and thrived depended upon our good caretaking of the Earth.

It is time for us to invoke our personal connections to this sacred heritage when we work for environmental change. It is not only the right of card-carrying

tribal members; it is a human right. We can begin by talking about it and keeping it in the conversation; making it as acceptable as grace before meals.

### **Council of All Beings**

There are formats for engaging others on a spirit level that have already been developed by respected environmentalists, like Joanna Macy's Council of All Beings. This is a play that is enacted by humans and (humans disguised as) animals, where an exchange between the animal world and the human tribe is solicited from the actors. Participants can pick their favorite animal, or chose to be human, and each then enacts and experience of the exuberance of that point of view and life experience, but also recalls what has been lost due to environmental damage. The play climaxes in a Council meeting, where the animal voices address the humans, and share their powers by gifting them to the humans to help in righting the wrongs. As environmentalists, we might conduct these events with community organizations that don't necessarily have an environmental focus, to foster an exchange of ideas, and to broaden support for our work. Such "play" can be fun, and takes some of the bite out of our standard action-oriented approaches.

### **Sharing Earth Intimacy**

We might also consider leading others into Earth Intimacy moments, or mini-vision quests if we feel comfortable doing so. Something as simple as planting a vegetable garden for people who wouldn't typically be able to participate in this activity would do – such as those in wheelchairs, or people living in cities. A small plot of land is usually enough and raised salad tables can be built to allow easy access for wheelchairs.

In our outdoor wanderings, we might begin to look for suitable places for meditation, ceremonies and rituals that are close to homes and neighborhoods, so that we can lead others in these practices in convenient venues. By encouraging this practice close to where people live, they will be more likely to return, and to develop a relationship with the environment right around them. Then, we will have watchful eyes and ears in many places, and not just in parks or more exquisite locales. Developing a “sense of place” is widely regarded as a useful environmentalist technique; this simply takes it “to the streets.” If all that is available is a tree, then that is the sacred place, and that is good enough. If only a small patch of flowers or a potted plant, that too can work. Ceremony can be as simple as thanking the flower and pausing to appreciate it each time we pass it, or offering it a bit of tobacco or cornmeal.

The value of such simple ceremonies is not to be dismissed. A medicine man known as Wolf once told the story of a New York city man, African-American, who dressed as a UPS delivery man and used that as a cover to break into people’s apartments and carry things out. He ended up in jail, and wrote to Wolf from there. Wolf’s assignment for him was to try to get into nature, any way he could. The man had a small window high up on a wall in his cell. There, he could get a view of the sky. Standing on his bed, he could just make out the moon rising in a tree beyond the guard tower. It was this man’s first experience of seeing the moon rise. Later, at his parole hearing, when he was asked what he would do when he gets out, he said he would take kids in New York City somewhere they could see the moon rise. Two of the parole officers said they had never seen the moon rise either and asked to come along.

Take people out into nature; take children out into nature. Remember that providing cultural support for these moments, and sharing the stories of Earth Intimacy cultivates deep awareness, and creates and maintains meaningful change.

### **Ceremony and Bioregional Tours**

When we step out to act on behalf of the environment, we might begin with prayer, or ceremony. For example, before conducting habitat restoration, we might begin by creating an altar, and reciting the values of our bioregion, a verbal tour of the local features such as rivers, woodlands, foothills or mountains. The Spirit and Nature website (<http://www.trunity.net/san>) contains some sample wording that can serve as a model. Then, as we weed, we can communicate with the invasive species, letting them know that they are here because of our mistakes, and that their sacrifice allows other native plants to live, providing medicines for the sick, food for animals and bringing the ecosystem back into balance.

Robert Thayer describes a tour of his local watershed as a celebration of the spirit of place in his book *Lifepace* (pp. 71-89). His tours gather everyone into a bus and takes them from the source of their local waterway, following it's path through their foodsheds, wineries, restaurants and fishing holes, stopping along the way for moments of education, reflection and recreation, incorporating cultural and natural history along the way. While it may be worthwhile to organize such formal tours, we can also guide people through their bioregions with poems, pictures or prayers that express our gratitude and appreciation, and celebrate the bounty of our local environments.

## Healing Gardens

Gardens are places where we can pause to take in the sensory beauty of nature. But sacred gardens take this a step further by being prepared and cared for in ways that honor the plants as equal relations to humans, worthy of gratitude, respect and love. The energy of these places can transform a simple garden into a place where the opportunities for Earth Intimacy abound. The properties of the plants themselves can also be honored and the principles of plant medicine can be shared in such gardens, educating the public about the gift that plants make for us in terms of foods, medicines and the healing conveyed by simply being in their presence. We sometimes forget why flowers are sent to the sick and suffering – because their very presence soothes and comforts. Creating gardens that educate passersby of the inherent value of nature and remind them of the real meaning of a bouquet are a gentle and persuasive way to garner support for our cause.

“Some were blue, some pink, others lavender. The yellow ones looked like tiny suns and were full of mirth. I wanted to bury my face in their midst. As soon as I had that thought I realized that they wanted to caress my face as well. How astounding this was. Oh, how lovely if it were true. I bent close to the sill and leaned toward the little yellow suns, and as I drew closer and closer I saw that there were millions and millions of little faces smiling at me, reaching up to kiss me. And so I buried myself deep into the welcoming love. There was no resistance in me for the inevitable. What a delight it was. A shower of warmth and colors of every hue of the rainbow greeted my mind and body. Old hurts and bumps released their pain and I grew in every part of me renewed. Invigorated. Minuscule kisses were planted on every inch of my face and I felt radiant.



My eyes opened and found colors to see that they had forgotten existed. A rosy bloom flushed my cheeks and colored my lips. I was smiling a deep smile, an everlasting smile, the smile my face had been born for.

Seeing my happiness the little flowers in the flower box clapped their tiny hands and gave dainty bell-like cries of delighted laughter. They were applauding my successful return to joy. To think that I had friends such as these who shared fully in my emancipation and who knew how my soul exploded.

My heart bursting, I passed my hands, ever so gently, over the glistening flowers. My fingertips hummed and tingled as I, too, caressed my flower friends. A faint spray of twinkling flower-dust fell from my hands and rested on everything I touched. I knew now that I was not alone in the Universe and that I had never been. This filled my heart with such a great peace and I felt more alive and awake than I had ever been” (Graston, 2009).

## **Working with Children**

Children are themselves ecological wonders, spinning vortexes of energy and enthusiasm, absorbing their surroundings with a subtle ease that shocks and surprises when we witness our words and deeds reflected back to us with deadly accuracy. Their immense powers of observation and openness are both easy and enjoyable to work with. Simply exposing a child to an animal or an area of natural beauty and interest is frequently all that needs to happen in order to pull their focus in and provide the opportunity for an intimate Earth moment. While it may be difficult to hold that focus for very long, as Rachel Carson pointed out many years ago, what is most important is planting the seeds of wonderment:

“I sincerely believe that for the child, and for the parent seeking to

guide him, it is not half so important to *know* as to *feel*. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused - a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love - then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found, it has lasting meaning. It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts he is not ready to assimilate" (Carson, 1956, p. 56).

Currently considered an expert on introducing children to nature, Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods* has a list of more than forty activities to use when working with children:

Plywood Playground – Take a piece of scrap plywood and leave it on the grass for a few days, then return to uncover all the creatures that have moved in underneath.

Wonder Bowl – Dedicate a special bowl for all the treasures that children return with from outside. This limits the number of treasures destroyed in the laundry, and enables children to return to these objects again and again for further exploration, identification and inspiration.

Moonlight Hike – Create a moth lure made from rotted fruit, stale beer or wine, sweetener and mix in a blender. Smear on trees or untreated wood at sunset and return after dark with a flashlight. Also look for bats, stars, the full moon, listen for owls and look for glowing fungi.

Sit Spot – Tell a child about an experience you had in nature, and help them find a place that can be all their own, as a place to be alone and quiet.

Read outside – Stories are not just for bedtime. The outdoors encourages the imagination. Encourage children to take a book to their “Sit Spot.”

### **Leadership Practices**

As environmental leaders, we can lead book discussion groups, expanding opportunities for deeper exploration of spiritual environmentalism, and incorporating the many perspectives, cultures and experiences of participants. Leading Earth Intimacy workshops is another way to get people working with nature spirituality.

But one of our most important roles is communicating the message. If we craft our messages in ways that make science and spirit equal parts of equation, we may be able to spawn greater action. Let’s experiment with a few slogans here.

### **Science + Spirit = Action**

I propose that we reframe message to include both the scientific basis for the changes we wish to see, as well as our spiritual connection to it, and that we focus on benefits. With both solid science and the personal connection clearly expressed, I submit that we will yield greater motivations for change. There will simply be no wiggle room. Besides which, the personal emotional and spiritual benefits are tangible, and not just the experience of “sensitive types.” Furthermore, we could reframe the science piece of the equation in a way that deflects the loss or sacrifice. Let me explain through example.

## **1. Biodiversity + Bliss**

Loss of biodiversity is a “bad” thing, but *biodiversity* is a really good thing - something that humans reap enjoyment from in foods, flowers and vistas. They bring us joy, even into a state of bliss. Reminding a “foodie” how much they love oysters, or the abundant variety of apples is a pleasant, even seductive way to highlight the importance of biodiversity. Now the motivation is not just because the biologists say it’s “good for the planet,” but because we love sampling all the flavors of life, it is the very bliss of our existence, a reward for a job well done. A walk through a gourmet grocery store or mall reveals that it’s all about coffee from “Yoruba” and unique one-of-a-kind clothing that you can be sure no one else will wear to the office! We humans love a choice – Biodiversity is Bliss. When we stop logging or development to save a woodland, we aren’t sacrificing material wealth; we’re gaining our own happiness.

## **2. Chill out through Inner Change**

Global temperatures must come down, but we are a fast-paced society, and many of us are hell-bent on seeing the world before parts of it drop underwater. Environmentalists are often avid travelers; we haven’t exactly set a high standard on this point. All this running about is putting hypocritically insane amounts of carbon dioxide in the air through emissions from planes and cars. But here’s the deal: we travel far and wide so that we can refresh ourselves, and feel renewed and invigorated. However, if we used Earth Intimacy as a way to renew ourselves within walking or biking distance, we might find that we can recharge in a local woodland, wetland or lake. Eventually perhaps, the remote vacationlands can get back to being wild lands, or beaches where dunes

dominate instead of Coppertone. The National Parks were initially established as a way to set aside our most exquisite natural places simply to “be.” It was the vision of just one man at the Parks Service (Stephen Mather) to turn them into tourist traps. I think Muir would be pissed and Thoreau the book at us. Much of what it takes to reduce our carbon footprints comes down to living simply. A way to make this tolerable to a species that loves diversity is to help it gain an appreciation for the microcosm... the internal and eternal diversity of ourselves, which can be appreciated through meditation and journaling; and cherishing the nature all around us that we pass over as “too plain.” Healing gardens, ceremony, bioregional tours – these all hold the potential to help us find happiness in who we are, where we are, without seeking exotic stimulation.

### **3. Purify and Appreciate**

To quote our good man Al Gore, “It isn’t pollution that’s harming the environment, it’s the impurities in our air and water.” Pollution is a word that triggers a mental slide show of shredded plastic bags wavering in trees, water bottles in rivers and sooty skies over Baltimore. It is despairing, even sickening. As Al’s famous misquote implies, what we need is to *purify*. And what better way to begin to purify the world around us then to approach it with pure and grateful hearts, in a ceremonial way? When we truly appreciate a bedraggled inner city tree for its inherent value, for the rugged life it leads, and for the life it gives us; we will begin to clean it up, comb out the bags and ensure that others to do the same. An “environmental action” can be as simple as honoring one tree, cleaning it up and returning to it time and again like an old friend. For some people, this may be as much as they can give or as far as they can travel. In this way, we may

also be helping weary, busy and bedraggled people who are overlooked, but whose role in conservation is as important as any one else's.

#### **4. Compact and Decompress**

Good Smart Growth plans not only reduce the effects of sprawl but also make room for well-placed green space - so why not focus on the fact that "living small" yields gains in health & well-being through the benefit of "green therapy" that decompresses our overhyped lifestyles? Also, because travel times for shopping and other routine errands are reduced, security is increased (due to the proximity of living quarters), and costs of living are deflated, the pressure cooker of modern lifestyles can be greatly diminished in such compact communities. Again, it seems to boil down to helping people appreciate *themselves* and their own capacities and inner-universes, so that they seek less from outside themselves and find happiness in living simply and simply living.

By mimicking ecological processes, our messages can become self-feeding cycles of benefit where the good accumulates organically - by feeding the needs of the self, we feed right action and with each subsequent turn of the wheel, the potentials grow deeper. Including spiritual needs allows us to put humans back into the equation without having to create a list of commandments; "Thou shalt not use incandescent bulbs, turn your thermostat over 60, drive to the corner store, buy wine from New Zealand." The list of restrictions goes on and on and leaves our audience feeling deprived, weary and put-out. It really is too much to ask. Let us have some compassion; let us make this easier for people. Let it be ok for something to be in it for *them*. Environmentalists *are* extremists – people don't want to be like

us – they want to have a life! Including the spiritual in our messages allows us to provide for human needs while still caring for the Earth.

### **Naturize Civilization**

Over thousands of years, we have cultivated the bad habit of civilizing nature. At first this was a very good thing – keeping out the cold, protecting ourselves from predators, creating cooperative societies where the efforts of the whole resulted in something greater than the sum of its parts. Now we are at the point where this separation no longer serves us and has cut us off from the source of life in unhealthy ways. We are currently attempting to bring nature more into our human institutions and systems. This is a good thing, and the modern “green” movement is very focused on this approach.

But the fear of course is that it is yet another fad that will not last. As environmentalists we may have to grit our teeth, look past the sometimes very shallow approach that the green movement takes, and stay focused on the goal - which is to make environmental impacts a part of everyone’s moment-to-moment, day-to-day thought process. Simple things like bringing a piece of nature into the office – a piece of bark, a rock, a plant – must be encouraged for the simple service they perform of reminding us of our connection to the Earth. Walking instead of riding, easing up on the gas pedal, turning off the lights, fixing leaky faucets, using less and reusing more are all simple acts that have a collectively large impact, but how many of us remind each other and those in our communities that all these small acts add up? But what’s more important is that these acts bring nature into the present moment and hold the potential to spread the movement far and wide in

simple steps. Such conservation measures were fairly popular in the 1970s when oil prices and an economic recession made them popular. Perhaps now we have the same opportunity to re-popularize them, while belts are tightening again. “Every little bit helps” should become our international slogan. Then everyone would understand that individual acts are important. We seem to have slipped into territory where people think they don’t matter, that they can’t have a big impact and that they are too powerless to make a difference unless they are a part of some large campaign or organization. This mentality is dangerous and works against us. No act that attempts to “naturize” our far too civilized lives is too small if it reconnects people to the truth that all things come from the Earth.

## **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 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 of 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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## **Appendix A: An Annotated Bibliography for Spiritual Environmentalists**

**Adams, C. (1993). *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.**

A collection of thoughtful essays that contextualize environmentalist philosophies within religious and social frameworks. Includes three essays of interest – “For All Those Who Were Indian in a Former Life” by Andy Smith, a pointed critique of New Age approaches that create “consumerist spiritualities” and extend old patterns of exploitation towards Native peoples. “Toward an Ecofeminist Ethic of Shamanism and the Sacred” by Gloria Feman Orenstein (apprentice to a traditional female Shaman from Samiland, in Lapland), an in-depth discussion of some of the inter-cultural insensitivities and misguided attempts to integrate “shamanistic” approaches into environmentalist causes while also providing a ray of hope for its potential to point us in new and fruitful directions. And finally, “Animal, Vegetable, Mineral” by Carol Lee Sanchez, an essay that offers several helpful perspectives that Sanchez observes as integral to Native worldviews but grievously absent from Western worldviews, such as the value oral histories that “are solemnly recited at various times during the year” as means of remembering “what happened as a result of greed or lack of careful preparation.” She also discusses “cultural hypnosis” by which “it is harder to entertain the thought that we in modern Western society might have our own cultural peculiarities in the way we perceive the world – that our reality might be as parochial in its way as that of the Middle Ages appears to us now,” a powerful quote from Willis Harman pointing to the cultural arrogance

that places Western civilization at the apex of human history, assuming it to be the best.

**Berry, T. (1988). *The Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.**

Thomas Berry has written on the philosophical, historical and cultural importance of the natural world to human well-being since the late 1970's. His opening work "New Story," contained in this volume, clarifies 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."

**Broker, I. (1983). *Night Flying Woman, An Ojibway Narrative*. St. Paul, MN: Borealis Books.**

Broker, an Ojibway elder has transcribed the life story of her great-great grandmother, who was born in the 1800s and lived through the encroachment of Europeans onto her traditional tribal lands. She tells the story as she remembers hearing it from her Grandmothers using exactly the same words where possible, so

as to avoid confusion and misinterpretation –a tradition of oral history that is now nearly extinct. The story teaches the lessons of honoring elders, accepting difficult circumstances with grace, and showing respect for the community even during the most trying times.

**Brown, D. (1970). *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, An Indian History of the American West*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.**

A nearly 500-page comprehensive history of the westward expansion as told from the Native perspective. Not surprisingly, it is the story of wars, chiefs, generals, negotiations and broken treaties, culminating in the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. It is a sobering, but important book to read. Its relevance to environmentalists lies in its history of the usurpation of wild land for political and economic gains.

**Cromwell, M. (2002). *If I Gave You God's Phone Number, Searching for Spirituality in America*. Baltimore, MD: Pamoona Press.**

This book is a collection of interviews with people from all walks of life in answer to the question “What would you do if I gave you God’s phone number?” and is written by a long-time apprentice to medicine woman, Jasmine Hisha. The book includes Jasmine’s answer to this question. A fun and thoughtful read, it reveals how spirituality takes on many individualized forms yet remains deeply important to us all.

**Crow, T. M. (2001). *Native Plants, Native Healing, Traditional Muskogee Way*. Summertown, TN: Native Voices Book Publishing Company.**

Crow, a traditional Muskogee and Hitchiti root doctor and herbalist shares knowledge about the medicinal value of several plants in this book, but more

importantly, sacred practices for harvesting, preparing and maintaining these plants in their wild habitats so that they will continue to be available to coming generations. There are countless encyclopedic volumes on herbal remedies but nearly none that incorporate the importance of respect, intent and the value of good communication and right space when harvesting plants and preparing remedies. This book is a must-have for any self-respecting herbalist.

**Deloria, V. (1973). *God is Red*. New York: Dell Publishing.**

Noted Native American historian and theologian Vine Deloria, Jr. presents his argument for adopting a Native spirituality and leaving Christendom behind. He points out that “creation is an ecosystem present in a definable place,” 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.

**Deloria, V. (2009). *C.G. Jung and the Sioux Traditions, Dreams, Visions, Nature and the Primitive*. New Orleans: Spring Journal, Inc.**

Comparing and contrasting the deep psychology of Carl Jung with one of his major sources of inspiration – the spirituality and culture of Native Americans - Deloria sheds light on how Native philosophies have in fact been richly developed and deeply thought-out, shattering the notion that these are simply romantic and idealized perceptions from a culture whose time has past. He states, “first and foremost in the Sioux mind was the idea that other creatures were “peoples” like us. Again, while this notion is largely viewed in the West as fantastic and

anthropomorphic, we must nonetheless confront a historical fact. The Sioux lived wholly in the natural world their entire lives. They had infinitely more opportunity to observe animals than do modern people – and that includes scientists. We have no basis for believing that animals in a natural state do *not* demonstrate the aspects of personality and thought that we see in ourselves. Indeed, science is “discovering” what the Sioux knew all along: animals and humans share much in common. The Sioux watched animals closely so that people could predict their behavior. In this way, they were natural historians *par excellence*.”

**Erdoes, R. & Ortiz, A. (1984). *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York: Random House.**

An encyclopedia of tales from many different Native traditions and claimed to be one of the most comprehensive books of this type. The editors took pains to collect the stories in person at gatherings such as powwows, in moving cars, by tape and from archival resources, re-writing the tales to remove the “stilted” writing styles of certain eras, all in an attempt to restore the stories to their original form. An appendix gives brief descriptions of the tribes to which the tales are credited, providing key historical contexts as well as geographical locations of the tribes and the etymology and meaning of the tribe’s names, almost all of which translate to mean “the people.”

**Esbjorn-Hargens, S. & Zimmerman, M. (2009). *Integral Ecology*. Boston: Integral Books.**

This book attempts to establish a new conceptual framework for ecology by incorporating Ken Wilbur’s concept of Integral Theory – one that varies from typical empirical sciences where a scientifically reductionist model prevails. Integral

Ecology examines the part in relation to the whole, and accounts for a dynamic interplay between the two components and their forces. In this model, a frog is no longer a separate organism in a microcosm, but a complex integration and reflection of its entire ecosystem. This framework has the potential to incorporate social as well as biological processes and the volume includes papers and articles addressing both from practitioners of integral theory. Integral theory holds the possibility of moving our intellectual discourse away from a dialectic of opposites towards a model that captures the complexities of the nature along with the impact of humans upon it.

**Fox, M. (2008). *The Hidden Spirituality of Men*. Novato, CA: New World Library.**

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. He 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 this book, 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” and a “spiritual warrior” that will “defend and protect the Earth and her creatures for the sake of future generations.”

**Garrett, J.T. & Garrett, M. T. (2002). *The Cherokee Full Circle, A Practical Guide to Ceremonies and Traditions*. Rochester, VT: Bear & Company.**

This book describes a weekend-long ceremony developed by father-and-son team J.T. and Michael Garrett on the Cherokee Indian reservation in North Carolina. Basing their ritual on the principles of the four directions and the circle as a symbol of the cyclic nature of the Earth and human existence, the Garretts have created a vessel for teaching Native truths while also providing a means for re-balancing and restoring the self.

**Gottlieb, R. (2004). *This Sacred Earth*. New York: Routledge.**

A textbook-length volume of essays on the spiritual aspects of nature spanning Taoist, Buddhist, Christian, Judaic and Native concepts. Essays to note include "Traditional Native Hawaiian Environmental Philosophy" by Michael K. Dudley, "Central African Voices on the Human-Environment Relationship" by Mawil Izzi Deen, "The Rainbow Bridge" by Brooke Medicine Eagle and "Wiwanyag Wachipi: The Sun Dance" by Black Elk.

**Greenspirit, UK. (2009). Website. Retrieved January 4, 2009 from <http://www.greenspirit.org.uk>**

This community sponsors online discussion forums, annual conferences, informal gatherings and produces newsletters and journals that keep members creatively engaged. Greenspirit is part of the Creation Spirituality movement based on Matthew Fox's concept of "original blessing."



**Harney, C. (1995). *The Way It Is, One Water, One Air, One Mother Earth*. Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin Publishing.**

Corbin Harney was the spiritual leader of the Western Shoshone Nation in Idaho, Nevada, Utah and California. After the death of his mother several hours after his birth, he was raised and trained by traditional medicine people. His life and work encompassed protecting Native lands from housing development, mining and dam building, in addition to healing work. His book simply, eloquently and directly describes the importance of healing and preserving the Earth based on a fundamental respect and appreciation for the land and all its creatures.

**Hazen-Hammond, S. (1999). *Spider Woman's Web, Traditional Native American Tales About Women's Power*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group.**

A compendium of Native folk tales, but with a special section after each story called "Connecting the Story to Your Life" designed to assist the reader in applying the lesson to their personal life, with guided imagery and suggestions for thoughtful reflection. Grappling with everything from marriage to murder to incest, these stories hold as true to modern human issues as to the ancient. A self-help book reminiscent of the tradition of ecopsychology, although written published before the trend took hold.

**His Holiness the Dalai Lama. (2006). *How to See Yourself As You Really Are*. New York: Atria Books.**

This is a book that can be used to learn meditation or to improve an existing practice. In Native American traditions, Tiyouweh is a kind of meditation that is described as something slightly different from traditional eastern and Buddhist meditation practices, but if you are new to meditation or find philosophical

underpinnings and intellectual conundrums to be stimulating, or you simply want to learn more about Tibetan Buddhism, this is the book for you.

**Hull, F. (1993). *Earth and Spirit: The Spiritual Dimension of the Environmental Crisis*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company**

After organizing the “Earth and Spirit” conference in Washington state in 1990, Hull compiled the best works of some of the presenters and other thinkers in the field on the question of the spiritual aspects of the ecological crisis. One of the contributors was his wife, Vivienne, who as a scholar of Celtic spirituality discusses “Celtic Christianity” in Ireland in the second century. This essay sheds light on some of the same themes of the energetic and psychic connections between humans and the more-than-human that resonate throughout Native spirituality.

**Kazimiroff, T. (1982). *The Last Algonquin*. New York: Walker Publishing Company.**

A biographical account of a young boy born and raised in the Bronx, New York, who while out walking in the woods in 1924, stumbled upon the camp of one of the last remaining Algonquin Indians living in the area. The story unfolds as “Joe Two Trees” introduces himself to the boy and shares his story of attempting to live a modern life in the city and his decision to return to a traditional way of life. The two remain friends until Two Tree’s disappearance and assumed death on Christmas Eve of the same year. The tale is written down by the adult son of the boy, as part of promise to keep Two Tree’s story alive as a lesson to future generations. This is a powerful personal story, ripe with history lessons and wonderment at the natural world as perhaps can only best be seen through the eyes of a young boy.

**LaDuke, W. (1999). *All Our Relations, Native Struggles for Land and Life*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.**

In her life as an environmental activist, LaDuke has encountered especially egregious violations in Indian Territory. This book compiles eight of those stories and walks us through the issues and the grassroots efforts to protect the land from mining, nuclear waste, industrial pollution, massive dams, militarization and “voyeuristic vacations” that are destroying native ecosystems in Hawaii, to the benefit of the tourism industry.

**LaDuke, W. (2005). *Recovering the Sacred, The Power of Naming and Claiming*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.**

Similar to the book above, this is also a compilation of stories of struggle, but expands out to include cultural, biological and economic issues related to indigenous rights. In a chapter called “Vampires in the New World,” LaDuke describes the use of blood samples taken from the Havasupai tribe by University of Arizona researchers under the guise of helping to resolve a growing diabetes epidemic, that instead was used as a resource for a panoply of research projects that ranged from providing genetic evidence to substantiate the Bering Strait Theory to use by pharmaceutical companies. The initial researcher was actually after evidence of schizophrenia in the community and also abused privacy rights when obtaining medical records. LaDuke describes similar exploits against the Yanomami people in Brazil and Venezuela, the Columbia River Tribes (Yakama, Nez Perce, Umatilla) of Washington state, and others, all in an attempt to patent the DNA found in the cell lines of these peoples. Time and again in these stories, Native people return to their

guiding spiritual view of the natural world as sacred to substantiate their rights and claims to the land and even their own bodies.

**LeGuin, U. (1972). *The Word for World is Forest*. New York: Avenel Books.**

A fictional story written during the time of the Vietnam War, LeGuin explores the nature of exploitation of the natural world – particularly that of logging. The “Athsheans,” whose culture is based on lucid dreaming, are a colonized people whose world is being destroyed. Eventually the Athseans, who had no prior concept of war, begin to dream of war against the colonizers. In the sense that fiction can help us see a situation from another vantage point, and teach us lessons in the imaginary world without having to learn them in the physical, and because the novel explores the questions of ecological destruction and how our dreams become reality, it is relevant to environmentalists and those who wish to better understand the power of thought.

**Mankiller, W. (2004). *Every Day is a Good Day, Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.**

Mankiller compiles the stories of several indigenous women who are active in their communities and on behalf of the environment. Seeing the role of women and that of the Earth as inherently linked, each fulfilling roles as caretakers of life, these women describe the challenges of maintaining sovereignty on Native lands, the importance of ceremony to community and individual life, what it means to be a woman, and the meaning and role of love in their lives. These autobiographical thoughts and stories are like footprints left for those of us who come behind, making

the path easier to find and the good red road easier to walk in the presence of their exquisite examples.

**Mankiller, W. (1993). *Mankiller, A Chief and Her People*. New York: St. Martin's Press.**

Wilma Mankiller came of age as an activist during the 1970 occupation of Alcatraz Island near San Francisco, where her family had been relocated from Oklahoma during the 1950s. Ever since, she has been a leader in the indigenous rights movement and ultimately returned to Oklahoma, to serve in tribal government and became the first female chief of the Cherokee Nation. But her personal story has been one of many challenges, including the kidnapping of her daughter by her husband, from whom she had separated, and many physical ailments including a near-death car accident that left her with a permanent limp, crippling myasthenia gravis, cancer and kidney disease. She persevered, as she says, by being “of good mind,” a traditional Cherokee practice of remaining emotionally balanced and ever-grateful for life and the experience of physicality.

**Matthiessen, P. (1992). *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*. New York: Penguin Books.**

This is the story of Leonard Peltier, the American Indian Movement (AIM), life on the Pine Ridge Reservation from the 1950s through the 1970s, and the shoot-out that resulted in Peltier's life-term sentence for the murder of two FBI agents who came to Pine Ridge to investigate AIM. A 600-page, detailed account of this important event, as well as the history of relations between the U.S. government and the Lakota people that led up to the shoot-out and the tensions that have followed,

even until the present day. For environmentalists, and anyone struggling to change habitually exploitative patterns, much can be learned from this historical account.

**Peyer, B. (1989). *The Singing Spirit, Early Short Stories by North American Indians*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.**

Seventeen short stories written by Indians you have never heard of who lived in the late 1800s and early 1900s whose lives frequently intersected with significant cultural and historical moments in Native American history. The stories, like snapshots in time, are expressed in sparse prose and remain mostly unaffected by literary conventions, keeping them as fresh for today's audiences as they were at the time of their original publication. A short biography of the author precedes each work.

**Roszak, T., Gomes, M., Kanner, A. (1994). *Ecopsychology - Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.**

A compilation of essays on how modern psychology is incorporating nature's ability to heal into its therapeutic model. In the essay "Where Psyche Meets Gaia," Roszak describes a conference in 1990 where the practitioners gathered conclude, "if the self is expanded to include the natural world, behavior that leads to the destruction of this world will be experienced as self-destructive." Herein lies the hope of ecopsychology – to heal the individual and the environment with one stroke of the sword. 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.”

**Roszak, T. (1992). *The Voice of the Earth, An Exploration of Ecopsychology*. New York: Touchstone.**

Generally regarded as the book that introduced the movement, Roszak defines the eight principles of ecopsychology: (1) the existence of an “ecological unconscious” at the core of the human mind, that (2) contains ancestral memories going back to the beginning of life on the planet, (3) the goal being to help recover this unconscious and therefore restore attitudes of environmental reciprocity, (4) to restore our child-like wonder and appreciation of the natural world, true to Western psychology’s emphasis on the significance of childhood experiences and the stages of development to the human psyche, (5) to assist the maturation of this ecological ego so that social and political acts reflect this consciousness, (6) to address balancing masculine and feminine energies and the current tendency towards favoring the masculine, (7) to adopt a post-industrial philosophy that questions the large centralized institutions and governments that dominate our civilization in favor of those that create small-scale, personalized ones that retain the technological and scientific advances that have been gained by the former, and (8) to utilize the “synergistic interplay between planetary and personal well-being.”

**Sams, J. (1994). *Earth Medicine*. New York: HarperCollins.**

Using the cycles of the moon to demarcate months, Sams creates thirteen sets of daily reflections with the first day of the month beginning on each new moon. This pattern of measuring time is based on Earth cycles and has been practiced by Native

peoples for centuries. It is also somewhat intuitive to many women since our menstrual cycles generally follow the moon. Wisdom related to humor, discernment, dreaming, delusions and more are all addressed through poetry, folk tales and snippets of ancient knowledge Sams has gathered over many years of study with elders of the Wolf Clan Teaching Lodge.

**Sams, J. (1993). *The Thirteen Original Clan Mothers*. New York: HarperCollins.**

Using the thirteen yearly cycles of the Moon as inspiration, Sams creates an Earth mother for each month that personifies some of the most admirable traits of women. These Mothers serve as teachers to the human tribe, to help us develop our own unique gifts and talents. Each Mother has a medicine shield and animal totems that assist her works. These stories and symbols help modern women reconnect with our inner feminine wisdom and bring it forth into the world. As such, it can also assist men who wish to tap into this source wisdom and achieve balance.

**Schaefer, C. (2006). *Grandmothers Counsel the World: Wise Women Elders Offer Their Vision for Our Planet*. Boston: Trumpeter Books.**

This book presents the herstories of the International Council of the Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers who came together in New York in 2004 to hold Council on the land of the people of the Iroquois Confederacy. Elder women from the East, West, North and South were present, representing the four directions and several continents. Most of the women are renowned healers in their traditions, and as such discuss the necessity of a shift in human consciousness and spirituality as way



to see us past our current multiple human crises, including the ecological crisis and the need for healing Mother Earth.

**Seed, J., Macy, J., Fleming, P. & Naess, A. (1988). *Thinking Like a Mountain, Towards a Council of All Beings*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.**

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 of 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 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 open the hearts and minds of non-environmentalists to the possibility of greater advocacy.

**Skolimowski, H. (1993). *A Sacred Place to Dwell, Living with Reverence Upon the Earth*. Rockport, MA: Element, Inc.**

Henryk Skolimowski is a philosopher and academic in the European tradition who spent many years in England and the United States, eventually returning to his native Poland to become the Professor of Ecological Philosophy at University of Lodz. He describes ecological consciousness as a mandala where “each of its characteristics is feeding into the other and feeding on each other; co-defining each other.” The dynamics of this model occur in evolutionary, participatory, holistic,

qualitative, reverential and spiritual realms. He insightfully points out that our tendency to resist the kinds of internal changes necessary to rise to this new level of ecological consciousness are the heritage of messianic and technological thinking, wherein we wait for some technological miracle or Messiah to do it for us.

**Stoner, T. & Rapp, C. (2008). *Open Spaces, Sacred Places, Stories of How Nature Heals and Unifies*. Annapolis, MD: TKF Foundation.**

A beautiful coffee table book displaying the many sacred gardens installed with the assistance of grants provided by the TKF Foundation. Inner city “sacred commons,” urban rooftop gardens, prison yard meditation gardens and healing hospital gardens are all represented.

**Storm, H. (1994). *Lightningbolt*. New York: Ballantine Books.**

This is the autobiographical tale of Hyemeyohsts Storm, a Cheyenne-Crow medicine man and self-described “half-breed” whose bloodline includes German. To an even larger extent, the book is a biography of the life of his teacher, Estcheemah and a detailed explanation of the teachings he received from her during several years of his lifetime. Estcheemah was a Flower Soldier from a long line of medicine people and spiritual warriors who can trace their origins to the pre-Columbian tribes of Meso-America. The knowledge is said to go back tens of thousands of years and includes advanced concepts of science, ecology, warfare, medical knowledge and governance, all encoded within the symbology of Medicine Wheels and the human energy centers of the body, also known as chakras.

**Storm, H. (1972). *Seven Arrows*. New York: Ballantine Books.**

This book consists of fables embedded in a novel about encounters between the Plains Indians and White settlers in North American in the 1800s. The fables teach the larger lessons of life and about knowing oneself so that one can understand and make peace with others.

**Storm, H. (1981). *Song of Heyoehkah*. New York: Harper & Row.**

A dream-like tale of Little Wolf and Estchimah, whose lives follow parallel courses through the tragedies of Native life in the American West, and during their personal quests to learn traditional medicine ways. The story slips between vision and narrative, teaching the reader something about medicine along the way.

**Suzuki, D. (2009). *The Sacred Balance*. Retrieved July 22, 2009 from <http://www.sacredbalance.com/web/portal/>**

David Suzuki, a well-known science journalist based out of Canada, 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.”

**Swann, B. (2005). *Algonquian Spirit: Contemporary Translations of the Algonquian Literatures of North America*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.**

Twenty-five stories from several traditions, grouped by the geographical regions in that span the lands of the peoples whose language is rooted in Algonquian family of

languages. The stories are preceded by lengthy introductions, explanations and occasional interviews, or followed by suggested interpretations, conceptual perspectives and recommendations for further reading. Also in this book are substantial notes regarding the proper pronunciation of Algonquian words and alternative translations for some of the key elements of the stories.

**Thayer, R. (2003). *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.**

While this bibliography has almost exclusively focused on Native and spiritual themes and writers, Thayer's book deserves a place at the table as a resource for explaining how some of these underlying philosophies are currently being expressed in the environmental movement through the bioregional approach. By connecting deeply to the local ecosystems in which one lives, buying locally and appreciating the precarious condition under which our global economy exists (when considered in light of ecological stresses), bioregionalism provides a framework under which we can make corrective adjustments. Thayer's book includes a beautiful and detailed description of the Sacramento Valley, his own bioregion from which most of the country's food staples - everything from rice to peaches - are produced. A quintessential "Foodshed," the Valley produces two billion dollars worth of agricultural exports most of which are shipped over a thousand miles away. Bioregional theory gives us a way to scale down our global systems to something closer to the small-scale and personalized systems envisioned by ecopsychologist, Theodore Roszak.

**Ywahoo, D. (1987). *Voices of Our Ancestors*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.**

This is an esoteric book not for the faint-hearted, but for those familiar with what Native wisdom teaches in regard to the sentient life force present in all things, this book contains multiple layers of teachings that can be digested, reflected upon and approached time and again to extract the deeper meanings and relevant applications. The book is both of source of spiritual meditations and an explanation of ancient Tsalagi-Cherokee teachings that have been passed down orally from generation to generation in the Ywahoo lineage. In this volume the powerful interplay of energy, matter and light is carefully expounded in ways that leave the reader with more questions than answers, but also stimulated for deep reflection on the nature of human existence.