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Contemplative Studies & Practice Yoga Philosophy

TARKA

ON ECOLOGY

TARKA

Volume 3

ON ECOLOGY

Yoga Philosophy

Tarka means "perfected reasoning" and
is an embodied discernment that arises
from the refinement of knowledge.

TARKA

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Introduction to the Issue

Nature is not a place to visit. It is home.
– Gary Synder

God's ground is my ground and my ground is God's ground.
– Meister Eckhart

We can glimpse the infinite on a clear, starry night, from an expansive viewpoint, or even nestled in the underbrush of a dense forest. When we slow down to examine the toil of an earthworm or snail, as they move through a common grassy patch, or even within a potted plant, we see the enormity and importance of a world that is easy to overlook. This opening up and experiencing of the world beyond us, or the slowing down and witnessing of the myriad worlds around us, can fundamentally reshape our consciousness. We "fit" differently into the world around us when we absorb and experience nature.

The humbling impact of understanding oneself as part of a greater whole can change how we think and how we treat others. The fact that nature fundamentally reshapes consciousness is increasingly informing contemporary approaches to wellness, leading therapeutic practitioners to recommend time in nature as a treatment for depression and anxiety.[1] In the contemplative traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism, this altered sense of self in relation to nature goes beyond awe and inspiration. It is, in fact, rooted in ontological analyses of being that reveals the self as nature, nature as the self. In this issue of Tarka, we look at the intersection of ecology and contemplative practice - including various ways of understanding and relating to nature, environmental degradation, and modes for healing. The result is an interdisciplinary, multifaceted study of ecology. For example, Carryn Mills explores how a deep analysis of the Saṃkhyan concepts of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, commonly translated as

1. See: https://e360.yale.edu/features/ecopsychology-how-immersion-in-nature-benefits-your-health

matter and spirit, merges the notions of self and nature. Alternatively, Isa Gucciardi lifts up aspects of bodily experiences to consider how they connect the individual to the natural rhythms of life and the world all around. And, Martha Eddy employs the concept "childhood-nature," to encourage a therapeutic, somatic return to innocence and to reject the idea that humans are superior to nature.

Ecology entails a recognition of interdependence, connection, and relationship. In scientific terms, it is the study of living organisms and the natural (living) environment. The health and wellbeing of one form of life is dependent upon the environment where it lives and the creatures that surround it. This is true within national parks and wilderness lands and also within cities and suburban developments. The connection between ecology and the contemplative traditions is perhaps best exemplified through the teachings on compassion and the Bodhisattva vow in Buddhism that delays personal enlightenment for the benefit of others. Interdependence, or, in Thich Nhat Han's words, interbeing, is a spiritual, ecological worldview that emphasizes the many ways that every individual being is connected to everything else. Interdependence is specifically explored here in the excerpt from Stephanie Kaza's book *Green Buddhism*, where she relates the teaching narrative of Indra's infinitely intersecting net to contemplative practice. When the individual self is de-centered and interconnection is emphasized, care for the world around us takes on a different form.

The word nature refers to the natural land around us, as well as to our deepest sense of self. Yet, how nature is defined and understood popularly today is often rooted in mechanistic and materialistic assumptions about reality. Perhaps most commonly, it is considered an object other than us that must be either harnessed or protected. This perspective inadvertently feeds into a power imbalance wherein humans are given more agency and importance than the world they occupy. Like colonial and patriarchal systems, the power imbalance between human agency and nature has wide ranging consequences. In response, a number of articles in this issue, including authors Greta Gaard, Rebekah Nagy, and Jesse Jagtiani unpack and explore the philosophy of ecofeminism, a system that recognizes the destructive role of power imbalance and domination and proposes alternatives.

There is often a perceived divide between the concerns related to environmental justice and social justice. The possibility of jobs in the timber industry or coal (to name just two examples) is leveled against the concern for the environment. In this way, the early stages of environmental activism seemed to pit elite ideals (i.e. save the redwoods) against the practical concerns of lower-income families. We are gradually entering a new era where these concerns are shifting. The impact of environmental destruction disproportionately affects lower-income communities, who often lack the resources to move away from polluted land, who cannot afford or access clean, wholesome, and/or organic foods, and whose labor has often been replaced by machinery. Perhaps the issue never really was jobs versus the environment, but rather an economic system that values profit over ethics and certain lives more than others.

The era upon us is now being recognized as the *Anthropocene*, a term for the current

geologic age in which human activity is the dominant cause of change and evolution for the climate and environment. Many scientists and activists report that we are at a tipping point and our collective habits of consumption, development, and the need for entertainment are irrevocably causing damage - to the natural world around and within each of us. Given how frequently contemplative teachings are interpreted (rightly or wrongly) in renunciant ways, the status of nature presents an ongoing dilemma. A renunciant, after all, is practicing to ultimately leave the world behind. Still, the world to be renounced (in the ascetic traditions) is most often the world of productivity, commerce, and materialism. As Christopher Key Chapple reminds us in his book *Living Landscapes* (paraphrasing from George James), "Nature is not the problem; human industrialization and the manipulation of nature are the problem."[2] Several authors in this issue consider aspects of landscape, ritual, and meditation as means to restoratively engage with nature. Katy Jane considers the Sacred Rivers of India. Laura Amazzone looks at resources from the Shakti (goddess) tradition and Annapurna (the Goddess of food and nourishment). Jean Gardner explores three, historic, urban soil communities and the possibility of creating a soil-generating community. Ramesh Bjonnes asks why yogis eat carrots instead of cows, and our practice section includes several impermanent earth art mandalas by artist Day Schildkret.

Protection of our natural spaces is a protection of home, for ourselves, for the wildlife, and for future generations. Perhaps, in addition to the critical work for environmental justice, including protests, policy changes, restoration projects, and the ongoing development of renewable energy, what is needed is the cultivation of an ecology of belonging, of seeing oneself as part of the greater whole - not separate, superior, or even in charge of protecting - but immersed into the great web of being. This sense of belonging might be what saves us - mentally, physically and spiritually - especially when the challenges appear insurmountable.

A child, fascinated by tadpoles, patiently sits at the edge of a seasonal waterway. The willingness to observe the details is a habit – or practice – that invites a different kind of belonging to nature. Shadows cast by larger leaves give temporary shelter to small frogs. Insects thrive in the dense surrounding grass. Spring rain gives home and habitat to a variety of wetland creatures. Summer flowers emerge from seeds in the retreating waterline. Autumn leaves then lay the groundwork for new soil that will mature over the winter months. The cycles of days, lunar months, and seasons shape the land and all that lives within and above it. Contemplative practice encourages quiet observation – of land, of passing thoughts, of suffering, and of joy. It will not remove plastic from the ocean, but it might inspire a future engineer or current scientist or activist with enough fortitude and clarity to make a difference.

— STEPHANIE CORIGLIANO

2. Christopher Key Chapple, *Living Landscapes: Meditations on the Five Elements in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Yogas*. New York: Suny Press (2020: xxiii).

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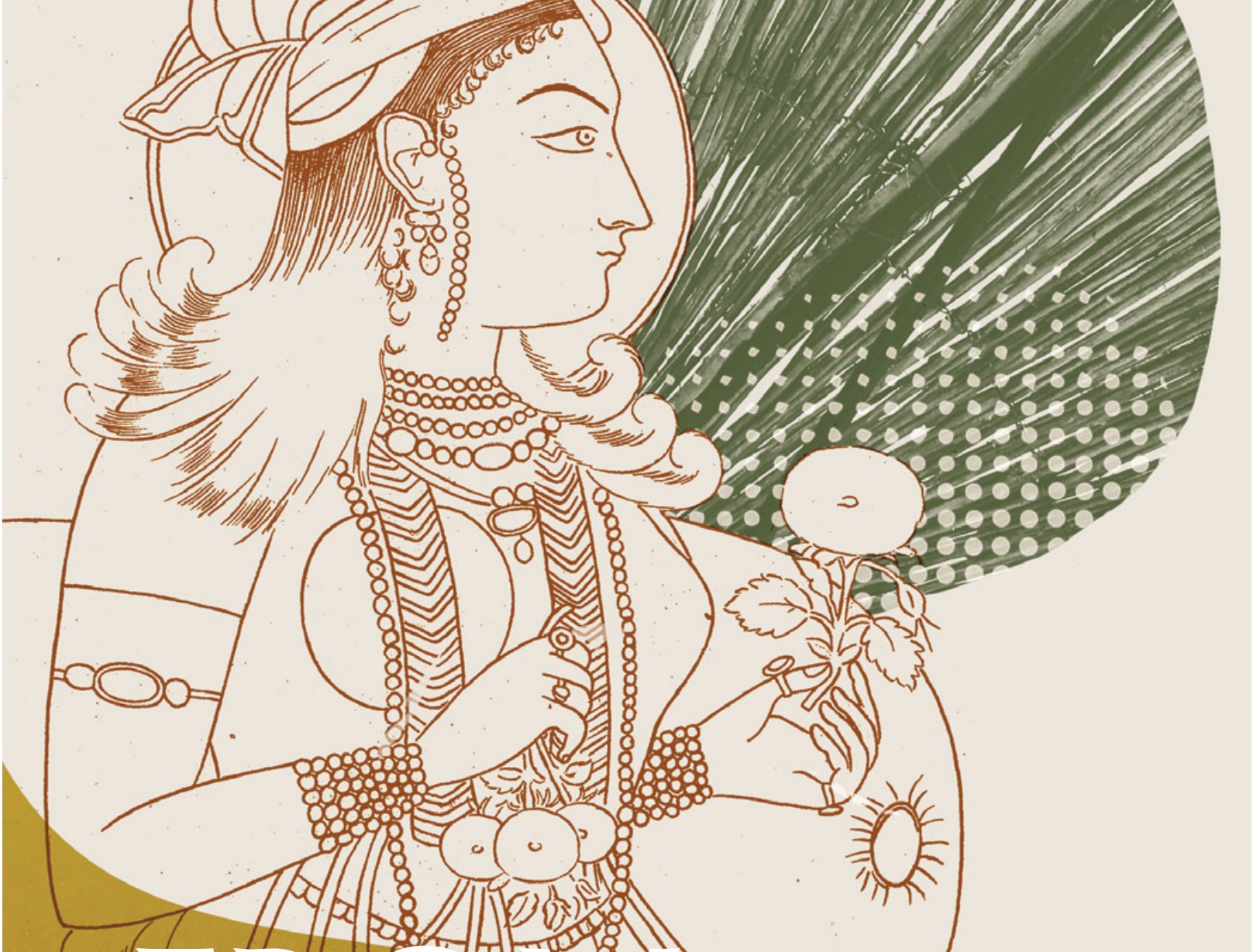


FROM FACULTY & FRIENDS

In relational thinking, one practices perceiving from a systems perspective, seeing how ecosystems, cultural systems, market systems and religious systems are all affecting each other and are interrelated. Human life itself is completely relational.

STEPHANIE KAZA

FROM FACULTY & FRIENDS:

DHARMA & ECOLOGY PANEL

On August 6, 2020, Embodied Philosophy hosted a panel discussion with four leading scholars on the topic of Dharma & Ecology: Contemplative Environmental Activism. The panel discussion included voices from different religious traditions with the goal of forming an interreligious dialogue on the topic of faith and environmental activism. Each panelist was asked to share some resources and dialogue about challenges from their own faith context for engaging with environmental destruction, eco-grief, and the perseverance of contemplative and religious practice in the era of global warming.

The following is a selection of excerpts from the panel.

RITA D. SHERMA:

Hindu dharma is an indigenous spirituality of place, and like other indigenous traditions, its sacred praxis often integrates the ecosphere symbolically, either via representations of archetypal elements common to indigenous cultures such as earth, water, fire, air, space, or directly through rituals and veneration that incorporate trees, rivers, plants, flowers, sacred groves, mountains and much more. But no philosophy or theology that arose in the ancient past can be expected to provide a prescription for the unprecedented environmental disasters of our current era.

I would say, however, that immanental theologies across traditions are more naturally felicitous for eco-theological interpretation.

By immanence, I mean the idea that the supreme reality, however envisioned, is inherently and dynamically present within material reality, within creation, within the world. In the context of the Hindu tradition, any theology or philosophy that offers primacy to supreme divine immanence is what I'm looking at.

And this focus on immanence is particularly strong in the doctrines and principles of the theology of the "Divine Feminine" or Shakti. Therefore, the theology of Shakti, is an especially promising candidate in the Hindu world for an eco-theological re-envisioning and eco-ethical application precisely because of its foundations in "deep divine immanence."

Shakti, as a vision of the Divine, has resonated with a lot of women globally. But Shakti is not exclusively about femaleness but, rather, about maternality, which represents a powerful impulse towards nurturing and caring. And that sense of nurturance transcends gender.

We also need to remember that immanence can be variously conceived and some notions of immanence do not really maintain or express the idea of what I term "deep immanence," but rather a kind of shallow immanence. Deep immanence is an entirely different matter. It's an organic immanence of the divine that inheres in physical reality, in material reality, in matter—both sentient and non-sentient.

This consciousness of deep immanence being intrinsic to matter—the earth, water, soil, air, mountains, etc.—is highly relevant to our present network of crises including a global pandemic, climate catastrophe, and mass extinctions. These crises share a common link—the *mal-relationship of human civilization to the biosphere*, whether it is trade in wild animals causing transference of zoonotic diseases; lack of urgency in transitioning to renewable energy; or, the utter absence of care, interest, and compassion for species disappearing forever.

As I have noted in my forthcoming book, *Radical Immanence*: "A civilization living without purpose will render life on earth untenable. Or, we will find a higher purpose, and discover a way back to an integral interrelationship with the ecosphere. There is no third option."

STEPHANIE KAZA:

I would like to bring attention to the calls for action across the globe. Last night, I was awakened here in Portland, Oregon, a hot spot of speaking out, by helicopters and sirens. These calls for action are all about environmental and economic suffering. We know what's going on. This is the new normal.

We know that life support systems are completely under siege, as Rita said. As part of how we see this, we must look at the systemic patterns of domination that are everywhere.

The wealth inequities, the unstable markets, the poor leadership – we need to see how climate impacts are adding stress to already challenged systems. From a Buddhist perspective, this is really a call for compassion, for everywhere people are struggling with rapid change and a completely uncertain, not only climate future but economic future and, I would say, a *moral* future.

I propose that we think in terms of taking a practice path. In this sense we see the whole field of impossibility out there as the context for Buddhist practice.

So, we begin where we are, affirm our intentions and give what we have to give on this practice path approach. It is very helpful to

affirm ethical guidelines that one can practice with others to strengthen one's own intention and compassionate action.

In relational thinking, one practices perceiving from a systems perspective, seeing how ecosystems, cultural systems, market systems and religious systems are all affecting each other and are interrelated. Human life itself is completely relational.

The Buddhist term for relational thinking is *paticca samutpada* -- co-dependent arising, in other words, all things as they arise are co-dependent on all other things. Thich Nhat Hanh's term is *inter-being, a* popular and more poetic expression. Joanna Macy uses the phrase *mutual causality* to indicate a kind of reciprocity contained in this understanding. Another phrase is "the law of interdependence," which I often use because it overlaps so well with the laws of interdependence in ecology.

Thinking from this relational view leads us rather quickly to the practice of non-harming. Let's talk about ethical practice for a minute and what compassionate protection of life looks like. The way we're wearing our masks today is such a relational practice. This is all about protecting others from harm by protecting ourselves. As we take action to protect the earth community, the earth supports us. Taking care of the garden, we take care of ourselves, as in the beautiful practice garden at Upaya Zen Center.

Thich Nhat Hanh recommends that we also avoid harming through judging and through pressing our ideologies on others. This is a common trait among environmentalists. We often feel quite self-righteous, and it can cause harm in unexpected ways. All ethical practice is practice acting with restraint and awareness of others. The bottom line is, as the Dalai Lama says, practicing kindness.

PANKAJ JAIN:

Let me focus solely on Jainism. I think that's one of the least understood religions in this part of the world. So, I'm going to speak on Jainism and ecology. When we speak or think of the word Jainism, Jains themselves defined the whole tradition as *Ahimsa* or non-violence. So, what could be a nonviolent method to save the planet?

◆

Jainism is known by its three pillars. The first pillar is Nonviolence (*Ahimsa*). The Jain way of practicing *Ahimsa* is by minimizing the consumption. *Ahimsa* can be the greatest Dharma for one's Karma. If Karma is based on nonviolence, one's Karma footprint will also be less. And this may help get you a better chance in your next birth by keeping your karma progressively more nonviolent.

The second pillar is *Aparigraha*, non-accumulation, that directly translates for Dharma for nature or ecology. So, again, keeping the carbon footprint as low as possible. By avoiding accumulating extra clothing or devices or cars or any other possessions, for instance, and by

minimizing the consumtion of energy as well. This is another principle that Jains have been practicing for thousands of years.

The third pillar is *Anekantavada,* perspective. This is sometimes explained by one of the popular Asian fables in which there are six blind people trying to touch an elephant. They touch the different parts of the elephant and conclude the reality from their own perspectives. For some, the elephant is like a spear. For some, the elephant is like a ball. For some, the elephant is like a fan. We only get to the comprehensive reality by combining all the different perspectives as each perspective is partially correct.

So, to translate that into environmentalism will be to say that anthropocentric or egocentric perspective towards nature would be just one perspective. We need to also consider biocentric perspective or species centric perspective towards nature. One example that I always share is to look at the contrast in the way the highways are constructed in America versus in India. In America, even humans are prohibited from entering national highways. If you start walking on any American highway, you can be fined by the police for a couple of hundred dollars. Humans cannot walk on American national highways.

Now, in the Indian scenario, elephants, donkeys, monkeys, all kinds of wildlife, you see on several national highways. There are elephant corridors I saw when I was traveling in the Himalayas. Elephants are allowed, not only allowed, but humans are supposed to stop for elephants. You don't have any monopoly even on national highways. This is the elephant zone. Stop your cars. Do not honk at the elephants.

◆

Then, if you look at the history of Jainism, we see that the Mahavira who was a contemporary to the Buddha, was the 24th great teacher, or

We only get to the comprehensive reality by combining all the different perspectives as each perspective is partially correct.

24th Tirthankara. Even as he is dying, he sends Indrabhuti to stop the cattle slaughter. That compassion for animals is supreme in Mahavira's mind, even as he is dying and attaining his enlightenment. He says in one of his teachings that the trees are inherently valuable.

Vegetation has life just as humans. This is 2600 years ago. Mahavira said vegetation has life just as humans, because they have souls. Before Mahavira, the 23rd Tirthankara also similarly responded to the burning of a snake. And 22nd Tirthankara also showed similar compassion. On route to his wedding he heard the cries of animals being killed for the feast, he immediately stopped his wedding and became a monk. These kind of role-models are so ingrained in the Jain tradition that animal killing continues to be highly discouraged and has been for thousands of years.

Another text in Jain tradition, the *Adipurana*, says that souls render services to one another.

Humans should follow the behavior of the bees. The bees, as they collect the nectar from each flower, do not destroy the flower. They do not destroy the plant itself.

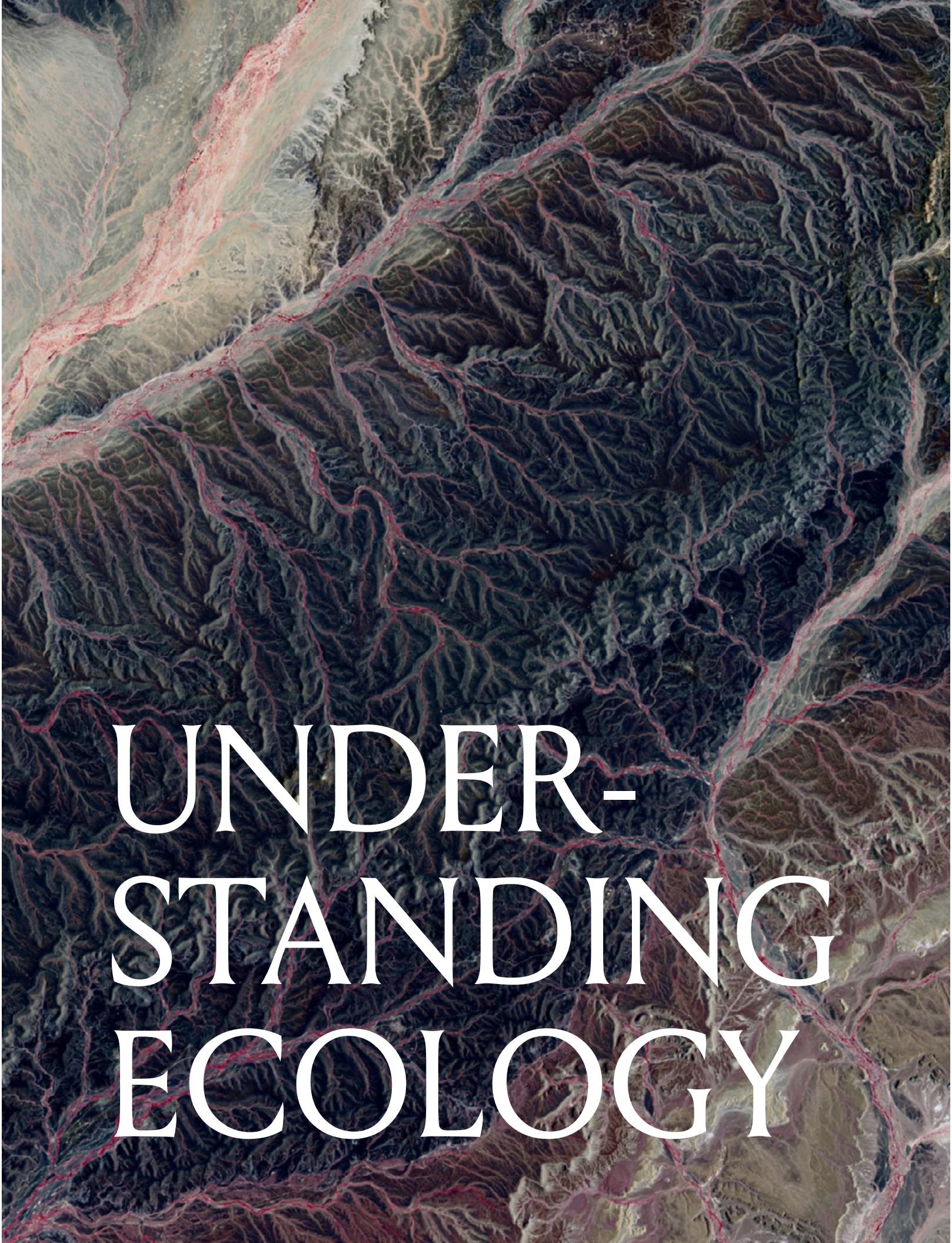
CHRISTOPHER KEY CHAPPLE:

In regard to the conversations on the environment, examine the rhetoric and think about the source. What message have we been inundated with for these past 250 years, perhaps even the last 400 years in regard to the measure of human goodness? Acquiring lots of material stuff. It is supposed to make us happy. What's the problem with lots of stuff? Climate change, pollution and ultimately, a denigration of dignity. Every wealthy person manifests an opulent lifestyle at the expense of so many others. What can we do?

I have reflected on this since childhood. When I was seven years old, I saw mountaintop removal coal mining during a visit to Ohio, a scene of utter devastaion. I asked, “What is this, this gaping hole in the Earth?" I learned about legislation. Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia allow this form of strip mining. It would never be allowed in New York State.

I learned about the importance of sustained intimacy with nature through my father and my mother. Stephanie Kaza gave a great gift to all of us in her beautiful book *Conversations with Trees*. My late father, who had studied Forestry at the University of Toronto in the 1920s, so loved reading this celebration of intimacy with trees.

Perhaps the only good thing about COVID is that each and every one of us have regained intimacy with our housemates. We have regained intimacy with the stuff that is now a constant companion. We've regained intimacy with the streets that surround our households. So many people rejoiced in the birds as they went through their spring cycle. These moments allow for the pause, for that silent and sacred place of abeyance. As we emerge someday from this restraint, let's take a vow, the Bodhisattva vow. Let's take the vow to remain informed by this time of quiet and to discover all that we can do with our consumer choices. Let us say all that we can say in the public arena on behalf of the Earth. Let us resolve that, moving forward, we will create something better, something new. Thank you.


UNDER-
STANDING
ECOLOGY

What is Ecology?

BY JESSICA JAGTIANI

Ecology,[1] or ecological science, is the study of the relationships between organisms and their biophysical environment. A biophysical environment consists of both the biotic[2] and abiotic[3] surrounding of an organism or population. The abiotic environment includes

1. From Greek: οἶκος, "house", or "environment"; -λογία, "study of."

2. Biotic components can be described as any living component that affects another organism or shapes the ecosystem. This includes both animals that consume other organisms within their ecosystem, and the organism that is being consumed. Biotic factors also include human influence, pathogens, and disease outbreaks.

3. Abiotic components are non-living chemical and physical parts of the environment that affect living organisms and the functioning of ecosystems. Abiotic components include physical conditions and non-living resources that affect living organisms in terms of growth, maintenance, and reproduction.

Rivers running in the wilderness
Colored Etching. Artist Unkown..
Source: Wellcome Collection.

weather, earth, sun, soil, climate, and atmosphere. The biotic environment includes organisms of the same kind as well as other types of plants and animals. A biophysical environment's range can vary in scale from microscopic to global. The number of biophysical environments is infinite, given that each living organism has its own environment; which includes the factors that have an influence on their survival, development, and evolution.

Ecology is studied at various levels, such as organism, population, community, biosphere,[4] and ecosystem.[5] It is often defined as the study of ecosystems because ecologists study the interaction of all the organisms in an ecosystem. The study extends from complex interactions between thousands of plants and animals to the role of microbes living under the soil to the effects of tropical rainforest on the Earth's atmosphere. Ecology provides new knowledge on the interdependence of people and nature that is vital for food production, maintaining clean air and water, and sustaining biodiversity in a changing climate.

The word "ecology" ("Ökologie") was coined in 1866 by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel to describe the "economies" of living forms. Ecological thought is based on established divisions in philosophy, particularly in ethics and politics.[6] Theory in ecology consists of the heuristics or principles applied to construct models. Different from evolutionary theory, ecology has not generally accepted global principles such as Mendel's rules of genetic inheritance.[7] Contemporary ecology involves a mixture of sub-disciplines including population ecology, community ecology, conservation ecology, ecosystem ecology, metapopulation ecology, metacommunity ecology, spatial ecology, landscape ecology, physiological ecology, evolutionary ecology, functional ecology, and behavioral ecology.[8]

An ecological crisis can strike when the environment of a species or a population evolves in a way harmful to that species' survival.

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4. The regions of the surface, atmosphere, and hydrosphere of the earth (or analogous parts of other planets) occupied by living organisms.

5. An ecosystem is a community of living organisms in conjunction with the nonliving components of their environment, interacting as a system.

6. Eric Laferrière; Peter J. Stoett. International Relations Theory and Ecological Thought: Towards a Synthesis. Routledge (2003: 25).

7. Mendelian inheritance is a type of biological inheritance that follows the principles originally proposed by Gregor Mendel in 1865 and 1866. When Mendel's theories were integrated with the Boveri–Sutton chromosome theory of inheritance by Thomas Hunt Morgan in 1915, they became the core of classical genetics.

8. Sarkar, Sahotra, "Ecology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

Spiritual ecology is an exploration of the spiritual dimension of our present ecological crisis that recognizes that there is a spiritual aspect to issues related to conservation, environmentalism, and earth stewardship.

The crisis may start with a change in the climate (such as increased temperature or decreased rainfall), an extraordinary event (such as an oil spill), increased activity of predators feeding on prey (such as overfishing), or explosive growth in the population of the species that cannot be supported by the ecosystem. In the past, human actions have severely affected many ecosystems by rampant deforestation, uncontrolled expansion of agriculture, intensive farming, mining, and infrastructure development, as well as the exploitation of wild species and the pollution of ecosystems. Some environmentalists and conservationists regularly apply ecology and other sciences to support their advocacy standpoints for controversial political or economic reasons. Consequently, some scientific work in ecology directly influences policy and political debate, which in return may direct ecological research and practice that is not always in favor of sustaining and healing our planet.

Our present ecological crisis, including the fast-tracking climate change, species depletion, and the pollution and acidification of the oceans, is the utmost man-made disaster this planet has ever faced. A crucial but hardly addressed component of this crisis is our civilizations' inattentiveness to the sacred nature of life and creation, and the way this affects our relationship to the environment. There is an uncompromising urgency to acknowledge the spiritual factor of the ecological crises, in order to help bring the world back into equilibrium as an organic unity. The importance of the interconnectivity between the wellbeing of humans, other living things, and entire

ecosystems are increasingly more visible.

Research suggests that humanity's destruction of biodiversity creates the conditions for new viruses and diseases to arise, such as Covid-19 that emerged in China in December 2019. Reducing the natural barriers between host animals for viruses and ourselves by invading tropical forests and other wild landscapes, we humans are creating the conditions for the spread of diseases. We disrupt ecosystems. We cut trees. We kill animals. We cage them. We eat them. We shake viruses loose from their natural hosts, so that they are in need of a new host.[9] Disease ecologists argue that shrinking natural habitats and changing behavior add to the risk of diseases spilling over from animals to humans. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that three-quarters of new or emerging diseases that infect humans originate in animals. It is an increasing and weighty threat to global health, security, and economies that will not be overcome without a change of human behavior.[10]

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY?

Since the late 1980s, interest in the intersection of spirituality and ecology has grown exponentially. As an umbrella term, spiritual ecology may be defined as a vast, complex, diverse, and dynamic field of intellectual and practice-oriented disciplines at the intersection of spirituality, environments, ecologies, and environmentalisms.[11] Spiritual ecology is an exploration of the spiritual dimension of our present ecological crisis that recognizes that there is a spiritual aspect to issues related to conservation, environmentalism, and earth stewardship. Its advocates promote the idea that contemporary conservation work includes spiritual principles and that contemporary spiritual practice involves awareness of and engagement in ecological issues. The field of spiritual ecology, which embraces concepts

9. David Quammen. "Opinion | The Next Pandemic: Not If, but When." The *New York Times*, May 9, 2013, sec. Opinion. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/opinion/the-next-pandemic-is-closer-than-you-think.html.

10. See Vidal, John Vidal. "'Tip of the Iceberg': Is Our Destruction of Nature Responsible for Covid-19?" *The Guardian*, March 18, 2020, sec. Environment.

11. See Leslie E. Sponsel, *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution*, ch. III, "Branches" (2014: 69-83) and specifically ch. 12, "Supernovas."

such as deep ecology,[12] ecofeminism,[13] and nature religion,[14] is largely evolving through the three distinct formal areas of science and academia, religion and spirituality, and ecological sustainability.[15] It does not promote any specific religion; no particular belief system is designated as the solution. Instead, scientists, scholars, educators, clerics, adherents, politicians, and others are encouraged to deeply examine their own beliefs and values for foundations, attitudes, values, and practices that relate to viable environmental worldviews.

Teachings and practices in the field of spiritual ecology tie together spiritual and environmental experience and understanding. Moreover, within the tradition itself dwells a profound notion of a collective human-earth-spirit evolution that is expanding consciousness beyond the dualities of human & earth, heaven & earth, and mind & body. This notion of interconnectedness is a component of indigenous[16] cultures and contemporary knowledge that acknowledges the unity of all of things.[17] Many proponents of spiritual ecology agree that indigenous wisdom carries a distinct aspect of experience and lived understanding of the principles, values, and attitudes of spiritual ecology.

For many indigenous societies, the earth is the central spiritual context.[18] This principle order reflects a stance and way of being in the world that is rooted in land and embedded in place.[19] Spiritual ecology guides us to look to respected preservers of these traditions in order to grasp the source of our current ecological and spiritual crisis, which may lead us to move into a state of healing.

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12. Deep ecology is an ecological and environmental philosophy promoting the inherent worth of living beings regardless of their instrumental utility to human needs, plus a restructuring of modern human societies in accordance with such ideas.

13. Ecofeminism is a branch of feminism that understands environmentalism, and the relationship between women and the earth, as foundational to its analysis and practice; it draws on concepts of gender to study the relationships between humans and the natural world.

14. Nature religions include indigenous religions and contemporary belief systems throughout the world that consider the environment to be imbued with spirits and sacred entities and that understand nature and the natural world as an embodiment of divinity, sacredness, and spiritual power.

15. Leslie E. Sponsel. *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution.* Praeger (2012: xiii).

16. The term "indigenous" here refers to that which is native, original, and resident to a place, more precisely to societies who share and preserve ways of knowing the world in relationship to the land.

17. John Grim, "Recovering Religious Ecology with Indigenous Traditions", available online at: Indigenous Traditions and Ecology, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology.

18. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim (eds.), *Worldviews & Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment,* Bucknell University Press (1993: 11).

19. Tu Wei-Ming, "Beyond Enlightenment Mentality", published in *Worldviews & Ecology: Religion, Philosophy, and the Environment*, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John A. Grim (eds.). Bucknell University Press (1993: 27).

Indigenous peoples have always understood the interconnection between the outer and inner as a fundamental aspect of life itself. While the outer signs of our ecological crisis are clearly visible in the pollution of the waters, the dying of species, climate change, and the current spread of diseases, the inner marks of the crisis are less comprehended, particularly in Western culture. For centuries, Western culture has dismissed the inner worlds, asserting that only the material world is "real." We are less aware of the inner spiritual crisis that underlies the outer crisis.

The collective pursuit of materialism and the disregard for the sacred within all of life has had a devastating effect. Spiritual ecology proposes we need to recognize that there is a direct relationship between our inner world and the outer, physical, ecological predicament. Because our culture has ignored the inner for so long, it is difficult for us to perceive what is happening. We have forgotten that the world has a soul, the anima mundi.[20] The world's soul is no longer part of our collective consciousness, even though for centuries it was understood as the root of everything sacred in creation.[21]

What the world needs is a fundamental transformative change that includes system-wide reorganization across technological, economic, and social factors, including paradigms, goals, and values, promoting social and environmental responsibilities within all sectors. At the root of the ecological imbalance and the resulting crises is a deep disregard for both the environment and for the consequences of our actions. An important element in the work of contemporary spiritual teachers is the call for humanity's full acceptance of responsibility for what we have done to mother earth - physically and spiritually.[22] Healing and transformation will only be possible by accepting this responsibility.[23]

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20. The world soul (Greek: ψυχὴ κόσμου *psuchè kósmou*, Latin: *anima mundi*) is, according to several systems of thought, an intrinsic connection between all living things on the planet, which relates to the world in much the same way as the soul is connected to the human body.

21.See Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee. "Spiritual Ecology,"in *Spiritual Ecology* (2014).

22. This theme is developed further in the work of Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, Sandra Ingerman, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim: http://fore.research.yale.edu, Leslie Sponsel: http://spiritualecology.info, and others.

23. Also see the video *Taking Spiritual Responsibility for the Planet* with Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, and *Engaged Buddhism.*

What is Ecofeminism?

BY REBEKAH NAGY

To define ecofeminism, it might be useful to look at the terms it synthesizes. Any conversation, in this case, between environmentalism and intersectional feminism, amounts to more than the sum of its parts; relationships are generative. The ecofeminist critical framework "situates humans in ecological terms and nonhumans in ethical terms," and models itself after the global ecological community it describes.[1] It contains contradiction, allowing for a polyphony of perspectives, taking relativity and context into account. Ecofeminism sees social justice and environmental protection as "complementary, mutually supportive projects."[2]

The science of ecology, which is "inherently multidisciplinary," can be defined as the study of the relationships amongst "plants, animals, and microorganisms and their natural environment, living and nonliving."[3] There are no absolute components of any ecosystem;

1. Val Plumwood. From Greta Gaard. *Critical Ecofeminism.* Lexington Books (2017).
2. Karen J. Warren, and Jim Cheney. "Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology." *Hypatia* 6, no. 1 (1991:182-3) www.jstor.org/stable/3810040. Accessed March 17 - 25, 2020.
3. Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi. *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision.* Cambridge University Press (2014: 341-342).

it depends on the parameters set by the observer. This approach disrupts classical reductionist notions that we are separate from what we observe. Ecofeminism is interested in a self-aware approach to ecosystem ecology, which acknowledges the importance of context and rejects the idea of a neutral observation stance, bridging scientific inquiry and ethics.

The term "feminism" applies to a broad range of ideologies and waves of social and political movements that seek to define and establish gender equality in all domains: social, personal, economic, and political. Per activist-scholar bell hooks, "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression."[4] The heteromasculinized social order, and the hierarchical structures that arise from it, is called "patriarchy." One common criticism of feminism by those who are not familiar with it, is the incorrect idea that it seeks to position women over men. This is an uninformed criticism; to state it simply, feminism's goal is equality and not female supremacy.[5]

However, as with all -isms, there are many feminisms, and mainstream liberal feminism begs deep interrogation and reform. Susan Watkins points out that "advances in gender equality have gone hand-in-hand with soaring socioeconomic inequality across most of the world," demanding a more coherent egalitarianism.[6] Mainstream liberal feminism has focused almost exclusively on white, college-educated, middle-class women. These elitist and incomplete feminisms fail to include the experiences of indigenous folks, Black folks and people of color, and working-class, poor, queer, and differently-abled folks. Ecofeminism was birthed from a diversity of countercultural movements in the 1960s-70s and its innate intersectionality arose out of critiques of the myopic direction in which mainstream feminism was heading. Feminism without intersectionality falls prey to the unconscious hierarchical suppositions of the very mindsets it wishes to eradicate.

To tease out how social and political identities intersect, and to challenge the primacy of gender alone in informing discrimination, Black feminist scholar and attorney Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989. Intersectionality

4. bell hooks. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics.* Pluto Press (2000).

5. Female supremacy as a salient BDSM fantasy for exploring and subverting patriarchal trauma is a pretty interesting cultural niche, though.

6. Susan Watkins. "Which Feminisms?" *New Left Review,* Vol. 109 (Jan/Feb 2018).

describes how social and political identities, including but not limited to gender, race, class, sexuality, ability (and I'd like to add, species and assumed sentience), compound and magnify systems of oppression. Learning to see these identity-based modes of oppression as intertwined and mutually reinforcing, rather than competing or incompatible, is also a refutation of the either/or thinking that characterizes the mindset of Western, white-supremacist, patriarchal colonialism and capitalism.

Rachel Carson set the foundation for nascent ecofeminism with her landmark 1962 book, *Silent Spring*.[7] She unapologetically writes with both emotion and scientific precision, demonstrating their complementarity and subverting unexamined ideas about scientific objectivity. The actual term "ecofeminism" was first used by author and activist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. She sees the destruction of nature and the subjugation of women, people of color, children, and the poor as interwoven oppressions which arise from patriarchal values. d'Eaubonne believes that all social injustice must be eradicated to eradicate any of it; it is all interrelated.[8] Therefore, ecofeminism is fundamentally intersectional, concerned with the intertwining ideologies of racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, imperialism, naturism, and speciesism. It critiques "not only androcentric but anthropocentric bias."[9]

Central to ecofeminism, is the idea that it is not possible to address environmental change without addressing social change, and that the human and nonhuman worlds, as obvious as their interconnection may seem, suffer from a deep rupture in mainstream culture. From environmental degradation to human rights crises across the globe, the domination of nature and our fellow humans is not and has not been "considered to be unethical, but rather a judicious use of resources."[10] Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen name four interrelated factors underpinning this sense of separation:

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7. Greta Gaard. "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism." *Feminist Formations*, Vol. 23 No. 2 (Summer 2011: 26-53).

8. Kathryn Miles. "Ecofeminism: Sociology and Environmentalism." https://www.britannica.com/topic/ecofeminism. Accessed March 17 - 25, 2020.

9. Karen J. Warren and Jim Cheney. "Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology." *Hypatia* 6, no. 1 (1991: 182-3). www.jstor.org/stable/3810040. Accessed March 17 - 25, 2020.

10. Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen. "Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health." *Society and Nature,* 2 (1993: 1-35).

https://www.academia.edu/32438639/Ecofeminism_Toward_Global_Justice_and_Planetary_Health. Accessed 2/16/20 - 3/25/20.

1. **The reductionist, mechanistic materialist model of the universe, from the birth of modern medicine and science, which characterizes matter as an inert resource to be studied "objectively" and used.**

2. **Gender hierarchies established in the patriarchal religions, and their exchange of immanent, distributed, earth- and goddess-centered divinity for hierarchical male sky gods with centralized creative power.**

3. **Dualisms which create power imbalances: either/or, self/other, order/chaos, male/female, culture/nature, White/Black, human/animal, monoculture/diversity, native/invasive, etc.**

4. **Capitalism's cruel logic, rooted in exploitation and destruction, which places wealth creation above all else, fiscally elevating a few at the expense of many in its intertwining of economics and rationalism.**

Under patriarchy, heteromasculinity dominates the realm of culture. "Women, animals, nature, children, people of color, farmers, [enslaved people], as well as the body itself, emotions, and sexuality," are conflated and treated as separate and inferior "in order to legitimate their subordination under an elite and often violent and militarized male-dominant social order."[11] They are all considered resources to be exploited, over which men, and particularly wealthy white men, hold exclusive power, agency, and subjecthood.

In the global economy, the majority of work performed is excluded, due to an artificial construction called the "production boundary," a sexualized and otherized division of labor. As Vandana Shiva puts succinctly, in the inverted logic of the production boundary, "if you produce what you consume, you do not produce."[12] This includes so-called women's work (regenerative, renewable production cycles such as managing households, caregiving, child-

11. Greta Gaard. "Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism." *Feminist Formations*, Vol. 23 No. 2 (Summer 2011: 26-53).

12. Vandana Shiva. Foreword to Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern*. Zed Books (2017: xvi).

bearing and -rearing), and subsistence farming, fishing, and foraging (self-sufficiency rather than the enforced poverty of globalized monocropping and neocolonial debt), which aren't factored into GDP calculations and are controlled through economic appropriation and cultural imperialism. Work on the wrong side of the production boundary is sometimes also called the "free economy."[13] Earth's finite natural resources are also externalized; they are considered outside of the accumulation of capital like the free economy, essentially passive and available for appropriation at no cost. In fact, the free economy and the earth's natural resources are the invisible and exploited foundation of capitalism. The burden of these hidden costs falls most heavily on otherized and colonized people, including women, indigenous folks, and people of color. Therefore, movements that are holistic and inclusive of the diversity of those most negatively affected by the accumulation of global capital are the only ways to begin to unravel these interlocking oppressions.

The intersectional ecofeminist call for coalition, awakening, and action that respects difference and diversity is evident in the nondual ethical consideration of the *bodhisattva*, sometimes called the Bodhisattva Vow. As defined in the glossary of *Radical Dharma*, a *bodhisattva*, or "awake being" in Sanskrit (बोधिसत्व) "is like a saint who vows to achieve enlightenment only to free others. Many Buddhists take the Bodhisattva Vow in which they commit to spiritual enlightenment in this life, and all lives to come, in order to liberate others."[14] It is not that I forsake my own liberation until all beings may be liberated, but that my liberation can't actually happen any other way than in a cocreation of liberation for all, by all. If others are not liberated, neither am I. Individual liberation is bound up in collective liberation. The Bodhisattva Vow is a potent reminder of how intertwined we are with everyone and everything. In the ecofeminist context, it is a potential future wave for feminist theory, racial and structural justice, and environmentalism, with an appropriately expansive nondual ethics. Perhaps more urgently, it is a call to action for interwoven individual and collective awakening.

Ecofeminism is rigorously interdisciplinary and profoundly nondual. "No other political perspective," writes Ariel Salleh, "can

13. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books Ltd. (2014).

14. Rev. angel Kyodo williams, Lama Rod Owens, and Jasmine Syedullah. *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation.* North Atlantic Books (2016: 205).

integrate what ecofeminism does."[15] It is a framework that "reconciles diversity, difference, and commonality, while honoring individuality, autonomy, and respect" for those who haven't been afforded it. Ecofeminism complexifies and contextualizes ethical considerations, "making a central place for values often lost or overlooked in mainstream ethics (e.g., values of care, love, friendship, diversity, appropriate reciprocity) in the context of human-nonhuman relationships."[16] It offers a relational view of all organisms and the environment in which they are situated, in contrast to abstract notions of individualism, so that as a global community we may forge new and timely coalitions of both commonality and difference. It is so encompassing, intersectional, and structurally pluralistic that it undermines dualism, demanding a reconsideration of "the living metabolism of human bodies embedded in ecological processes" in the co-creation of "a future horizontalist politics of spontaneity and mutuality — a commons."[17] Ecofeminism invites us into relationship with the world around us, revisioning the world as an agent with whom we must learn to converse, trading mastery for fidelity.[18] Our appropriate stance "toward the more-than-human world is not one of identification or unity, but of solidarity in the political sense."[19] This approach requires the alignment of theory and practice in an acknowledgement of their interdependence, which at its heart may be a realignment of the political with the spiritual.

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15. Ariel Salleh. Foreword to *Ecofeminism*. Mies, Maria, and Shiva, Vandana. Zed Books Ltd. (2014).

16. Karen J. Warren, and Jim Cheney. "Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology." *Hypatia* 6, no. 1 (1991:188). www.jstor.org/stable/3810040. Accessed March 17 - 25, 2020.

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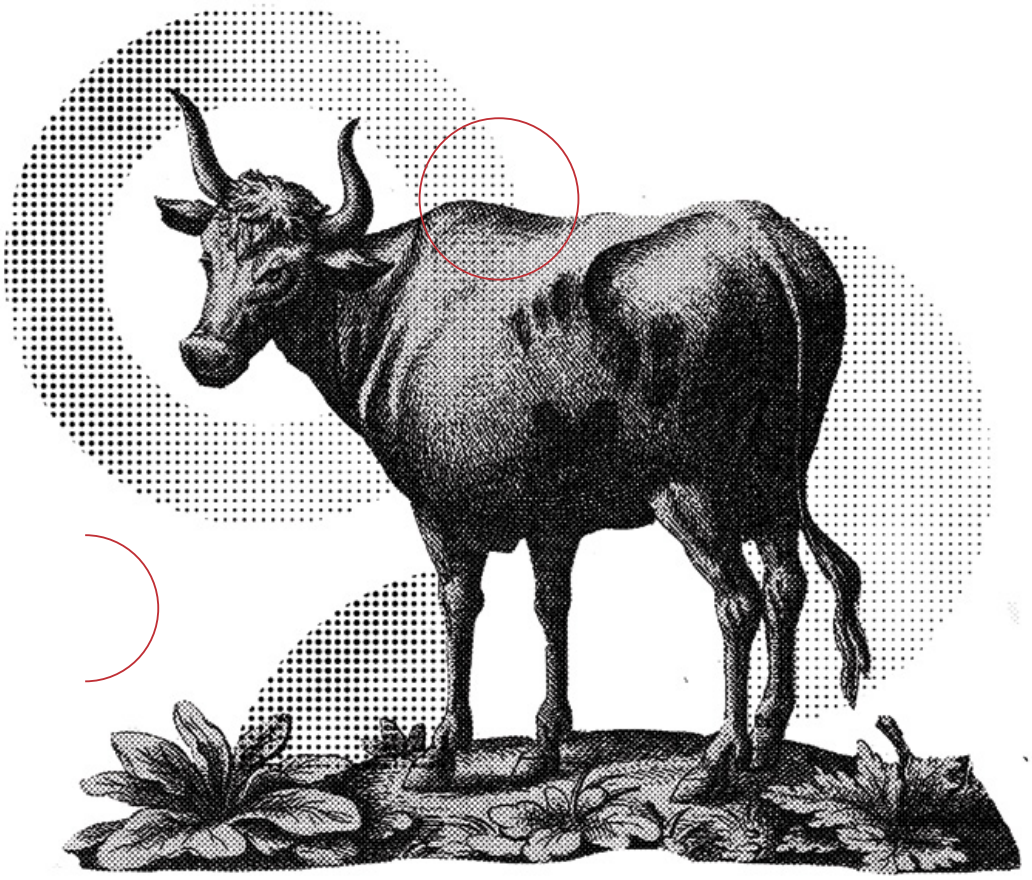

Sacred Cow

BY KATY JANE

The cow is defined as the mother of the Adityas, the daughter of the Vasus and the very soul of the people.

Atharva Veda 1.22.1

My husband's father waited until dinner time to inform his grandmother about a decision he'd made as head of the district. He couldn't wait to see her face when he told her the news.

"Today I instituted a policy that makes it a punishable offense to transport cows heading to slaughter in Calcutta from our district railway station," he announced plaintively and waited for his elder's response.

Slowly the news settled and she realized what it meant: *cow protection.* "You've done something very very good," she responded approvingly. "Very good."

Never once had she taken an interest in her son's policies. But today she did. As a devout Vaishnava and vegetarian, no other social or political issue meant as much personally to her as cow protection. And she wasn't alone. Many Hindus in the district would have been just as happy that night.

For them the cow, above all, is sacred. It's not worshipped in the same ways as gods necessarily—except on specific holidays meant for the worship of cows. It's sacred because the cow is synonymous with Vedic civilization. It's sacred because it's synonymous with Hindu identity. It's sacred because it's synonymous with India.

As such a powerful cultural symbol, the cow encompasses four key principles that convey its sacred status: *ahiṁsa* (non-violence), *dharma* (right conduct), *artha* (prosperity), and *puṇya* (merit). All four meanings come together in one unifying image of the cow as *mother.*

The Vedas are replete with images of mother cow. The beams of Aditi, "the mother of light," are personified as cows that draw her chariot forth each morning as the dawn. The rain-cloud is a cow—the mother of lightning. The bountiful clouds are multi-colored cows who fulfill all desires. And the gods themselves are called *gojātāḥ*, "cow-born."

The cow as mother, therefore, is *aghnya*, "not to be slain" according to 16 references in the *Ṛg Veda* and forms the basis of later concepts and practices of *ahiṁsa,* "non-violence."

The first references of non-violence toward animals in the Vedas are found in *Yajur Veda* wherein *paśu-ahiṁsa* ("non-injury toward animals") is advocated. The concept of non-violence gets fully developed in the *Chandogya Upanishad* which bans violence toward all creatures *(sarvabhuta),* and makes the connection between *ahiṁsa* and future-birth merit.

Simply put, if you kill any living being you can expect a future birth that will demand payment in suffering for taking a life unnecessarily. Restraint from killing equals a happier time next time around.

The ethics of *ahiṁsa* get fully expressed in early Buddhism and Jainism

wherein any act of violence—including killing animals for meat—is grounds for spiritual devolution. This is echoed in Patañjali's classical yoga wherein *ahiṁsa* is the first and most important "restraint" practiced by a yogi.

By the first century C.E., killing a cow was equivalent to killing a brahmin—and a rapid demotion down the evolutionary ladder. And during the transition to the age of the *Mahabharata,* innumerable mentions are made to *ahiṁsa paramo dharma*—"non-violence is the supreme *dharma*."[1]

As an embodiment of *ahiṁsa,* the cow as mother is also the upholder of *dharma,* "right conduct."

The Vedic concept of time envisions four ages of time symbolized by a cow of *dharma* standing on four legs. In the *sat yuga*, "the golden age," the cow is depicted as standing on all four limbs signifying the perfection of *dharma* or moral order in that span of time.

As time declines with the expansion of the universe, the cow loses a limb signifying entrance into the *trega yuga* ("third age") wherein *dharma* reduces by a fourth. While she balances on three legs, the cow of *dharma* suffers a blow. This is the age of the *Ramayana* wherein gossip and slander signify the lessening of righteous behavior.

Then as we enter the *dvapara yuga* ("second age"), the cow of *dharma* loses yet another limb, teetering on only two legs. The *Mahabharata* describes the moral conduct of this age wherein brother is pitted against brother, uncle against nephew, father against son.

Finally, with the advent of the *kali yuga* ("the final age") the cow of *dharma* stands precariously on only one leg and morality has gone for a toss. No one follows the codes of right conduct. It's the age of darkness.

It's also the age of Krishna, the cowherd, who spread the doctrine of *bhakti* or devotion. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* which chronicles the

1. The phrase "ahiṁsa paramo dharma" appears in many passages in the Mahabharata, most notably in the 17th book of the epic, Mahaprasthanika ("Book of the Great Journey")—MB 13.117.37-38.

life of Sri Krishna, the devotee of god is equated with a cow—loving, reverent, and giving like a mother to a child.

The cow as mother is hence a source of giving, fertility, and abundance. She's Kamadhenu, the cow "from whom all that is desired is drawn." The Purāṇas uphold that all the gods reside in the cow of plenty. Her four legs are the Vedas. The trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) are her horns, with Shiva as their base. Her eyes are the sun and moon. Her shoulders are Agni (Fire) and Vayu (Wind).

Beginning with the Vedas, enduring in the epic periods, and culminating in the Purāṇas, the entire universe that sustains and provides all needs and desires *(artha)* is the mother cow.

But perhaps the greatest act of merit *(puṇya)* a person can enact is giving a cow in charity. It's especially meritorious to give a cow to a brahmin as part of ancestral worship. Specifically, the ceremony of *bhaitarni go dān*, "the gift of a cow," blesses one's ancestors for seven generations behind and seven generations to come. The list of benefits are numerous including relief from planetary afflictions, the destruction of the ill effects of any pāpam ("sin"), overcoming obstacles in love, marriage and family, and so on.

For all these four reasons *(ahiṁsa, dharma, artha, and puṇya),* the cow is *mother*—the loving, self-sacrificing, prosperous, and meritorious giver—who's birthed the defining principles of Vedic civilization and culture. And which is why Gandhi is quoted as saying, "The central fact of Hinduism is cow protection."

What is a *Śākta*?

BY LAURA K. AMAZZONE

A Śākta is a practitioner within the Śākta tradition, a Goddess-centered spiritual, philosophical, and ecological tradition that most likely evolved out of pre-historic Mother Goddess worship in civilizations across the globe. Iconography, ritual practices, and ancient art that could be considered Śākta are evident in South Asia and beyond. A proliferation of archaeological artifacts that depict imagery of female divinity and that honor the interrelationship between humans and the natural world dates back well over 30,000 years and is found on every continent.

Although there is no actual conception date of the Śākta tradition and its followers, N.N. Bhattacharya, author of *History of the Śākta Religion* contends the term, Śākta, arose as early as the 4th century CE and is applied to ritual practices, texts, and devotees of the Goddess. Prior to the 4th century, the term *Kaula,* or *Kula,* was used — a word that connotes matrilineality within female clans, groups of female deities with animal and vegetative mounts, and references the powers of the menstrual cycle and female sexuality.

On the Indian subcontinent, Śākta "imagery" is evident as early as the Indus Saraswati Valley Civilization (3500 BCE-1500 BCE, hereafter ISV), where numerous seal stones portraying female figures associated with vegetative, animal, and ritual symbolism have been found. Notably, around 90% of figurines found are female. Today many of these same symbols, for example, trees, seven female figures, tigers, buffalos, and others, are central to contemporary Śākta rituals and practices. Although the ISV script has not yet been deciphered, the stylized seal stones and other archaeological discoveries suggest

the ISV culture was a Goddess-centered, egalitarian, peaceful, and highly creative urban civilization that spanned hundreds of thousands of square miles. Similar to Paleolithic and Neolithic cultures of Old Europe, no weaponry or fortification is evident in any of the sites. While contested, some scholars posit Vedic culture evolved out of the ISV Culture, and others have presented a continuity of symbolism that is evident in the later Kaula and Śākta Tantric traditions.

Author June McDaniel points out the theological differences in understanding the identity and origins of Goddess within the Śākta tradition that elucidates the diversity one finds amongst Śākta practitioners: "Monism, monotheism, dualism, polytheism, henotheism: all of these are legitimate positions in Śāktism, and each is widely held, sometimes more than one position is held at a time." [1] Some Śāktas believe all Goddesses are manifestations of the one Great Goddess, while others honor the unique and diverse qualities of female deities that likely emerged from indigenous cultures and maintain power individually and collectively. According to McDaniel, Śākti Monism is when "all phenomenon are the parts of the goddess, whose deepest nature is Brahman or Universal Consciousness." She suggests within a Śākta monotheism, Devī (Goddess) is the "one and the many," and all deities, as well as all existence, are emanations of the Divine Mother. (p. 5) According to the *Devī Māhātmyam*, a Śākta 5th century CE text, Mahādevī (Great Goddess) assumes many forms to defeat forces that are threatening the natural harmony and equilibrium of the earth and cosmos. Each of Devī's forms can express benevolent and destructive qualities and have crucial roles and functions in the cycles within existence.

Śri Vidyā, a lineage stream with roots in Vedic, Śākta, and Śaivite Tantric traditions, presents a non-dual view of the Divine as the Absolute in the form of Goddess Tripurasundarī. In Bengal and Orissa, Śāktas consider the Absolute Goddess as Kālī or Durgā. In the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal, Śākta beliefs are evident within both Buddhist and Hindu traditions: Goddess Bhagawatī or Durgā is worshiped interchangeably with Her Buddhist counterpart, Vajrayoginī.

Geographically, Goddess worship within Śākta streams has sometimes been split into two types relating to the North and South, although worship of one expression is not exclusive. In the

1. June Mcdaniel. *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2004: 5).

South, there is an emphasis on the benevolent and peaceful nature of Goddess as Śri, Lakṣmī. Pārvatī, Gaurī, Gaṅgā, Saraswatī, and Umā. These are some of the most popular nurturing forms and expressions of Mahādevī's Śākti. In the North and Northeastern regions into Nepal, more wrathful emanations like Kālī, Durgā, the ten Mahāvidyās, Matṛkās, and Yoginīs are prominent in Śākta worship. Depending on region and stream, Śāktas will have a personal, sometimes family, or clan-based relationship to these different forms of the Divine Mother, with one form generally holding a central place of worship and devotion.

McDaniel further delineates different types of Śāktism and Śāktas into three categories: folk and tribal, Tantric Yogic, and Śākta Bhakti. While there are differences within these types, ultimately Śāktas view the Divine as Feminine. Devī is immanent and transcendent; She takes form and is formless. She is Absolute and relative, She is both earth and cosmos.

A central tenet within Śaktism holds, "Śiva without Śakti is but a corpse." A Śākta views the feminine principle or Śākti as the animating, dynamic, all-pervading force behind all existence while the masculine principle, or Śiva, is considered to be the quiescent, receptive force. The "feminine" Śākti is the expression of the Divine in this manifest reality, while the masculine offers a field within which Śākti unfolds Her infinite manifestations. Central to Śākta theology is recognition of the interrelationship between the Divine, humans, and the natural world. All of existence is conceived as the expression of a Great Mother Goddess. The power of Goddess is worshiped in both iconic and aniconic forms. Deities within Śākta pantheons can have associations with the natural landscape: trees, rivers, stones, mountains, hills, etc. Ritual practices also focus on placating deities in order to prevent natural disasters and illness. To a Śākta, the mysteries of death, life, and birth are considered the Goddess's domain. There is a deeply held and cherished belief that we all come from and will eventually return to the Great Mother Goddess.

To a Śākta, the human body is considered a temple for the divinity to express Itself. It is a ground for our spiritual awakening. The Yoni (female genitals) takes on micro and macrocosmic significance. The Yoni is worshiped as a creative and fertile source and also the primordial womb (and tomb) behind all existence. The ubiquitous Yoni-lingam, evident in stone sculptures as early as the ISV civilizations, symbolizes the integration of masculine and feminine prin-

To a Śākta, the human body is considered a temple for the divinity to express Itself. It is a ground for our spiritual awakening.

ciples that go beyond our human gender concepts, and ultimately express the nature of Reality.

It is as difficult to offer a single definition of a Śākta is as it is to define the Śākta tradition. Not all who consider themselves Śākta are so because of *dikṣa* (initiation) although that has its place. Devotees who consider any female divinity as their *iṣṭa devatā* (personal deity) may call themselves a Śākta. Others whose family deity is Kālī, Durgā, or any of the other fierce emanations of the Divine Mother are Śāktas. Śākta is not restricted to those born into a Hindu family. In folk and tribal Śākta systems, having a dream or waking vision of Devī qualifies one as a Śākta. Śāktas express their devotion by performing *Yajñas* (pilgrimages) to the 51 Śākta Pīṭhas (mythologized places understood to be body parts of Devī in the natural landscape), or by participating in the annual fall Durgā festival known as Navarātri.[2]

In conclusion, the Śākta Tantra tradition shares similar values and beliefs with ecofeminist and other ecological movements. Returning to an earth-based theology that honors the interrelationship between nature, Goddess, and all living beings may offer viable solutions in restoring peace, harmony, and balance on the planet today.

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Michael Danino. *The Lost River: On the Trail of the Sarasvati.* New Delhi: Penguin, (2010).

2. Ibid, 15.

What is *līlā*?

BY JACOB KYLE

Līlā means, among other things, "sport," "play" and "pastime." Often translated as "divine play," *līlā* signifies a number of theological and metaphysical ideas that pertain to the spontaneous playfulness of the absolute or supreme being.

There are at least two meanings of *līlā* relevant to the student of

Krishna's Dance of Delight (Rasa Lila)
Artist unknown. Circa 1675-1700.

Indian traditions and śāstras. These meanings might be described as "dualistic" and "non-dualistic," indicating how the supreme playfulness that is *līlā* is to be perceived and understood. In the dualistic schools of Hinduism, *līlā* denotes those activities that god participates in with his devotees. In the non-dualistic schools, *līlā* refers to the great dance of life, the exquisite sport of existence. Exploring both of these meanings will lead us into the larger question of ecology that guides this issue of *Tarka*.

To 'Play With' Or To 'Play As'

One of the perennial philosophical questions is "why?" Why this reality? Why does anything exist at all? The concept of *līlā* answers this question with a simple "because." Because of the play of relationship and the play of existence. Because the supreme reality wants to '*play with*' and to '*play as*' the manifold diversity of life for the sheer enjoyment of it.

We might say that reality 'plays with' this diversity in the dualistic traditions, while it 'plays as' this diversity in the non-dualistic traditions. That is to say, in its dualistic expression, the supreme being remains independent of the individual souls that it plays with, while in its non-dualistic expression, it is non-different from all forms of individuation.

DUALISTIC LĪLĀ

In the *Kṛṣṇa-bhakti* tradition, there is no higher realization than to be in perpetual relationship with the divine – hence, we describe this tradition as 'dualistic' because "it takes two to tango." Here, *līlā* refers to Lord Kṛṣṇa's divine "pastimes," especially those he engages in with his devotees.

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa's* 10th book, the use of *līlā* suggests that Kṛṣṇa has taken on a body for the sake of *līlā,* so that his devotees may enjoy lovely, playful exchanges with him.[1] Since god requires nothing and is self-sufficient – so the argument from Vedānta goes – this play is

1. Edwin Bryant. *Bhakti Yoga: Tales and Teachings from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* New York: North Point Press (2017: 60).

For if reality as *līlā* is equally the good and the bad, then what motivates my commitment to eradicating injustice? Indeed, what grounds my commitment to ecological ethics?

the expression of god's own abundant, spontaneous, loving, and playful nature. In this expression of *līlā,* the divine 'plays with' their devotees through relationships of lover and beloved, parent and child, or friend and friend.

NON-DUALISTIC LĪLĀ

In the so-called non-dualistic traditions (like Vedānta and the Śaiva-Śakta traditions), by contrast, *līlā* expresses how each individual being is a form of reality's play; in other words, we *are* the divine, and this supreme reality is our true nature. Hence, the divine reality 'plays as' individuated beings (and everything else), but there is ultimately no ontological separation between this relative world and the absolute – hence, we describe these traditions as 'non-dualistic' because in the end all things are non-separate from each other.

The philosophical justification for *līlā* from a Vedāntic perspective is simple and elegant. To say that Brahman (absolute reality) has a purpose would be to suggest that it lacks something that is not already intrinsic to its nature. When something has a "purpose," we understand this to mean that it aims to attain something that is not currently present. Since Brahman is already perfect and complete, this is impossible. Thus, the ephemeral nature of existence is to be understood as the spontaneous play of reality itself.

What's The Point?

One way of understanding the difference between the dualistic and non-dualistic expressions of *līlā* is by grasping the implications of their varied responses to the question of teleology. In philosophy, teleology is a tradition of thinking that posits a goal or a purpose as an answer to the question of why we're all here. The purpose of life, according to a teleological understanding, is explained by its goal, its destination – the end of the road defines the meaning of the road, as it were.

For example, one could argue that the Christian tradition is teleological. The purpose of life on earth is to determine our eligibility for the life to come – namely heaven. Many contemplative traditions are also teleological; they highlight experiences of *nirvāṇa* or *mokṣa*, enlightened 'final destinations' where one will at last be liberated from the cycles of *saṃsāra*. Dualistic traditions are therefore largely teleological, since the divine experience stands apart from one's current position as something to be achieved or attained. The purpose of life – why we're all here – is to get to that 'final resting place.'

When we look to the non-dualistic traditions for an answer to why we're all here, things get slightly more complicated. For from an absolute perspective, *this is it*. Fundamentally, this cosmic play *has no purpose* in a teleological sense; it has no goal beyond perpetuating its opportunity to play continuously. It has no meaning beyond the fact of its nature, which is to play at being born into form, persisting for some period of time, and then dissolving back into an oceanic stillness that is equally a mode of its play.

But what does all of this have to do with ecology?

Līlā & Ecology

Both dualistic and non-dualistic contemplative traditions struggle with questions about what to do about human-made environmental degradation, because their philosophies can seem to invite a perspective that, either (1) these circumstances are ultimately to be transcended or (2) that even these human-made circumstances are ultimately another expression of reality's play.

After all, if the dualistic notion of *līlā* points to a relationship or position beyond the everyday world, why should I care about the environment when a blissful relationship with god is waiting for me regardless of what happens to the earth? And if the non-dualistic notion of *līlā* embraces all expressions of life and of nature as the spontaneous, playful expression of the absolute reality, then what could be separate from that? From this perspective, nothing is excluded, not even what we would consider "bad," "wrong" or "negative" from an ethical perspective (like human-made climate change), so what can then motivate an ethical commitment to counteracting the effects of climate change?

These questions present us with some moral quandaries. For, again, if a forthcoming relationship with god is what legitimizes the activities of my daily life, then what connects me to the ground beneath my feet? And if reality as *līlā* is equally the good and the bad, then what motivates my commitment to eradicating injustice? Both perspectives, expressed in this way, strike us as equally insufficient in their ability to motivate an ecological ethics.

Cultivating Līlā

We seem to be in a position where we must admit that in order to cultivate responses to our ecological crisis, we need a teleological framework (one that remains moored to the earth) to make sense of strategies, formulas and policies that could be employed to do something about the situation we're in as a species. To simply say "it's all *līlā*" in a manner characteristic of some contemporary spiritual perspectives that characterize themselves as 'non-dual' is a problematic position when our instincts as embodied beings are telling us that something needs to be done. And if something is to be done, we require visions

of a future society in which we've responded to this crisis with transformed modes of living that are in greater harmony and balance with our planetary home.

Simultaneously, though, we need an understanding of our essential nature as non-different and non-separate from the earth, and this sort of vision is characteristic of the non-dualistic perspective. If the dark side of the non-dualistic insight is the suggestion we've outlined – that, according to a certain reading, there might be no ground on which to base a distinction between "good" and "bad" –, then the bright side is a vision of reality that embraces all expressions of life, all objects, all qualities as manifestations of the same nature; this embrace then can inspire a compassion for all of nature's expressions and a desire to do right by them through the eradication of unnecessary ecological suffering.

Which side we lean into will partly, but importantly, depend upon the depth of insight born of our contemplative practices. As we've suggested, the non-dual insight cannot be spoken about coherently through concepts and categories that are, by their nature, dualistic. The non-dual insight is paradoxical from a dualistic perspective and therefore must be experienced, imbibed, and embodied. In other words, we won't fully understand the non-dual meaning of *līlā* if we have not taken up those practices by means of which subtler dimensions of meaning might be cultivated. To attempt an understanding of *līlā* without the *adhikāra*[2] that is achieved through contemplative practice, we might discover ourselves stumbling upon ethical quandaries like the ones we've outlined above.

The concept of *līlā* then, fundamentally, invites us into the journey of contemplative practice. The non-dual literature highlights what mystics, sages, and yogis have been experiencing for thousands of years – that reality, at the most fundamental level, is interconnected. If everything is interconnected, non-separate, and non-dual, then everything is in relationship. Each relationship in this great cosmic web becomes an opportunity for play. Inspired by these insights, we

2. *Adhikāra* is a form of qualification. Just as one cannot understand certain scientific concepts without a preliminary process of education and inquiry, similarly certain contemplative concepts are misunderstood when not precipitated by the processes of inquiry and practice that are central to a comprehension of their meaning.

can then reimagine dualistic forms of *līlā* – from rituals and texts with traditional deity forms to those with divine substances that appear as trees, mountains, animals, and other people.

In the end, then, the non-dualistic and dualistic expressions of *līlā* imply and support each other, and to perceive it as otherwise can lead to different kinds of confusion, division, and dis-integration. This confusion risks perpetuating the forces of ignorance that have led to human-made climate change.

Aspiring toward an experiential understanding of our identity as more than this individuated body-mind, as non-separate from everything else, motivates and inspires us to engage in transformed playful relationships with nature, with the divine, and with each other. It encourages us to reject worldviews that support destructive teleological agendas and supports us in remembering that the earth – indeed, the very universe – is my body, and to neglect, pollute or destroy it is perhaps the highest form of self-destruction there is.

The Ecology of Tantra:

Why Yogis Eat Carrots Rather than Cows

BY RAMESH BJONNES

The Santiago theory, developed by biologists Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana, maintains that the process of cognition is intimately linked to the process of life. Hence, the brain is not necessary for the mind to exist. While a worm, or a tree, has no brain, they still have a mind.

To the ancient sages of India, there was also no final line drawn between the consciousness in humans and that of tress, nor even between humans and inanimate things. According to nondual Tantric yoga philosophy, there is consciousness (Shiva) even in the material substance of rocks. To ancient Indian yogis, the world of matter, the five *bhutas* (space, air, fire, water, and earth) is created by the creative energy of Shakti and infused with the consciousness of Shiva. Because in Tantra, Shiva, the dormant and all-pervading consciousness of the universe, is always united with Shakti, the evolutionary force that creates all things. Hence, matter is not dead to the yogis—it is just another manifestation of consciousness.

The Tantric master, Abhinava Gupta, echoes this idea in the *Tantra Loka* where he wrote that "Jagadananda, or world bliss, is the understanding that the realization of the Self includes everything,

within and without." Thus, in the yogic universe, there is both duality and nonduality, at all times, and in all places. The goal of the yogic journey of contemplative practice is to experience this nonduality in duality—the oneness of all creation. This is the essence of Tantric practice.

Imagine, then, the evolutionary Tantric cosmos as an ecological cycle—from the oneness of Shiva in a descending curve expressed as Shakti, creator of the world of all beings, and then in its ascending curve as human beings reverse the journey through spiritual practice with the help of Shakti's spiritual force (kundalini) to again reunite in Shiva, the nondual state of bliss.

That is why this yogic union (*samyoga*) in Tantra is often depicted as two blissful lovers in a sensuous embrace. Similarly, the Tantric wheel of life is the experience of *Shiva Shakti Atmakam Brahma*—that consciousness and creation are always together in one cosmic fusion, forever and ever. Liberation is the ultimate return to the Source, to *Parama Shiva*. And this liberation can take place in life, as a *jivanmukta*, liberated soul, or in death, as everlasting freedom and bliss.

"HIGH" AND "LOW" CONSCIOUSNESS IN NATURE

Since mind or consciousness is part of all living beings and lies dormant, even in so-called inanimate objects such as rocks, sand, or mud, there is an intrinsic, spiritual oneness in all of creation. Thus, according to Tantric yoga philosopher Shri Anandamurti's worldview—whose ideas have combined yoga philosophy with an evolutionary understanding of the world we live in—we may grant existential rights or value to all beings, whether soil, plants, animals, or humans. The ecological and economic implications of such a worldview is revolutionary.

If this idea was enacted as policy, we could protect nature not just because of its ecological and aesthetic values but also because nature, like us, has an intrinsic right to exist. The human-centered world we now live in would become being-centered, and humanism—the idea that all humans are equal—would have to embrace the rights of all living beings. Even the earth itself would be a living, conscious entity—a Gaia for all to behold and respect.

In nondual Tantric yoga philosophy, all physical expressions are in essence an expression of That, of Consciousness, of Shiva, and thus they have an equal right to exist and to express themselves. In addition, some beings have higher consciousness than others and thus

"more rights."

Tantric yogis, such as Anandamurti, see evolution in the form of Shakti's cosmic impulse behind creation as irreversible — amoebas eventually evolve into apes, but apes never transform into amoebas — thus this Tantric vision also acknowledges "higher" and "lower" expressions of Consciousness in nature. This differentiation is crucial—and forms the basis for why some vegan yogis eat veggies rather than veal.

According to this form of yoga, there is unity of consciousness amongst all beings, because we all come from, and are created by, the same Spirit, by the same Cosmic Consciousness. But nature is also infinitely diverse, and thus consciousness is also expressed in various ways, both "high" and "low." Hence, a seedling is more complex and therefore more conscious than an acorn, and an oak is more complex and conscious than a seedling.

ECOLOGICAL ETHICS ACCORDING TO TANTRIC YOGA

Another way of expressing this is that a dog has more capacity for mental reflection and self-consciousness than a fir tree. Both are conscious beings, both are manifestations of Cosmic Consciousness, of Shiva, both have mind and both have equal existential value — but because of the difference in expression of depth and quality of consciousness, the dog is higher on the natural hierarchy of being than the fir tree.

So, when we develop our ecological ethics, both the "low" and the "high" expressions of nature must be valued and accounted for.

Nonhuman creatures have the same existential value to themselves as human beings have to themselves. Perhaps human beings can understand the value of their existence, while an earthworm cannot, but even so, no one has delegated any authority to human beings to kill those "lower" creatures. Thus many yogis, from Jains to Buddhists, from Hindu Tantrics to modern posture yogis, have chosen to be vegan or vegetarians. They have chosen to eat as low down on the food chain as possible.

But in this dualistic world, there is never perfection: to survive, we cannot avoid killing other beings. To solve this dilemma, we may select articles of food from among those beings where the development of consciousness is comparatively low. If vegetables, corn, beans, and rice are available, cows or pigs should not be slaughtered. Also, before killing any animals with "developed or underdeveloped

If we indeed embrace the divinity in all of creation, the expression of our ecological ethics can become an act of sublime spirituality.

consciousness," we may ask ourselves if it is possible to live a healthy life without taking such lives.

In addition to existential value, various beings, based on their depth of consciousness, have a variable degree of what we may call "intrinsic value." The more consciousness a being has, the deeper the feelings, and the more potential for suffering. Eating plants is therefore preferable to eating animals. As George Bernhard Shaw once said, "Animals are my friends ... and I don't eat my friends." And as philosopher Ken Wilber said, "It is better to eat carrots rather than cows."

YOGA AND SUSTAINABILITY

In recent years, science has learned that it is ecologically more sustainable to extract nourishment from entities lower down on the food chain. Vast land areas are used to raise livestock for food. These areas could be utilized far more productively if planted with grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes for human consumption. It is estimated that only ten percent of the protein and calories we feed to our livestock is recovered in the meat we eat. The other ninety percent goes literally "down the drain."

In addition to existential value and intrinsic value, all beings have utility value. Throughout history, human beings usually preserved those creatures that had an immediate utility value. We are more inclined to preserve the lives of cows than of rats, for example. But, because of all beings' existential value, we cannot claim that only human beings have the right to live, and not non-humans. From this worldview, all are the children of Mother Earth; all are the offspring of Spirit or Shiva.

Sometimes it is difficult to know what the utilitarian value of an

animal or a plant is; therefore we may needlessly destroy the ecological balance by killing one species without considering the consequences of its complex relationship or utility value to other species. A forest's utility value, for example, is more than just "x number of board feet" of lumber. It serves as a nesting and feeding ground for birds and animals; its roots and branches protect the soil from erosion; its leaves or needles produce oxygen; and its pathways and campgrounds provide nourishment for the human soul.

As a whole, the forest ecosystem has an abundance of ecological, aesthetic, and spiritual values that extend far beyond its benefits in the form of toothpicks or plywood. All of nature is endowed with existential, intrinsic, and utility value. This holistic understanding of evolution and ecology forms the basic foundation for a new and potentially groundbreaking ecological ethics deeply grounded in the philosophy of Tantric yoga.

Similarly, to the Santiago Theory of cognition, mind and matter are two complementary aspects of the phenomenon of life. At all levels of life, beginning with the simplest cell, mind and matter, are inseparably connected. Thus we now have a scientific theory that unifies mind, matter, and life, which echoes the ancient wisdom of Tantric yoga. Hence we also see in these insights the possibility of a deep ecological vision rooted in both ancient and contemporary knowledge.

If we indeed embrace the divinity in all of creation, the expression of our ecological ethics can become an act of sublime spirituality. Our conservation efforts and our sustainable-resource use may become sacred offerings to Mother Earth, and ultimately to Cosmic Consciousness, the Shiva and Shakti within and beyond nature.

TARKA

FROM THE MINDBODY
THERAPY TRACK

Born with Divine Ecology — ChildNature/ ChildSpirit

Words by
Martha Eddy

Art by
Giles Watson

"Before the earth there was space. We can enter into space, empty space, the center of that empty space, and embody it. There is space outside of us and within us, and when we enter space we can meet consciousness."

Bainbridge Cohen during Eddy Interview (Eddy 2016: 256)

This article seeks to expose aspects of our educational and parenting methods that may lay the foundation for humans separating from ecology itself or from ecological awareness. I posit that our cultural and educational norms don't regularly take time to uncover or remember what we as adults may have felt or intuited as children - that we are connected to space, imbued with gifts/spirit, that we are a type of animal, and that every plant has a lesson in consciousness for us. Without encouragement, or with strong discouragement, we often lose connection with ourselves and nature at a young age - a form of disembodiment results. The good news is engagement with the arts and embodiment can either preserve or reunite us to our connectedness and may be a route back to our divine ecology - a holistic and intuitive sense of connection to the natural world.

If we are entering (or are in) the Aquarian Age, the astrological age determined by the precession of the equinoxes that has been associated with the exponential rise of truth and human consciousness, I find myself asking: Are we now shifting into a time when we move into collaboration with prejudice-free, fair, logical, humanitarian connections? And does this collaboration include a sacred

engagement with the earth? In this article, I explore ecology as the spirit-filled entities that live on the earth and arise from the soil of our planet, and the idea that the planet itself is spiritual.

I was always taken by Tom Robbins' characters in the novel *Jitterbug Perfume*, who were motivated by a concept he invented, Floral Consciousness. While not carefully defined, it is implied that this type of consciousness harkens from a developmental progression of our humanity – from oceanic to amphibian to mammalian and now to floral.

Why isn't this consciousness more evident? What denies access to the awareness of our consciousness as being based in ecology (including our human bodies) and not separate from divinity? And why isn't this thinking/feeling/speaking/being/doing more evident in our daily lives and in our institutional practices? There are most likely many reasons – one being that the negative expression of "Aquarius energy" is hiding in detachment, leaning into destruction, being out-of-touch, driven by irrationality, and sometimes filled with desperation. I believe there is an even more fundamental ingredient that divorces us from our divine ecology, especially missing in our more Global North, Westernized world. That is the process of nurturing the spontaneous spirituality of children, spirituality that is connected to both "our nature" and "our nature as part of and inclusive of the Earth."[1]

Put another way: what helps us to see, feel, imagine, and live our divine ecology? I would like to posit that many children, if not all, are born with "floral consciousness" and that much of what we teach at home and in schools does little to foster it. Indeed, our child-drearing and educational practices may be a big part of what shuts it down. We come upon the occasional book that speaks of the "Indigo Child" - those "special" children endowed with wisdom beyond their years and seemingly different from the rest because they live with traits that combine high-level intelligence, strong intuition, and resistance to rigid authority. While some adults recognize the sensitivity of the "Indigo Child" and lift up their "special" attunement with the planet and the humans on it, many are unaware of this identity or the concept, or see these young people as anomalies.

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1. M. Eddy, R. Weber & A. Williamson. "Reflections on the Spiritual Dimensions of Somatic Movement Dance Education." *In Dance, Somatics and Spiritualities Contemporary Sacred Narratives.* (Eds) A Williamson, G Batson, S Whatley, & R Weber, Bristol, UK: Intellect Press (2014).

In actuality, all children may be born with these traits but are taught to lose them early in life. If more children were encouraged to hold onto intuition and to resist blind authority, they might be, or become, our greatest ecological teachers. They have the characteristics that might help us *insist* on the interconnectedness of and reverence to the ecological harmony of all living beings.

I feel fortunate to have been born into a family where my wisdom as a child was fostered. Inquiry, exploring gifts, listening to all thoughts, and having original ideas were all encouraged. My father lived thirty years longer than my mother and had time to write. I will share some of his writing as a representation of their shared beliefs and the type of conversation that happened at the dinner table. I believe they provide one example of child development that includes caring for the planet with a spiritual lens. I will also share an oft-told story from my childhood that defines the Divine as allowing multiple entry points via religious perspectives. The outcomes of this experience of the Divine includes developing the ability to feel what is flowing through each individual, no matter how deeply buried.

My own experience is that when we feel into the states of beauty, joy, love, and gratitude deeply and somatically, that we are in a state of grace. Appreciating the natural world, be it animals, minerals, plants, our own somas, or the cosmos, may evoke these states most strongly. Do you have the experience of children reminding you of these appreciations of nature and our naturalness? What reawakens your sense of wonder?

Awe, beauty, joy, love, truth, unity, and gratitude are resiliency factors. Over the decades of my life and from the predominantly Latino and Black people of East Harlem where I was raised, I have learned that cultivation of these states helps us to have access to each of them. For example, awe becomes embedded and more available when one chooses to open to what is *awe*-inspiring, especially when opening with gratitude. Each of these states support resiliency and, in turn, provide an availability to meet resistance. They undergird the strength and courage that we need to sustain our values in the face of greed, lust for power, evil and other domineering and oppressive forces. Black leaders - often religious or artistic - and their communities have been modeling this for centuries.

While I have felt this profoundly from a young age, I did not come to the words for it on my own. Foremost was my embodied joy that emerged from developing friendships in the community that our

parents chose to raise my siblings and I in, also labeled by the media as "The Worst Block in NYC," certainly an impoverished neighborhood. For words I am thankful that my family regularly engaged in dinner time storytelling[2] and dialogue. Here are some of my dad's words describing his own life before becoming a community activist and minister in Spanish Harlem.[3]

Norman Eddy writes:

> "I had hoped that sooner or later the variety of visions and experiences I had been given since I was a boy in Connecticut would come together to start a spirit-directed revolution in the lives of both individuals and the societies of which they were a part. These included many strands in my early life. The most important was my life-changing spiritual experience during World War II when I was twenty-three. Our American Field Service ambulance corps[4] was on the road to Damascus in Syria in 1943. Here I was engulfed by the **experience of the unity of all creation, by love, by truth, by beauty, by awe, by joy, and by thankfulness."[5]**

Norm/Dad told this story again and again throughout our childhoods emphasizing that Spirit was the source for his experience of light that helped him to be on the front lines of WW2 for 3.5 years as an ambulance driver. This experience sustained him while facing the dark rampages of death each day. He spoke of why this light was necessary and the importance of creating a covenant to seek this light in every person, recognizing every human's ability to access states of wonder and appreciation. Why the covenant? Because it is a practice, a spiritual commitment, often with others, to help us remain accountable. Part of

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2. Rev. Dr. Margaret Ruth Eddy was a founding member of the Network of Biblical Storytelling and brought this skill, with passion, into numerous interracial groups in the 1960 - 80s. She also got adults to play - sharing all of her joys of summer camp games with community members of East Harlem in churches, on the streets, and on trips out of the city.

3. It's interesting to note that before Norm chose to become an inner-city pastor/community organizer he spent several years on farms - studying by doing - to to be a farmer. Despite degrees from two Ivy League institutions he was most proud of his Certificate of Pomology, the study of apples and methods of apple farming. The side-by-side memories of planting and harvesting, speaking and praying, that our parents taught us, run deep in my own experience of the Divine.

4. Norm's choice to be active against Hitler without shooting any ammunition resulted in his volunteer service with the American Field Service. This aspect of Norm's life is told in an upcoming book on Spiritual Activism.

5. From Norm Eddy's paper "On The Road to Damascus (Norm's call to engage in spiritual activism)" in M Eddy. (upcoming). "On The Road to Damascus: Norm's call to engage in spiritual activism" in *Spiritual Activism In East Harlem: Revs. Peg and Norm Eddy Igniting Lights for Social Change*. NY: Fordham Press.

The challenge, for me, is to try to help people learn that "Chi" is already working through them, that the Great Spirit is universal, and that Jesus's teaching about the Spirit coincides with and can enrich these two."

the covenant is also to remind us to work together to increase the amplitude of this divinity. What is significant here is that this journey began as a young boy by looking out the window at an open field and pond, and sensing/intuiting there was a great beyond that included injustice amongst humanity and a divinity that included hope of equality.

Things to consider as we reflect on the cultivation or squelching of children's natural impulses for caring for the earth and their potential relationships to divine experiences: What sort of covenants do we teach our children to form? Sometimes, I think the strongest covenant that the American culture has at the moment is with shopping. Is this the inherent tendency that we come into the world with - the acquisition of stuff and the spending of dollars, or is it more natural as children to enjoy what is wonderful, awesome, and beautiful in nature including other humans? Don't get me wrong, I love things and adornment. And, kids are not angels at every moment - I have some dark memories of my own acquisitiveness, meanness and even cruelty as a child. The creative spirit contains so much potential for both growth and destruction. Life requires us to break the husk of our seeds while in the dark earth in order to grow up toward the light. We each make choices about who or what guides us as we go through these cycles. And we have differing beliefs about our true nature. No matter whether we begin as negatively impacted unsympathetic angry souls or so light-filled that we've lost our grounding (becoming flighty) on earth, there are teachings that can bring us back to our grounded, embodied, divine ecology.

In another document, dated April 2002, called "The Great Spirit, Chi and the Teachings of Jesus," Norm muses:

"Recently I was talking with my two grandchildren about the Spirit.

> A memory from my school days when I was eight or nine suddenly came to mind. In class we were told that the American Indians believed in the Great Spirit. I immediately understood it to be the positive force in all of life, all creation. I believed in it. This belief had nothing to do with Christianity or the Bible, or church teachings. Then two weeks ago I read essays about "Chi" given to me by an acupuncturist who is both treating and educating me. This ancient Chinese concept – which teaches the universality of the positive energy that flows through the whole body and the whole being – struck me as being akin to the Great Spirit. As I have been reflecting on my own experiences of the Spirit ever since my amazing hour on the road to Damascus in Syria in 1943, I see, once more, the universality of the Spirit. Certainly "Chi" came before Christ. I don't know how long ago the American Indians experienced and believed in the Great Spirit, certainly long before they had heard of Christianity. I have always been drawn to people who know the Spirit and to others who manifest the Spirit of love, of truth, of beauty, of openness to all total humanity by their lives but, who in their commendable rational search for truth, are in conflict with much of the phoniness, and often the injustices, of the churches and their Bible teaching and theology. I often agree with them. The challenge, for me, is to try to help people learn that "Chi" is already working through them, that the Great Spirit is universal, and that Jesus's teaching about the Spirit coincides with and can enrich these two."[6]

Over the years my dad and I played a game, a game he started. He asked just about anyone he ever met, "Did you ever feel spirit or spiritual? If so, when did you first feel it?" Again and again, different people described a moment of wonder as a child, often before the age of six. Many times they would describe an awesome experience in nature. Others described experiences of harmony or beauty in art – whether the spoken word, the music in houses of worship or at a cafe, colorful and inspired depictions, or dancing or watching dance art. "Virtually every imaginable subject has been danced and many have been chronicled. Somatic educators seek to keep the dancing spirit alive whether indoors or outside by creating environments

6. M. Eddy. *Mindful Movement: the Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action*. Bristol, UK: Intellect Press (2016: 268).

that are sensorially rich and provide freedom for diverse, peaceable responses."[7]

And sometimes awe or the feeling of total unity comes in experiencing the inner workings of humans, especially humans working together. What raises up our ecology? I venture that it is some kind of physical engagement with either other humans or with nature, whether it be looking, feeling, smelling, tasting, or hearing it.[8]

Much of my thinking comes from working with children, children with a wide range of gifts and challenges from diverse economic backgrounds in rural and urban areas. I love what I learned from each child as I entered the world of kids who are "on the spectrum" or diagnosed ADD (attention deficit disorder). I found they had plenty of attention – if they could focus on their own desires. Of course, they could become apathetic and depressed, especially if constantly being told to stop or redirect, but when left to explore freely, they often took me on intergalactic journeys filled with a sense of unity.

Most likely because of these years of exploring somatic awareness with children, I received an invitation by email completely out

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7. M. Eddy with A. Moradian. "Childhood Nature in Motion: The Ground for Learning", in *International Research Handbook on ChildhoodNature: Assemblages of Childhood and Nature*. Springer Press (2018: 7).

8. S. Whatley, NG Brown and NG Alexander (eds.) M. Eddy. "Early Trends: Where Soma and Dance Began to Meet – Keeping the Meeting Alive." In *Attending to Movement: Somatic Perspectives on Living in this World*. Axminster: Triarchy Press (2015).

For this article, however, the key point is that these deveopmental viewpoints also include the improvisitional and exploratory mind of a child at play, in nature or with one's own nature as part of nature, being nature, and into the broadest reaches of all nature, and as such leave room for being part of something divine.

of the blue from a person I did not know who was living in Europe. The offer was to write a chapter of a book on Ecological Education for Children. I did not feel I had the time, but I had the interest. And while I didn't know her personally, I knew she was a member of the dance and somatic education community, so I pursued the conversation. Ultimately, we decided to write the chapter together. The goal was to emphasize how the somatic perspective of embodiment through movement is natural to children but that it can easily be lost – whether from profound trauma or from constant ongoing disconnection from self and nature. We both believe that some aspects of a child's intuition, curiosity, and resistance to being stepped upon needs to be preserved or reintroduced in education and that move-

ment, especially somatic movement, is important in doing so.

The book, *Research Handbook on Childhoodnature: Assemblages of Childhood and Nature Research Series* (Springer International Handbooks of Education) introduces the word "childhoodnature," to help disrupt existing ways of considering children and nature and to reject the view that humans are superior to nature.[9] I bring *childhoodnature* into this article because I believe the integrative "staying intact aspect" of *childhoodnature* is one facet of being born of or into divine ecology. Our chapter (Eddy and Moradian, 2018) as somatic movement educators seeks to establish embodied movement as both the physical and metaphysical ground for learning, including aesthetic learning in an ecological context. We advocate for the moving, sensorial body as critical to celebrating and deepening *childhoodnature*. We discuss the disconnections from embodiment that have occurred within Western cultural practices (including shopping or sitting at desks for too long) and the implications for those educational settings that lack an acceptance of natural movement expression and experiential "whole body" learning methodologies. We suggest that "developing a lifelong somatic relationship with our bodies in motion, a relationship in which we bring our attention to our lived (psychosensory-motor) experience, is a powerful way to reclaim that wholeness which allows us to care and connect for self and others, to feel a sense of place and belonging, and to self-regulate our behavior for optimal interaction with our world."[10]

The somatic lens we used to describe keeping *childhoodnature* alive includes the developmental lens of numerous somatic movement systems (Bartenieff, Body-Mind Centering, Continuum, Dart, Dynamic Embodiment, EastWest Somatics, Feldenkrais and their derivatives). For example, in Body-Mind Centering, the work of Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, we take a neuro-cellular approach inclusive of the ongoing influences in our bodies of our first embryological movements. Our swimming like amoeba or starfish in our mother's wombs reminds us (even as adults) of our adaptivity, our tie to all animals, and perhaps an appreciation of evolution, or at the very least ontological development. In early childhood education we encourage that children explore these movement coordinations (rolling or squiggling like a snake, hopping symmetrically like a bunny, lumbering

9. Eddy with Moradian (2018).
10. Ibid, 6.

like a bear, or hunting like a tiger) and get to "re-become" the animals that we were evolutionarily. We highly recommend this for adults as well. There are two reasons: to practice these movement coordinations and to attune with nature.

When we do as adults, we are refreshed by the experience of play and endowed with consciousness-building. We are making a trifold connection – with our bodies, our dependence on the earth, and our awareness of forces beyond ourselves and the earth. We open ourselves up to embodied experiences of magnetism and quantum physics. Some somatic systems such as those with a Laban/Bartenieff lineage link to cellular awareness as having a vast complexity parallel to that of space and the cosmos. For this article, however, the key point is that these developmental viewpoints also include the improvisational and exploratory mind of a child at play, in nature or with one's own nature as part of nature, being nature, and into the broadest reaches of all nature, and as such leave room for being part of something divine.

And why would we strive for this connectedness that also wakes up our insignificance in the grand scheme of things, invoking what is unknown and leaving us in a state that can be referred to as "beginner's mind?" I sometimes call this improvisational inquiry "diving into the mystery of scale" and as such it can exist as an aesthetic challenge and can also link to everyday life. With children or adults, I intertwine two Dynamic Embodiment[11] principles: "being as big as you are" and "noticing what is bigger than you." These are skills in gaining self-confidence through feeling self-worth juxtaposed with humility. The humility of my embodied smallness allows me to recognize that a raging fire, or hurricane or tornado or an unknown fast-acting virus is much more powerful than I am, while the self-confidence of full embodiment gives me power to stand up and think on

11. M. Eddy. "Dynamic Embodiment as an Observational Tool." *Beyond Frontiers*. Susanne Bender (ed). Berlin: Logos (2017).

my feet to self-protect and ideally to creatively interact with nature to come into new relationships.

In my book *Mindful Movement: The Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action*,[12] I write about Somatics and Spirituality, stating, "Dance, spirituality, research, environmental sustainability, social justice and visual perception may seem like unrelated topics. Yet, in the holistic model of somatic movement education and therapy and in somatic dance such as Contact Improvisation [or BodyMind Dancing inclusive of BaBoMiDa], they all connect. They weave together to contribute to more humane compassionate action." Somatic wisdom fosters a depth of awareness in making personal, social, and political decisions. It can also help to align with spiritual dimensions, if desired. ...If it is the job of each person to awaken to what is most supportive from within, individually and also for the community as a citizen of this planet, one can ask, "What is for the common good?" and "What beliefs support the common good?". "What environmental conditions allow a person to find truth and forgiveness in order to stop operating from bitterness?"[13]

In all the somatic systems I studied in order to describe "the evolution of the somatic arts," I found common features of slowing down to feel, releasing into gravity, experiencing our full three-dimensionality, and spending time with the breath. Historically, these educational methods have been directed toward adults but each pioneer also did work with children. F.M. Alexander, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, and Moshe Feldenkrais are prime examples of pioneers who awakened a physical ecology in both adults and children through the power of conscious action. Ann Moradian's research deepened this thesis. She opines that in these embodied practices, "We can touch this place of wholeness where body and mind, emotions and thought, matter and energy are given to us as one."[14] In this quote we are nature and that is the main premise of *childhoodnature* - we are not separate from nature. We are of it.

"The challenge in this state of complex and interrelated wholeness is to be awake fully to the internal and external – self and more-than-other,[15] which lies at the heart of the challenge of co-ex-

12. Eddy (2016: 276).
13. Ibid.
14. M. Eddy. *Mindful Movement: the Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action*. Bristol, UK: Intellect Press (2016: 255).
15. A term from D. Abram. *The Spell of the Sensuous.* New York: Vintage Books (1997).

istence."[16] Helping children become conscious of the body's experience, affirming its wisdom, and learning to moderate its impulses are important steps to dwelling, at home and at ease, in the body. Only then can we really begin to experience what it is to dwell on the planet. This harkens back to Gregory Bateson's "ecology of mind."[17] Somatic education is built on European, Eastern, and Afro-Caribbean constructs[18] that unify the physical and the mental, action and contemplation."[19] We can build upon these constructs in myriad ways in schools (or in home-schooling) - focusing on the sciences of anatomy, biology and physics, the physicality of languages, the stories in social studies and history, the activity in physical and dance education.

Hence somatic education systems can also be a pathway for adults to reclaim their *childhoodnature* and experience divine ecology. Remember that somatic movement education includes endeavouring to keep the dancing spirit alive whether indoors or outside by creating environments that are sensorially rich.[20] These activities provide freedom for diverse, peaceable responses. The Dalai Lama (1989) states "If every 8 year old in the world is taught meditation, we will eliminate violence from the world within one generation." [21]

Dan Roth, a Dynamic Embodiment Practitioner and graduate of Moving On Center, writes: "Moving On Center the School for Participatory Arts and Somatic Research (MOC) seeks to engage communities of learners in an overarching integrative process of self-healing, healing of our spirits, healing of our minds, healing of our bodies, and healing of our communities and planet. Health in this sense is a dynamic balance that enables all of our diverse parts to relate and participate "in a deeper democracy that goes right back to the body. MOC is an organization that brings the catchy 1960s slogans into contemporary life: 'The personal is the political.' 'The earth is my body.' 'We are the ones we have been waiting for.'"[22]

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16. Moradian, A. *Double Bind: Finding Our Way Back Home* (manuscript in preparation). Moradian, in M. Eddy. "Dynamic Embodiment as an Observational Tool." *Beyond Frontiers*. Susanne Bender (ed). Berlin: Logos (2017: 11).
17. G. Bateson. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (2000).
18. M. Eddy "Somatic Practices and Dance: Global Influences," Dance Research Journal, 32 (2) (2002, 2016: 46-62).
19. Eddy and Moradian (2018: 17 - 18).
20. Eddy, Weber & Williamson (2014).
21. Dalai Lama (1989). *Acceptance of Nobel Peace Prize Speech.* Norway: October 5, 1989.
22. D. Roth. "Deep Embodied Democracy: Moving On Center and Carol Swann."

Over decades of developing Dynamic Embodiment (originally at Moving On Center and now at Marymount Manhattan College - NYC, St Mary's College - Bay Area and University of North Carolina - Greensboro) as a synthesis of my teaching of the profound somatic movement principles of Body-Mind Centering® and Laban/Bartenieff Movement Studies, I have watched numerous adults re-enter their spiritual dimensions to connect with their own divinity. In some cases, this has also manifested as a renewed ecological sensitivity. Examples include feeling closer to nature, being supported and appreciative of our planet, and a renewed desire to protect the life of the earth. These experiences can lead to ecological action as individuals, and in groups.[23] One such example is the community project of the Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies, "Global Water Dances," an international day of dancing in over 150 cities globally – all dancing for clean water for everyone. Children are involved in this project as well.

Somatic movement experts often also take on a "social somatics" perspective as is seen in Resmaa Menakem's "Cultural Somatics" or "Generative Somatics." Here, leaders expand consciousness in diverse domains striving for social justice.[24] The justice field has long fused Social and Environmental justice as inseparable, especially when led by Indigenous peoples. When these activist movements take time to remember or infuse somatic awareness, we also find movement breaks, art-making or engagement serves to appreciate nature, to protect against threats to the environment and to work toward shifting policies.

In some cases, locating the awakening of somatic movement awareness becomes an opening to the transcendent as well. It is exactly this transcendent quality – of awe, of beauty or wonder of the breath, of our relationship with gravity, or the infiniteness of time, that can help motivate activism or provide the much needed recuperation to sustain our activism for the long haul, especially when things remain deeply uncomfortable. This connectivity is inspiring. Taking it outdoors can heighten the experience. Or visualizing memories of the outdoors, of nature, while locked indoors – whether in homes

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Personal Paper. Cornell University Ithaca, NY. unpublished (2005: 5).

23. Eddy, Weber & Williamson (2014).

24. M. Eddy. "The role of the arts in healing trauma in communities." *In Exploring Body-Mind Centering*. Etheridge, P, Miller, G, & Morgan, KT (Eds). North Atlantic Books: Berkeley, CA (2010); Eddy (2016).

or prisons – may sustain accountability and creativity as well. "The attunement with that which is greater than self may be defined as tackling life's mysteries through deep science or psychology or through what might be described as a relationship with the divine, or some combination of each."[25]

Dance, somatics and spiritualities is a new field that emerged in the late 1990s. Dance with somatic awareness is a particularly strong way to embody "the sacred and connectedness" that Williamson cites as germaine to spiritual inquiry.[26] Batson describes a "meta-kinesthetic" state which affords simultaneous experience of that which is within and that which provokes or stimulates from outside of oneself.[27] Somatic dance joins other forms of contemplative and expressive dance that practice listening to "the subtle."[28] All of these relate to the systematic and embodied investigations of the mysterious, which may also be referred to as the *great unknown.*

Who dances? Only "dancers?" Who still moves? Only children or animals? No. Children do, naturally. As long as they have not been scared to make music *and* move to the beat, when dancing we each may be able to awaken to the divine through the celebration of sensorial and the sensual.

I have been writing about spirituality and somatic experience for twenty-five years. I appreciate this opportunity to share what has been recognized as particularly relevant to children – a natural affinity for wanting to be outside, moving, and if not shut down by stress or trauma a curiosity for "connecting with nature" to appreciate life. Attuning with *ruach* as wind, breath and as Spirit, or with the majesty of the stars, provides a balance of appreciation that helps us overcome fears of the "plagues" replete with threats such as viruses, displacement, death by a knee or other forms of amphibian or early mammalian wildness. We need these resources in facing the constancy of challenge in life and we need floral consciousness. For instance in dealing with oppression whether as the oppressed or as a person who is facing the shame of being complicit as an oppressor, we need to recognize our lower brain instincts at play and be able to rise up into our creative cortical brain centers to imagine differently. This takes practice. Educational or spontaneous experiences

25. Eddy (2016: 256).
26. Williamson et al. (2014: 164).
27. Ibid, 230–233.
28. Eddy (2015) E-interview with Ronald K Brown (August 5, 2015).

with the elements provide the gifts of attunement with the universal. These are often available to us when we choose to open "to it" in the small moments.[29] Allowing for an experience of the divine informs a divine ecology. My aim is to highlight that conscious movement is important for each person's *childhoodnature*, at no matter what age. *Childhoodnature* can take many forms and can be explored in many places or states of mind – playful, serious, mournful, joyous. Being outdoors, if we have access to it, is another gift to partake of. What is most significant is to find and practice creative ways to live into that which allows us, at whatever age, to restore our sense of wonder, awe, unity, and truth, and to have gratitude for it.

29. I think here about incarcerated people for whom plentiful light, fresh air, and nature are often not available.

Ecology in a Time of COVID

By Christopher Key Chapple

The word covid stands for Corona Virus Disease. A coronavirus, when visually blown up to discernible proportions, looks like a globe surrounded with a halo of mushrooms emerging from its surface. This visual representation will serve as a metaphor for the following wide-ranging reflections on the state of the planet and global health dangers.

Ecology means the study of the home, the study of the nest. The word derives from the Greek term Oikos, which means both house and household. German zoologist Ernest Haeckel coined this word more than a century ago. The term itself encourages systems thinking, an examination of how the various parts of a system fit together in mutual symbiosis.

According to the sage Confucius, we live in expanding concentric circles. In his *Great Learning*, first, we must make things right within ourselves. This will stabilize the family. As families find stability, the village moves into a state of harmony and calm. Collections of virtuous villages negotiate their needs with ease, establishing a peaceful state. When all the states operate in this mode of self-regulation, the tradition famously declares, "The Emperor need only face

Scenic Hollywood Drawing.
By A.L. Tarter, circa 1940-1941.

South!" This final rejoinder conveys the sense that if the people tend to their own internal and external affairs, informed by the Confucian virtues of human-heartedness (*ren*), proper behavior (*li*), righteousness (*yi*), wisdom (*zhi*), and mutual trust (*xin*), then harmony requires no commandments from on high. Chuang-zi, a Taoist master, extends this concept even further, stating that if every village attains self-sufficiency, then no central rule is needed: no taxes and no law, other than self-regulation.

According to Jain, Yoga, and Buddhist practice, adherence to the five vows of non-violence, truthfulness, honesty, good comportment, and minimization of possessions will set a person free. Such a person spontaneously acts in a manner characterized by loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Freedom means liberation from all societal and personal impulses governed by ill will. Freed from ego and greed, a person can do what is needed without expecting reward.

In the early months of 2020, American and global societies have faced a twin reckoning: the outbreak of a new form of coronavirus and a consciousness-raising in regard to the stunning legacy of slavery and racism. Both demand a reconsideration of the methods and conclusions of environmental ethics. This essay will explore the biology of the virus and the sociology of the work required to counter racism.

PANDEMICS

In the middle of the 14th century (1347-1351), half of the people in Europe died from the bubonic plague. During the flu pandemic of 1918, 14 to 17 million people perished in India, five percent of the total population at the time. Diptheria, caused by bacteria, and viral polio claimed countless lives as recently as the 20th century. Typhoid bacteria continue to cause more than 100,000 deaths per year. Although preventative vaccinations and treatments are available for all these diseases, easy access is not always available, particularly to populations vulnerable to typhoid, which is largely transmitted through polluted drinking water. Despite the advances in public health worldwide building on knowledge of the spread of disease going back for several centuries, human beings still find themselves helpless in the face of harmful microscopic viruses and bacteria.

The Jain community more than 1500 years ago named these tiny living beings *nigoda* and developed ways to filter water and air in order to protect human health. According to some sources, Hindu

priests developed a process known as variolation to inoculate people from smallpox, a technique also reported in pre-modern Ethiopia and China. Keeping distant from diseased persons has long been part of public health practice, arising no doubt from the direct observation of contagion.

How might disease serve as a metaphor for ecological insight? First, disease originates from the smallest possible units of life: bacteria and viruses, collectively referred to in Jain biology as *nigoda*. These tiny forms are essential for human thriving. The bacteria themselves created the conditions for life over the course of billions of years. They preyed upon rock for nutrition and incrementally released gases into the atmosphere, eventually establishing the balance of oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon dioxide that has allowed our current complex state of seemingly countless life forms. Lynn Margulis and Robert Lovelock have painstakingly demonstrated that life arises from life.[1] This takes place on the planetary level. Each evening photosynthesis generates and maintains the cloak of air that sustains life on the planet. It also takes place on the multi-cellular level. Bacteria dwell with astounding diversity in the guts of mammals and other life forms. They enable the digestion of food, rearranging particles from the earth to build tissue and blood.

In the "natural," pre-technological, pre-medical state of the human story, bacteria (and the foibles of human aggression), limited the success of the human primate. Whether by war or by disease, the sheer number of human bodies were capped at a carrying capacity of a few million. With the advent of settled agriculture ten thousand years ago, food became more plentiful, allowing the birth of cities and the emergence of "cradles of civilization." For nearly ten thousand years, the human project was fairly stable with different cultures gaining ascendancy before falling into decline. More than three centuries ago, another tectonic shift in human development emerged: a philosophy of materiality advanced by Descartes, Bacon, and others, that gave birth to science and then technology. The human was able to become lord and master over the world. A new economy emerged based on plunder. A new medicine emerged that enabled the defeat of many diseases. New styles of warfare emerged that allowed the carnage of the American Civil War (rapid artillery), World War I (mustard gas),

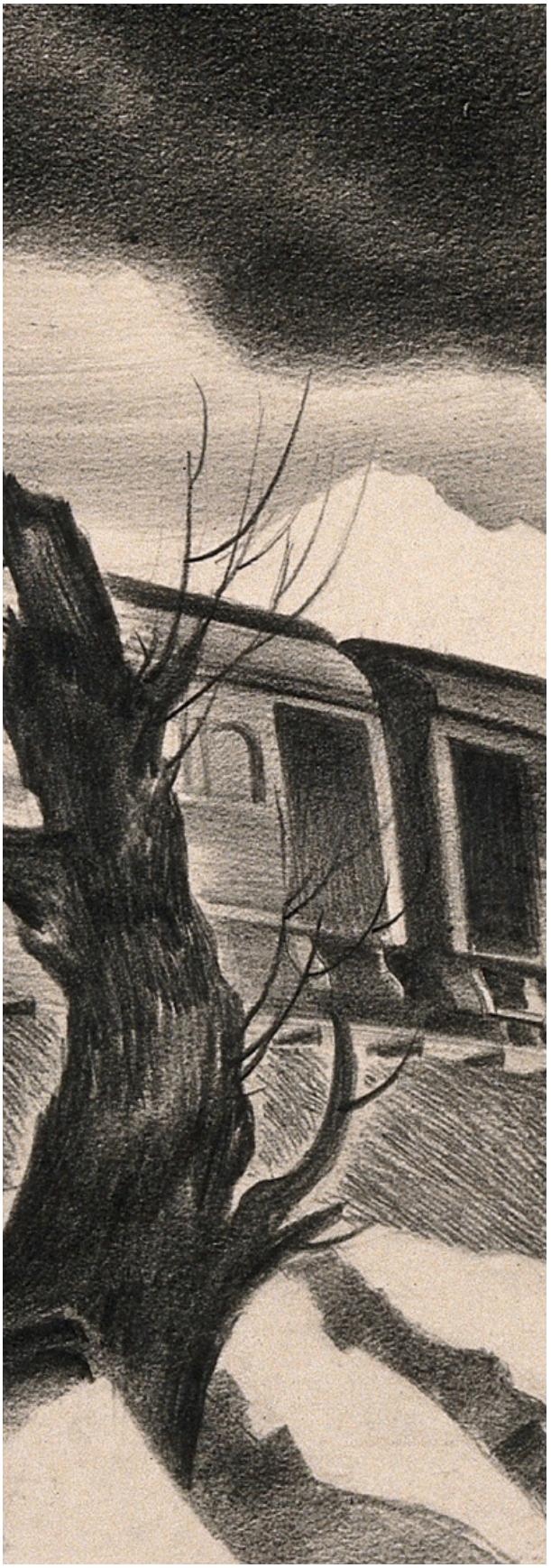
1. See "Gaian Views" by Dorion Sagan and Lynn Margulis, in *Ecological Prospects: Scientific, Religious, and Aesthetic Perspectives,* Christopher Key Chapple, editor. Albany: State University of New York Press (1994: 3-10).

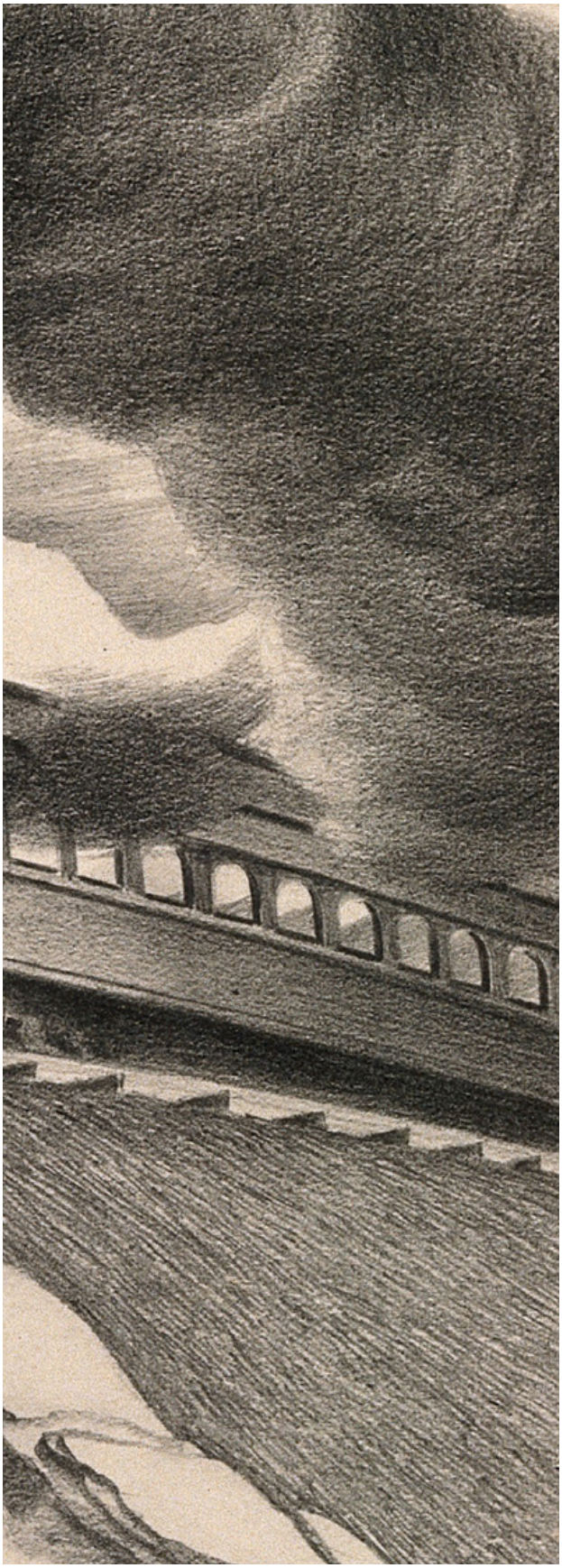
and World War II (the nuclear bomb). A new, psychological interpretation of human worth came forth that maximizes ego and minimizes the value of community. A new consumerism arose that uses the raw material of the earth to create disposable comforts to support newly-defined, market-driven human "needs." The automobile and the private home came to define the good life worldwide.

With this modernity came a rise in pollution. Rather than living in symbiosis with the ever-humbling bacteria and viruses, "better living through chemistry" extended human lifespans. New challenges arose: too many children would sap a family's capacity to consume. Hormones were developed to control fertility. Automobiles turned urban skies black. The gasoline used to power the cars was re-engineered and catalytic converters were installed to remove many heavy pollutants. With examples too numerous to mention, science and technology seemed to come to the rescue to solve the very problems they created.

Meanwhile, three undeniable shadows continue to loom. First, fossil fuels have changed the climate. Second, the expansion of farmland has displaced and eliminated millions of non-human forms of life, resulting in the Sixth Great Extinction. Third, human health has become imperiled by modern food and lifestyle. Heart disease, diabetes, and obesity plague the United States. Anxiety, stress, and depression are on the rise worldwide.

In short, the world is out of balance. In many ways, the now-current pandemic is perhaps long overdue. It reminds human beings of their own fragility and the vulnerability of life. A vaccine remains uncertain. Lifestyle changes are being recommended that tear the very fabric of social interactions. People have been asked to distance themselves, to avoid touching, to not sing with others, to not gather for any form of entertainment or education, or even work itself. Although computer technology has enabled many interactions to continue, the resultant isolation and separation tend to countermand best practices for what humans have learned they need to flourish. Speaking and learning from one another, laughing and singing, watching a movie or a baseball game in the company of others are now to be avoided. Every extrovert has been asked to





Scenic Hollywood Drawing. By A.L. Tarter, circa 1940-1941.

become an introvert.

On the one hand, many people are feeling constrained and are anxious to return to their normal daily routines such as dropping their children at work, commuting to their workplace, chatting with co-workers and friends at work and at restaurants, and traveling to see family and for work. However, at the same time, families are learning about being together for extended periods of time. People are learning that being constantly on the move has a down-side. Similarly, lives defined by purchasing, visiting the shopping mall, spending to keep one diverted from being bored, are perhaps not the best or most healthy ways of life.

Around the world, people are urged to create a self-imposed confinement. Seen through the prism of Jain, Yoga, and Buddhist ethics, a person undertakes these endeavors to minimize harm. If a young child brings home the virus to an elder, that person is put at risk. Nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) comes into play on so many levels. One seeks to avoid taking on the virus for one's own sake, and for the protection of others.

Second, one must be constantly mindful and truthful (*satya*) in regard to following the best practices for avoiding giving or receiving the virus. According to some epidemiologists, the face mask will become part of one's standard wardrobe for months, if not years to come. Wearing the mask sends a signal: "I believe in the truth of potential viral infection." Science does not lie. Humans cannot afford delusional thinking in face of the deadly coronavirus.

Third, the lives of so many family members have been stolen. The front-line essential workers in medicine and commerce are disproportionately at risk. Furthermore, so many of these workers are disproportionately from disenfranchised groups. These very people have been excluded historically from access to housing, health care, education, employment, and even voting. Once again, their communities are being robbed (*steya*) of bodies, inflicting yet more trauma.

Fourth, the proper comportment advocated as a necessary component for the good life gets stymied by the difficulties caused by the virus. Rather than seeing the fourth vow (*brahmacarya*) as celibacy, we might regard this fourth ethical principle in light of the education phase of human development.

Nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) comes into play on so many levels. One seeks to avoid taking on the virus for one's own sake, and for the protection of others.

This stage of life entails learning, taken up during childhood years of innocence, ages seven to thirteen. Some families have the home resources to enable their children to keep learning during this time of sequester. However, most children are being deprived of education. It will take a great deal of effort to make up for lost time.

Fifth, the closure of businesses worldwide provides an occasion to take stock, to separate needs from wants. Beauty parlors and barbershops have been closed, requiring many people to rethink their hair color and make shifts in their grooming. People who rely upon "retail therapy" to feel self-worth have not been able to occupy their time with face-to-face shopping. Home-cooked food has been rediscovered by many families. Revisiting the vow to release possessions and possessiveness (*aparigraha*) can advance the processes of analysis and awareness that are central to the work of social justice.

Many facets of the current environmental crisis could be addressed if aspects of these lifestyle changes could be embraced and adapted moving forward. Transportation, particularly automotive and air, creates tons of pollutants every day. Food waste is rife within the restaurant business. The pandemic has also brought to awareness the inherent unhealthiness of meat production. To resize food production will dramatically improve several aspects of local environments. Less water would be used. Fewer fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides would be consumed. Less energy would be expended in transporting food from farm to market. And, if people decided to continue with home cooking, fewer trips to restaurants will be generated, resulting in less energy consumption. Sadly, many restauranteurs will need to rethink their business models, particularly given

the need for social distancing.

Economies rely upon ecologies. To flourish, the human being must rediscover a place of balance, a place that does not cannibalize the conditions for life itself. Our air must be protected, our water pure, our food wholesome. Otherwise, modern civilization will perish. Some historians surmise that Rome fell because eating utensils suffused the bodies of Roman citizens with lead, rendering the people unsound. Similarly, we must be wary of the hallmarks of modern consumer culture, wary of the chemicals now flowing through our bloodstreams, wary of the outsourcing of labor and entertainment, wary of being subjugated by market-defined forces.

RACISM

Modern civilization was built on the European exploration and exploitation of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Global mercantilism began to rise in the 17th century, coinciding with the rise of materialist philosophy, science, and technology. A key component in the success of European enterprise was slavery. European masters enslaved Africans and transported them to the Americas for labor. They also enslaved indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. The French and the British fought wars of dominance against one another not only in North America but in India. The Spaniards killed millions in their conquest and subjugation of the areas now referred to as Latin America. Despite the good efforts of 18th-century abolitionists, the legacy of slavery continues in low wages paid to descendants of slaves, poor health due to abiding anxiety and generational trauma, and an inability to feel calm in an environment created by one's oppressors. Mainstream white culture is considered to be the global norm. Black and other cultures are held often with fascination, suspicion, and perhaps fear, as "the other."

Every culture and civilization grapples with inequality. Even within families, competition exists. Some family members may be successful by all measurable standards: health, appearance, wealth, happiness. However, those deemed "less so" still remain members of the family in most instances.

Two leaders of the Poor People's Campaign, in response to the killing of George Floyd, released a litany that links the problems of poverty, poor health care, and environmental ravage, as seen in this segment:

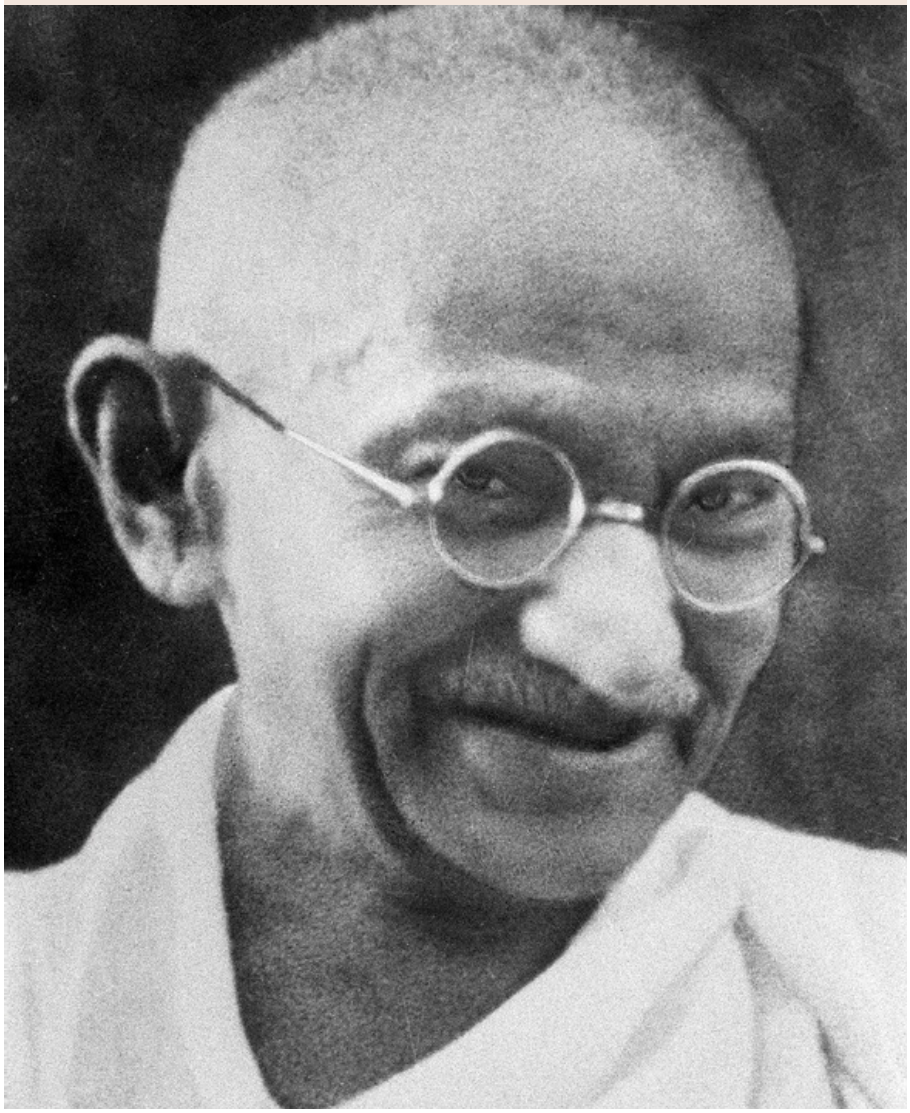
> We hear the cries of the poor and low wealth in a land of abundance.
>
> We hear the fear of death among the uninsured and underinsured.
>
> We hear the groans of ecological devastation and environmental violence.
>
> We feel the violence of militarism all around.
>
> And we mourn the untold thousands who die every year from poverty, the lack of healthcare and pollution.
>
> These things suffocate the life out of this democracy.[2]

Disruptions to the environment fall significantly upon the poor, who are the most directly affected by pollution, most vulnerable in terms of health care, and most likely to be engaged directly in industries that generate high levels of toxicity. By calling out these connections, the Poor People's Campaign advocates for a simultaneous effort to uplift both humanity and the planet.

Mahatma Gandhi created a template for activism that has inspired generations of people devoted to social justice and overall human improvement. Drawing from the Bhagavad Gita, he urged equal status among all living beings, seeing "the Brahmin, the elephant, the outcaste as the same" (V:18), "the farmer, the merchant, the Brahmin, all women as the same" (IX:32). He praises the highest Yogin as "the one who sees the pleasure or pain of others as equal to one's own" (VI:32). Such a person "is the same to friend and enemy, to honor and disgrace, to cold and heat, pleasure and pain" (XII:18) "regarding all beings as equal" (XVIII:54). As depicted in the Attenborough movies, Gandhi sought for inclusion in a wide range of undertakings. He sought harmony between Hindus and Muslims. He advocated locally-based economies as the best remedy for overcoming the injustices inflicted on India by global trade and capitalism.

In regard to race, Mahatma Gandhi brought forth a new vision for inter-group relations in India. He rejected the hegemony of British colonial rule, pointing out that mandates to grow indigo for the mills of Manchester resulted in a famine that took the lives of millions in the 1890s. He rejected the division between Hindu and Muslim foisted

2. Litany circulated by Rev. William J. Barber and Rev. Liz Theoharis, June 6, 2020.



Mahatma Gandhi. Late 1930s.
Artist Unknown.

upon India by British colonial policy, disrupting a long-standing mutual acceptance of one another following the rule of Aurangzeb and assisted by sacrifices made within the Sikh community. Gandhi refused to "other" the other. He sought within himself to constantly strive for honest improvement. Within his body, he found the distinction between needs and wants, through fasting and singing and speaking out, and writing. For Gandhi, the inner environment was inseparable from the external environment. To feel free is to be able to live free. He identified and named bondage in so many forms: oppression by the British, oppression of women, oppression of tribal and low-caste communities.

Gandhi used Yoga to find the strength and resolve to fight oppression. Yoga was not an abstraction for Gandhi. Gandhi trained with Swami Kuvalyananda at Kaivalyadham in Lonavala in an attempt to control his blood pressure. He also took initiation in Kriya Yoga when Paramahamsa Yogananda traveled from Los Angeles to visit India. He regularly participated in the singing of chants and maintained a rigorous practice of walking daily.

After discovering the Bhagavad Gita as rendered by Sir Edwin Arnold while studying law in London, he eventually adopted recitation of the last nineteen verses of chapter two, the Yoga of Understanding, as part of his daily routine, verses that speak to the qualities of a sage:

54. Arjuna asks Krishna:
How can the person of steady wisdom be described,
that one accomplished in deep meditation?
How does the person of steady vision speak?

How does such a one sit and even move?
55. The Blessed One responds:
When a person leaves behind all desires that arise in the mind, Arjuna,
and is contented in the Self with the Self, that one is said to be steady in wisdom.
56. The person who is not agitated by suffering (*duḥkha*),
whose yearnings for pleasures have evaporated,
whose passion, fear, and anger have evaporated,
that sage, it is said, has become steady in vision.
57. One whose passions have been quelled on all sides
whether encountering anything, whether pleasant or unpleasant,
who neither rejoices or recoils, such a person is established in wisdom.
58. And when this person can draw away from the objects of sense
by recognizing the senses themselves
like a tortoise who draws in all five of its limbs,
such a person is established in wisdom.
59. For some, the sense objects will recede
but the hunger remains within the body.
Having seen the Supreme, the flavor and the hunger cease.
60. Arjuna, even in the case of the resolute person
who has achieved some insight, the rapacious senses
carry away the mind as if by force.
61. One who is able to apply restraint on all sides,
who is disciplined, intent on me, should sit
with the senses firmly under control.
Such a person is established in wisdom.
62. Fixation on objects
generates attachment.
Attachment generates desire.
Desire generates anger.
63. Anger generates delusion.
From delusion, mindfulness wanders.
From wandering mindfulness arises the loss of one's intelligence.
From the loss of intelligence, one perishes.
64. By giving up desire and hatred even in the midst of the sense objects
through the control of the self by oneself, a person attains peace.
65. This peace generates for that person the end of all sufferings (*duḥkha*).
The one with a peaceful mind indeed attains steady intelligence.
66. There is no intelligence if one is not disciplined.
Without discipline there is no meditation.
Without meditation there can be no tranquility.

Disruptions to the environment fall significantly upon the poor, who are the most directly affected by pollution, most vulnerable in terms of health care, and most likely to be engaged directly in industries that generate high levels of toxicity.

Without tranquility, how can there be happiness?
67. When the mind is governed by the wandering senses,
all wisdom goes away like wind drives a ship on the water.
68. Therefore, O Arjuna of Mighty Arms,
when the senses are gathered inward on all sides
and directed away from objects, that person is established in wisdom.
69. When it is night for all other beings, the adept remains wakeful.
When those beings are wakeful it is night for the sage who sees.
70. Just as waters continually enter the ocean
and yet it remains full, unmoving, and still,
so also, all manner of desires can enter but do not disturb
the one who has attained tranquility.
This is not so for those who desire desires.
71. The person who abandons all desires moves about free from lust,
free from possessiveness, free from ego. That person attains tranquility.
72. This is the godly state, Arjuna.
Having attained this, one is not deluded.
Staying in this even up until the time of death,
one reaches Brahma Nirvana.[3]

In order to be effective as an agent of social change, Gandhi insisted that one strive for perfection of this sort in the activities of daily life. Righteous indignation can take many forms of expression. For Gandhi,

3. Translation by C. Chapple.

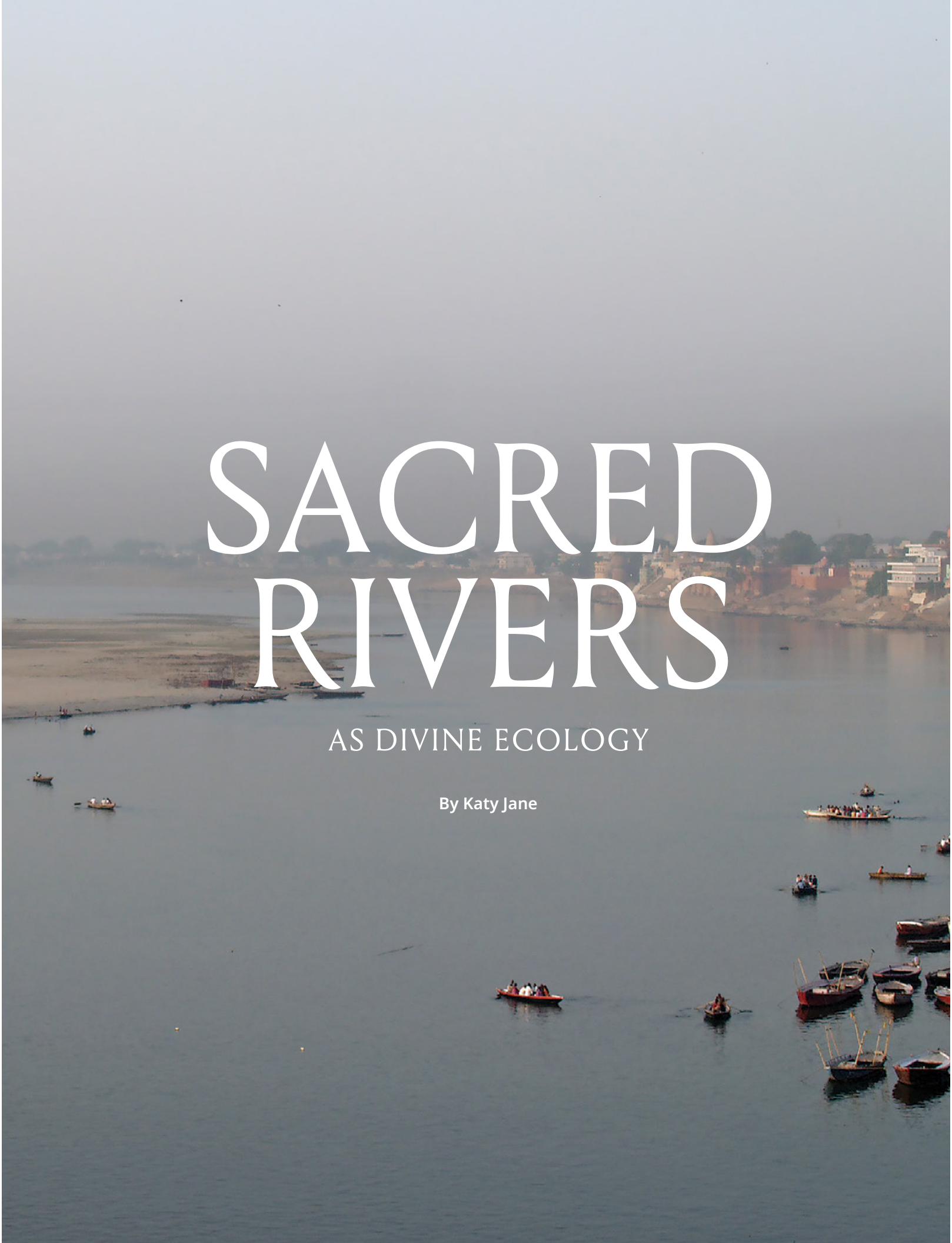
the best path was non-cooperation and a willingness to suffer, and to make sacrifices for the sake of the greater good.

CONCLUSION

We find ourselves in a state of collective upheaval. Disease and social unrest have unsettled the quiet lives of so many. Mahatma Gandhi employed the core Yoga practices of nonviolence and truth to throw off the shackles of British colonial rule. Nelson Mandela, while addressing the Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town in 1999, proclaimed that the *Bhagavad Gita* sustained him during his 27 years of imprisonment, mostly on Robben Island. African American theologian Howard Thurman spent two years in India in the 1930s learning from Gandhi and Gandhians. Rev. James Lawson, who learned the techniques of nonviolent resistance while teaching school in the early 1950s in India, continues to train peace workers monthly in Los Angeles. Lawson trained both Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King.[4]

Speaking truth to power requires quiet, steady, patient determination. Accomplished people of Yoga have learned mastery of body, breath, and thoughts to cultivate tranquility and develop insight. These skills can allow a person to be active, not reactive, and certainly not passive. By assessing the twin ills of racism and environmental degradation while retaining equipoise, the Yogi can follow the examples of Gandhi, King, and Mandela, working toward positive change.

4. https://www.holmanumc.com/people/rev-james-lawson/



SACRED RIVERS

AS DIVINE ECOLOGY

By Katy Jane

I. Why Rivers Are Sacred

When Indra slew the demon He removed the cloud covering the sun—the source of water. The liberated rivers ran upon the earth like mother cows, eager to suckle their young.

— ṚG VEDA 1.61.10

I'd left Jabalpur on a public bus at dawn, heading toward the source of the Narmada River at Amarkanthak. Squished against the metal side of the crowded vehicle, I watched the beauty of Madhya Pradesh's central hinterland go by in the morning light.

We crossed many valleys and rivers before arriving at a bridge crossing the Narmada River for the first time. The bus stopped. People started to pray loudly. One lady leaned over me, whispered some grievances over a coconut and tossed it into the swirling waters below. Another gentleman with a pair of chickens sitting behind me kept shouting joyfully, "Jai Mā! Jai Mā!"

I wondered of all the rivers we'd crossed in our journey why this one was so special. No other river elicited this much emotion, this much reverence. I questioned what makes one river more sacred than another. And I contemplated the relationship between mythology, landscape, and theology that come together in equating an ordinary river with a divine status.

My research assistant, Babita, sitting next to me, interrupted my thoughts. She asked, "In America do you believe rivers are goddesses?" I thought about the Mississippi River—our largest—and shook my head. "No, I've only ever heard it referred to as 'Old Man River.'"

Babita twisted her face. She wondered incredulously, "How could anyone think of a river as an old man? Everything about them is feminine. Everything about them brings life."

In Vedic thought, water *(āpaḥ)* is the womb of all things. It's the

primal element from which all forms emerge and to which they all return. In the *Mantra Pushpam* (a collection of verses offered at the end of all fire sacrifices), it is said that, "One who knows the source of water becomes established in herself."

Rivers are sacred because they carry you toward the source, yet contain the source— water—themselves. They are a metaphor for life. They describe the journey from birth to death. They wash away everything that has been, making new ground for growth.

The elements of nature—especially the water of sacred rivers—form a kind of "divine ecology" that's at the basis of the Vedic worldview. Through nature we reach the gods and the gods reach us through nature.

There are three reasons why India's seven holy rivers are more sacred than others in a country teeming with flowing waters. First, they originate in the creation of the universe. They're part of the limitless ocean of Being from which the world evolves and dissolves back into. They define the sacred landscape of India as a mirror of heaven. The natural world is a perfect reflection of the spiritual world.

Second, the seven celestial rivers were "brought down" for the salvation of beings and the elimination of "sin."[1] They are equivalent to *soma*, the elixir of immortality and the nectar of the gods. They are potent sites of redemption.

Third, the rivers are *tīrthas* ("crossings") whereby one can cross the ocean of *saṁsāra* ("transmigration") and attain freedom from rebirth. They are portals to heaven.

Together these three aspects of the seven sacred rivers form the basis for the Vedic notion of "divine ecology." Mircea Eliade describes sacred rivers as "hierophanies" in his *Sacred and Profane* because they manifest heaven on earth. Devotees see them as living goddesses.

1. The word for this is "*pāpam*" in Sanskrit, which translates as "sin" or "transgression." It's in quotes because it has a different connotation than in Christianity. *Pāpam* is the opposite of *punyam* or merit. So "sin" is an accumulation of the effects of wrongful deeds that result in a lack of merit. In this case, the lack of merit (*pāpam*) prevented the ancestors from attaining heaven upon their death. You could replace "sin" with "bad karma" or "wrongful actions." But there really is no equivalent in English for *pāpam* other than "sin" or, perhaps, "transgression."

They are the source of sanctity, fertility and sustenance. Civilians rely upon them for food production and water supply. The seven sacred rivers of India have defined her civilization for centuries. And yogis discover them within their own body-minds as the energetic rivers of consciousness that make up the subtle nervous system.

II. Sacred Rivers Connect Heaven & Earth

There are many myths that narrate how the seven sacred rivers of India were released to earth, creating a bridge to heaven and establishing a divine ecology here.

The Vedas envision heaven as overflowing with seven celestial rivers that were once swallowed by a demon, Vritra, causing drought and chaos everywhere in the universe. The leader of gods, Indra, engaged the demon in a great struggle and finally pierced him with his *vajra* (thunderbolt). The waters then rushed forth from his belly and spilled out toward earth, where they became the *sapta sindhu* ("seven rivers") that define the geography of the Vedic civilization.

The Nadi Stuti Sukta ("Hymn in Praise of Rivers") found in the 10th Maṇḍala of *Ṛg Veda* enumerates actually ten such celestial rivers, of which the Ganga is supreme. Later in the Epic and Puranic literature, the term *sapta sindhu* refers to the seven sacred rivers that are popularly revered today: Sindhu, Sarasvati, Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, Godavari and Kaveri.

Each one weaves her way through the fabric of mythology and geology to establish a uniquely Vedic notion of "divine ecology"—linking theological principles with the flow of water.

The Sindhu (from where we get the word "Hindu") defined the center of Vedic civilization. The underground Sarasvati merged with the goddess of speech, music and knowledge as the "undercurrent" of an enlightened society. The Ganga became the portal for the safe passage of ancestors to heaven upon death. The Yamuna became the witness to the life of Krishna and his joyful exploits. The Godavari served as a shelter for Rama, Lakshman and Sita during the years away from Ayodhya. The Kaveri is said to be the garland around Lord Vishnu's

neck. And the Narmada—the daughter of Shiva—became "the Giver of Delight."

Of the seven, the Ganga is revered as supreme—flowing through the very heart of India —and yet contains the essence of the other six. In the subtle body, the Ganga is the *suṣumna nadi*, the central "river" of *kuṇḍalinī* (liberating energy) that leads to the ocean of Pure Being from which it arises. In this way, there's no separation between the heavenly and earthly landscapes and the landscape of the human nervous system. In the Vedas, "ecology" is not separate from body and mind.

III: Sacred Rivers Offer Redemption

I come to you as a child to her mother. I come as an orphan, to you, moist with love. I come without refuge, to you, giver of sacred rest. I come to you, a fallen person, uplifter of all. I come undone by disease, to you, the perfect physician. I come my heart, dry with thirst, to you, ocean of sweet wine. Do with me whatever you will.

— GANGA LAHIRI (JAGANNATHA); TRANS., DIANA ECK

It was going to hurt like hell. But I was going in anyway. I'd been here twice before in my life so I knew the drill.

The first time was when I was 18 and I needed to get over the grief of having lost a carload of friends in a drunk driving accident while I decided to stay home that night—and lived.

The second was after a skiing accident took my father's life during my dissertation "research year" and I'd offered a *pinda dan* ("soul release") ceremony on his behalf.

And now on the third occasion, I'd come back to Haridwar on the Ganges River to get over yet another painful ending. I'd just sent off my divorce papers from a roadside shop that displayed an obscure

"Fed Ex" sign hanging beneath a menu offering *samosas* and *chai.* I enjoyed both while the *chai-wallah*—doubling as a notary clerk—stamped and sealed my fate.

I felt dead.

I felt dead, which is why I'd come to Haridwar to begin with. This was Hari's *dwar,* the door that you walk through when you want to leave your old life behind.

Hindus leave behind the ashes of their dead here. They submerge them in the Ganga that flows through the town. She's the door. She's the door you have to walk through when things end in your life. Her other name is "Surrender."

This was the same Ganga that was going to poke me with a million sharp needles as soon as I had the courage to go in. It was freezing. It was December. It was going to hurt like hell to let go. But I knew I had to. I was going in.

You have to grab hold of a chain as you enter the river Ganga, otherwise her current is so strong she'll sweep you clear away to the Bay of Bengal. Yet the chain presents you with a conundrum: *How am I supposed to surrender and hold on at the same time?*

But you have to. This is the ultimate challenge of living a human life. So I held on while I slipped on a mossy rock which pulled me toward her like a mother to her breast. "Here. Come here. Be comforted," she seemed to say.

And I was. I let go and held on. I let her wash all over me. I laid back and let her flow through my hair and along my spine. It was going to be okay. I was going to be okay.

I felt myself part of a flow that knows where to take me. Of all the things I have to figure out in my life, this part I didn't. The river took care of that.

The redemptive water of rivers is one of the most significant features of Vedic divine ecology. Water is cleansing not only physically, but also

washes away the remnants of *karma*—the results of our thoughtless and binding actions. A dip in the sacred river that comes from heaven removes the taint of our past deeds. It gives us a new birth.

The river as redeemer arises in many myths, the most important involving the "foot" of Vishnu and the "head" of Shiva.

During the Vamana ("dwarf") incarnation of Vishnu, he took possession of the three worlds with his three strides offered as a boon from the demon Bali. With his third stride, he punctured a hole in the vault of heaven and released the celestial Ganga. As she poured out to earth, her waters passed over his lotus foot acquiring the redemptive power of its "red pollen-like dust."

Bathing in the Ganga is like being showered with the blessings of Vishnu's divine foot. And to submerge your body in her waters is to receive the Lord's *śaranam* ("redemption") from whatever *karma* clings to your *jīva* ("transmigrating soul").

In another myth, King Bhagiratha of the Ikshvaku dynasty learned that his forefathers had fallen victim to a curse that forbade them from entering heaven. They remained frozen in stone.

To release their souls, Bhagiratha fled for the Himalayas where he engaged in a brutal course of spiritual austerities for one thousand "god" years.

As he stood on one leg with arms prostrate to the sky, Bhagiratha implored Ganga to descend to earth and liberate his 60,000 grand-uncles with her redemptive waters. But she told him her force would be too much for the earth to bear. She requested he elicit the blessings of Lord Shiva who alone could soften her blow.

Shiva obliged the request of Bhagiratha and allowed Ganga to flow down through the mats of his dreadlocked hair. They seemed to tame her and she gently flowed to earth. The king then led her to the ashes of his ancestors which she washed away toward heaven.

To take a "holy dip," offer the "soul" of one's departed relative, and place their ashes in the cleansing waters of Ganga is to reenact the myths of

Vishnu and Shiva. It cleanses your body-mind-soul from head to toe, with water flowing from the foot and head of the cosmic Being.

IV. Sacred Rivers Grant Liberation

"Svarga sopana sārinī... The ladder that flows to heaven, Ganga.

~ADI ŚANKARĀCARYA, GAṄGĀṢṬAKAM (8 HYMNS IN PRAISE OF GANGA)

I clutched onto the round ball of dough as if it really were the body of my Dad.

It had all seemed so unreal up until then...his untimely accident, my sudden return to the USA, and the funeral. That all happened in a blur and I found myself back in India to complete my dissertation research. Seeing I was in no shape for any new interviews, my research assistant suggested instead I perform a *pinda dan* ("soul release") ceremony on behalf of my father on the banks of Ganga at Haridwar.

I thought of my adventurous father and how cool he would have thought it to have his "body" offered to the holy Ganges River. I was game.

We hired a Kashmiri priest who requested a new *dhoti,* some cash and a promise to feed 108 other brahmins and their cows in exchange for releasing my father's soul to the Ganga—for his freedom. It didn't seem like a large cost to me for that.

After the transaction, I sat opposite the priest next to Ganga as he invoked my father's soul into a dough ball he'd covered with sandalwood paste and marigold petals. As I listened to his Sanskrit invocations, I felt the presence of my Dad and revisited scenes from his life. I was actually enjoying it.

And then came the hard part.

I had to let go of the ball of dough. I had to let go of my father. Suddenly Ganga's waters seemed really fierce and cruel, raging as they do at Haridwar. Releasing him into that torrent felt like I was erasing him.

But that's what freedom is. It's crossing the ocean of appearances that you think are so real but actually are as fleeting as that ball of dough. Once it dropped from my hands, the water tore it apart. It never existed.

Sacred rivers are sacred because they are *tīrthas*, "crossings," where you can cross over from bondage to freedom. They're places where heaven and earth meet. A *tīrtha* is a portal between worlds. When you enter the river, you cross to the other side.

The myth of the "Churning of the Ocean of Milk" describes the link between the sacrality of rivers and the nectar of immortality.

Once the worlds were covered in a great ocean of milk that enclosed within its depths the nectar of immortality. With the chance of never-ending life, the gods and demons both wanted it and engaged in a "tug of war" to attain it.

Together they churned the ocean of milk until the god of healing, Dhanvantari, emerged from its depths bearing a pot containing the precious nectar.

A scuttle ensued. The pot was snatched. And in the commotion, four drops fell to earth and became *tīrthas*—portals to the infinite. One fell at Haridwar on the Ganga River. The second dropped at Prayag where the Yamuna, Sarasvati and Ganga Rivers conjoin. The third descended at Nashik on the Godavari River, and the fourth at Ujjain on the Shipra River.

These potent sites are the locus of a re-enactment of the myth during the Kumbha Mela festival. Once every 12 years when the Sun, Moon, Jupiter and Saturn are in an astrologically significant alignment, the possibility for liberation is available at any one of these four *tīrthas*.

To enter the river at that auspicious moment is to dissolve in freedom. No other time allows such easy transport to the other world—the world that mirrors ours. The attainment of perfect unity between human and divine is the fulfillment of divine ecology.

The river has carried you
across.

Uncovering Nature Within

By Carryn Mills

We live the experience of divine ecology because we *are* nature. We are of the earth and know ourselves through it, but many of us experience our sense of self as distinct from the natural world. How we understand and live that distinction is often inherited through systems of meaning mediated through language. The separation of who we are and what 'nature' is, is born of how we define that relationship. When human nature and the natural world are not understood in opposition but in relationship, known through each other to be separate and whole, we can truly appreciate what it means to be human. Our liberation lies in disidentifying with any concrete definition of 'self' or 'nature' and diving deeper into relational experience where knowing one's self is reflected through nature.

By re-examining inherited Western systems of naming and knowing, and re-engaging Sāṃkhya philosophy (c. 2nd century CE) we can understand *puruṣa* and *prakṛti,* not by the limitations of their definitions, often translated as "spirit" and "matter" respectively, but by how they relate to each, and in doing so, reveal who we are. Participating in the dance of life without needing to define it, we find the peace of being with ourselves and one another, coming into our true nature.

BORN AS BEING, WE LEARN SELF THROUGH LANGUAGE

We are born into intimate relation with the earth. We arrive and are inspired to tears as we cry out for breath, the fluid constant that will carry us until our last moments. Our senses then become the means of learning and growth as we decipher self and other. Sense perception shapes our nervous system and neural pathways, laying a framework of meaning and emotional tone for the rest of our lives.

How we relate to sense perception is modeled for us over time and coded in language. We are not offered neutral means of interpretation. Instead, we are given value systems, world views, and ways of operating within a complex network of stories and systems via language. The process of definition is a constructive and creative one, where talking about something simultaneously creates separation from it. The primary relationship that gets shaped by language is our self-understanding which occurs at a preverbal stage. This reveals that our sense of meaning and emplacement is established through language long before we are capable of harnessing it. By the time we get a command of our respective language, our sense of who we are and where we fit, not just within a family unit, community, or society, but also within the natural world and the greater cosmos, has already been decided for us, manifested through the language we speak and the value systems associated with it.

In order to retrieve that which we are born with, our relationship to (and as) nature, we must recognize what forces shape our self-understanding long enough to see how we shape the world around us. Our humanity depends on how we understand being human. We can come into greater intimacy with what *is* by challenging certain 'given' languages of self-understanding, thereby releasing the self-imposed sense of separation.

THE LIMITATIONS OF DEFINITIONAL KNOWING

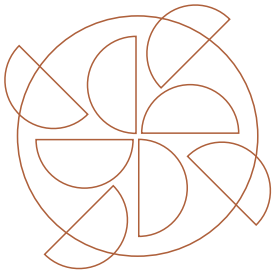
The question of divine ecology, of what nature and self are and how we know them, asks us to clarify our connection with nature, something that we have always been part of. How can we come into communion with something we have never been separate from? The idea of the natural world as something separate from human beings and the notion that human nature can be qualified reflects a theology that fails to account for itself or its origins. To explore this relationship then requires an investigation of how concepts of *human*, *human nature*, and the *natural world* are being broadly taught, learned, and

lived. In order to foster a more authentic relationship with ourselves we must look to the unseen, as we uncover the contexts and frames that silently shape meaning. So far, this may seem rather involved, but hegemony functions so simply that it is often imperceptible. The dynamic power of language and the value systems it implies and perpetuates (by shaping self-understanding) are so complex, yet they can be eloquently exposed when we listen to children.

In my position as a preschool teacher, I have the opportunity to observe the behavioral and linguistic patterns of children. Recently at the snack table, a young student named Chloe looked over at me and said, "These are not apples, these are apple...," she trailed off with an inquisitive look on her face. I could see Chloe was struggling to describe the cut-up pieces of apple she saw, to which I asked, "Slices?" "Yes," she replied, "These are not apples, they are apple slices." I was curious as to whether she was looking to distinguish or define, so I inquired, "Are they still apples?" "No," she replied. Her friend Sunny quickly chimed in, "Yes they are," but the question remained for Chloe, evidenced by the curious and slightly frustrated look she continued to express. This small, seemingly insignificant moment offers a window into how we know ourselves and nature.

When Chloe labeled the apple on the plate *apple slices,* Chloe revealed that *apple* no longer meant the same thing to her. This was not purely because of the label *apple slices,* but the value associated with accurately defining what was in front of her. Chloe was expressing what she knew, a new word and an apparent deepening of her understanding through the greater complexity of her conceptual and linguistic ability. It would appear that Chloe knows more about the apple than the younger children who are unable to articulate this distinction because Chloe is able to identify and name something with greater specificity. Chloe was concerned with what the thing on the plate was, and for that, she needed the *right* word, the *right* definition, because that is what she is being shown it means to 'know' something. Unlike the two year-olds who were also invested in knowing what was on the plate, understanding the apple and its pieces through deep, relational presence (the smiles, sounds, tasting and occasional drool reflecting the 'knowing' of the apple), Chloe was learning to know the apple from a conceptual space, the space of language. Language as a tool of description via distinction can be a means of greater communication and connection, but language as a means of definition, rife with unacknowledged value systems, is limiting.

As Chloe defines the apple, she is also defining herself because she is in relation to it. In learning and naming *slices*, Chloe was attempting to know more about that which was on the plate, when in fact, she effectively disconnected the slices from the apple and distanced herself from them. In the process of alienating the apple slices from the apple, the apple became more ambiguous and so did Chloe. Chloe was not enjoying the apple in the same way some of the other children who were not actively thinking about it were because she was focused on 'knowing' the apple rather than being in relationship with it. She also wasn't experiencing a level of relational knowing with regard to the apple, where she might also consider the life process of the apple or the people and places that helped bring it from seed to table. *Apple slice*s were not *apples* to Chloe because the attempt to define the condition of the apple made them into separate entities. This is the divisive power of language.



In the process of alienating the apple slices from the apple, the apple became more ambiguous and so did Chloe.

The apple is not the slices, the apple is not the experience of eating it, it is also not the people, places or processes that helped bring it there. So, what is the apple? And how do we know it? We often turn to language to help us organize concepts and relate to them. When used functionally, language offers labels and expressions that allow for connection, collaboration, and creation. If, however, those labels aren't driven to express as much as they are to define, the 'knowing' that is possible through language loses its potentiality. It shrinks to its own limitations where knowing becomes defining and the process of definition demands separation and encourages isolation. If, for Chloe, "apple slices" fails to designate the state of the apple, but rather the truth of what the thing on the plate is, there is a subtle yet significant break in connection. The apple slices are now an object to which Chloe is the subject defining and acting upon them. Before Chloe could tell the story of the apple in words, she lived it. Chloe knew *apple* by sense perception and relational experience. Who she was emerged in direct connection to the apple and although she acted upon it, they defined one another. Now that Chloe can conceptually define *apple*, she can change its meaning and determine its significance. If the ideology that underpins the language system to which Chloe belongs is one that seeks knowledge through definition, labels for label's sake, not only does the apple change, but so does Chloe, statically fixing the position of both.

This precarious relationship with the apple, mediated through language, is reflective of our relationship with self and other, a micro-

cosm of the human/nature relationship. Human nature does not exist. Rather, understandings of human nature are reflected in the natural world because the conceptualization of nature is a reflection of how one understands themselves and their humanness. To know nature we must know ourselves, to know ourselves we must know via experience our true *nature*. This kind of reflexivity is why it is challenging to 'know' ourselves when knowing something means defining it. Neither nature nor human beings can be known (in this circumstance defined) in isolation because neither can exist without the other. Many of us have been taught to define the world around us in an attempt to know ourselves. If we limit nature to the identifiable and objectifiable we subject ourselves to the same constraints. Human beings and human nature shrink as nature is limited to the observable and recognizable. Nature is limited conceptually and experientially by the lens of a being who understands itself to be finite and separate. As a result, it has become something to be subdued and overcome as it represents a challenge to the survival of a species in a cosmology of hierarchy and dualism. How is it that so many of us have come to know ourselves this way? It has been written into the language of science, one of the greatest "definers" of nature.

RE-EXAMINING THE LANGUAGE OF SCIENCE AND ITS ORIGINS, WE BECOME MORE EFFECTIVELY EMPLACED

The language of science as the definitional framework to understand the natural world and one's place in it, has some significant, albeit "invisible," limitations. Today, many people look to science to define themselves and the world around them. In primary school many students are taught about the natural world in required courses like biology or chemistry which are often limited to the use of books and computers as tools for learning rather than direct experience. Science as a discipline is excellent at labelling, codifying and helping to define relationships, but often fails to make explicit the system of valuation in which it also participates, thus revealing that its functionality can become its limitation. I would like to reaffirm that in a world where science, truth, and fact are all under attack, I believe in the reality, power, and relevance of science. I also believe that when we fail to question the frames of meaning we are offered, these frames tend to fail us. We, as a global society, are being failed by the understanding that science is a framework of self-knowledge that exists in juxtaposition to religion. If we dig deeper, we find that modern science was par-

tially born of religion. If we can better understand how they shape one another, we can better understand how we have been shaped by them.

Darwin's theory of evolution is just over 160 years old, while contemporary geologists suggest that the earth is 4.54 billion years old, give or take 50 million years. So, while biology has guided our lives for billions of years, our understanding of biology as a discipline has come to define contemporary perceptions of the natural world and our relationship to it. If we aren't careful, the ancient and unknown facets of our biology become subject to the limits of biology's disciplinary definitions as we outsource our self-understanding to perceived experts in the field.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BCE) played a foundational role in the development of the discipline of biology and he believed that "life-forms could be arranged on a ladder, or scale, of increasing complexity, later called the *scala naturae* ("scale of nature"). Each form of life, perfect and permanent, had its allotted rung on this ladder."[1] The idea of this hierarchical scale began to take greater shape when Swedish physician and botanist Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) created a system of taxonomy to classify life's diversity "for the greater glory of God."[2] Linneaus's system would then become an important influence on the development of English naturalist, geologist and biologist Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) theory of evolution.[3] Already, we can see that the natural world (and the human place within it) is being organized as a hierarchy and within the context of western cosmology. Darwin recognized Linnaeus' organizational scheme as reflecting "the branching history of the tree of life, with organisms at the various taxonomic levels related through descent from common ancestors."[4] For Darwin, this system of categorization allowed for organization where "groups (were) subordinate to groups" and this impacted and supported his newly developed theory.

In an attempt to illustrate the pervasiveness of this relationship to nature and to biology and the unacknowledged impact of limited definitional knowing, I draw from the sources of knowledge commonly offered and accessed, either through a public school education or

1. Neil A. Campbell and Jane B. Reece. *Biology*. San Francisco: Pearson, Benjamin Cummings (2005: 439).

2. Carl von Linné and Carl von Linné. *Systema Naturae* ('t Goy-Houten (Utrecht): HES & De Graaf Publ., 2003) as cited in ; Neil A. Campbell and Jane B. Reece, Biology. San Francisco: Pearson, Benjamin Cummings (2005: 439).

3. Campbell and Reece (2005: 444–46).

4. Ibid, 444.

If what is natural gives way to the natural world, this raises the question, what is natural?

through a cursory search on the internet. In the textbook assigned during my high school biology class, I learned that "Scientific inquiry seeks *natural* causes for natural phenomena"[5] which suggests that science looks to define natural phenomena (the natural world) according to those which are deemed accepted or likely causes. If what is *natural* gives to way the natural world, this raises the question, what is natural? As it should be very clear by now, the definition of these terms is highly dependent on the person doing the defining. In this case Darwin was defining what the natural causes for natural phenomena were and more presently, biology as a discipline does the defining. So, I looked to what would have been Darwin's larger frames of meaning in an attempt to identify what guided Darwin's interest to see "groups subordinate to groups" as natural.[6] In 1832, Darwin was aboard the HMS Beagle, a British naval vessel where, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "the specimens and observations accumulated on this voyage gave Darwin the essential materials for this theory of evolution by natural selection."[7] Darwin's theory, however, hinged not merely on isolated observation of definite species, rather, it was born of his experiences and observations as a whole. So, we look to the larger context within which Darwin was operating.

According to that same biology textbook, "The primary mission of the voyage was to chart poorly known stretches of the South American coastline."[8] If we are not careful here, language betrays us. Poorly known? Known by whom? Certainly not all of the people living along those stretches of coastline were unaware of its geography, depth, and importance. And what would it mean to come to *know* it? The Encyclopedia Britannica website reveals what the "fact finding" mission of the Beagle was really about, "A goal of the voyage was to obtain a complete circle of measurements of longitude, a feat requiring the use of 22 chronometers and accomplished within only 33 seconds of error. Fitzroy (the captain of the ship) also completed the South American surveys begun on the *Beagle*'s first voyage and returned three Indians whom he had taken from the island of Tierra del Fuego in 1830. In 1833 HMS *Beagle*, *Clio*, and *Tyne* helped the British to take control of the Falkland Islands from the Argentines."[9] If the

5. Ibid, 446.
6. Ibid, 444.
7. Keith S. Thomson, "Beagle | Ship," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed June 28, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Beagle-ship.
8. Campbell and Reece (2005: 441).
9. Thomson, "Beagle | Ship."

term "Indian" doesn't point to an antiquated and colonial perspective, the "return" of those three individuals after being enslaved as scientific specimens certainly should. To know these people, places, and spaces then, was not to understand or relate to them, but to quantify, qualify, and own other human beings and places. Darwin's process of knowing and defining the biology of the individuals, organisms, and geographies that he encountered was constructed, confining, and a direct extension of a larger colonial project. His means for analysis fit in 'naturally' within a system of hierarchy whereby othering people and places they could become objects within a 'natural' world order.

The biology textbook states, "The power of evolution as a unifying theory is its versatility as a natural explanation for a diversity of data from biology's many subfields,"[10] legitimizing the theory of evolution within parameters of scientific inquiry where there is a natural cause for natural phenomena. However, there was nothing natural about the hierarchy and power structures that stripped individuals of their humanity and reduced entire cultures and ecosystems to specimens ready to be defined and consequently commodified. The authors then highlight one of Darwin's two main contributions, "that evolution explains life's unity and diversity."[11] In a couple of pages, the origins of the discipline and its superiority as a means for understanding life is given authority within a self-referential narrative that fails to examine its own underpinnings. Implicit in the theory of evolution is the urge to understand the "unity and diversity" of life, which originates from structures that value certain forms of life over others as part of a "natural" hierarchy. This hierarchical organization often operates most effectively and discreetly through language.

The practice of using definitions to understand concepts breeds isolation because we distance ourselves from that which we attempt to define, whilst we appear to become more intimate with it. We disconnect from the natural world and detach from those around us as we confine ourselves to self-definitions that limit relationship and prize conceptual knowing. We separate from our experiences, relating to them not as present and processual, but from a distanced objective and static known position. Once we have distanced ourselves and concretized self and other, our internal world is separate from the external. For *self* (now separate and concrete) to survive in an

10. Campbell and Reece (2005: 446).
11. Ibid.

interwoven and ever-changing world, we must write stories to keep nature and ourselves the same, static and knowable. We succeed in recreating the very dynamic we hope to avoid. Running away from the perceived darkness of nature's unknowable qualities, we opt towards a concrete understanding of the natural world and ourselves, disallowing ourselves from ever knowing our true nature. Just like the apple, part of our wholeness is in our pieces. All of what we know, comes from what we don't know. The impossibility of defining *self* and *nature* does not keep us from knowing them. By fearing the unknown of a life of process, we guarantee that we will know the constant suffering of loss as the dynamic changes of nature continue. If we fear what we don't know, we come to fear ourselves.

KNOWING NATURE THROUGH RELATIONSHIP, WE UNCOVER WHO WE ARE

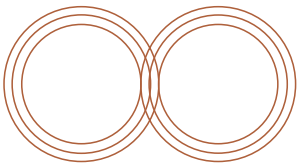
In nature we are as we are. Emplaced, we sense simplicity and complexity in harmony. Spectrums of color, shapes, sounds and smells envelope us within the fabric of being. Standing at the edge of the ocean, your toes can squelch the sand while the waves lap at your ankles and somehow there is ease in simultaneously experiencing your smallness and your greatness. As you gaze at the horizon, standing at the edge of the vastness of the sea and your insignificance within the cosmos, the finite-ness of this being and the infinitude that we are meet and you *are* in intimate relationship with the creative flow of nature. If all we are is a complex of processes, it seems logical that it would be more comfortable to turn ourselves into something concrete, but as we can see this concreteness is confining. If we apply the same logic of self-knowledge that has been offered by certain scientific disciplines to understand nature and the self, we limit our capacity to experience deeper knowing by entering into the engagement with a dualistic and hierarchical understanding that will shape our participation. How do we engage then when the organizational logic of language, lived and unseen, continues to define in opposition?

A cosmology that depends on a series of oppositions such as life and death, heaven and hell, savior and saved as the foundation of existence does not allow for the lived experience of process. We can look to engage life from views and practices that allow for greater dimensionality of being. When the natural world is defined in juxtaposition to the self, matter and spirit are at odds, this is often why we find that

translations of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* that attempt to distill them down, miss the dynamic of the relationship. If we look to understand one through the other, we come to know them relationally which allows for distinctions to be discerned whilst maintaining their connection. When we can live the separation of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, we are released from the limitations of our identification with a limited sense of self. Here, existence is born and released through the space of separation as we connect to non-separate wholeness by *knowing* the parts.

All of what we know is *prakṛti*, the ground of all materiality. As Gerald Larson describes in *Classical Samkhya*, *prakṛti* is "an undifferentiated plentitude of being which implicitly contains the possibilities of all thought and substance."[12] As we try to assess what we know, Hariharananda's translation of Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtra* reminds us that, "The statement Puruṣa (or Prakṛti) "is" is an example of vikalpa" (a "significant or useful verbal concept or idea which has no corresponding reality, e.g. space, time etc.")[13] So, although *prakṛti* is and defines all we know, it does not exist within space or time, so it functions as a useful concept, but in truth, it is not some thing at all. If we go on talking about *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* as objectifiable (spirit and matter, etc.) we are reaffirming a reality they do not exist in. To understand *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* with the hopes of re-engaging the dynamic relationship of self and nature, we must practice knowing these forces not as concepts but in process.

Larson sets the stage for engagement with *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* not as things to be known, but forces to be understood by describing them in relationship to one another. Although Larson does define *puruṣa* in contrast to *prakṛti*, he does so while refining their engagement, describing *puruṣa* as "Pure consciousness which is different from unconscious being and yet by its mere presence renders unconscious being intelligible."[14] *Puruṣa* needs *prakṛti* to see itself, it also joins or is near *prakṛti* so that it may be disidentified from it. "On the one hand, puruṣa provides the consciousness which render the process of emergence, (ie, creation) possible, while on the other hand, prakṛti by means of its first evolute, buddhi, provides the requisite knowl-



Puruṣa needs prakṛti to see itself, it also joins or is near prakṛti so that it may be disidentified from it. Prakṛti depends on puruṣa to animate it.

Puruṣa: "Pure consciousness which is different from unconscious being and yet by its mere presence renders unconscious being intelligible." — Gerald Larson

Prakṛti: "An undifferentiated plentitude of being which implicitly contains the possibilities of all thought and substance." — Gerald Larson

12. Gerald James Larson and Īśvarakṛṣṇa. *Classical Sāṃkhya: An Interpretation of its History and Meaning*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass (2014: 12).

13. Patañjali, Paresh Nath Mukerji, and Hariharānanda Āranya. *Yoga philosophy of Patañjali: Containing his Yoga Aphorisms with Commentary of Vyāsa's Commentary in Sanskrit and a Translation with Annotations Including Many Suggestions for the Practice of Yoga*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press (1983: 153).

14. Larson and Īśvarakṛṣṇa (2014: 12).

When we can allow self and nature to be as they are, we come into alignment with our true nature. When we are no longer looking to know self and nature, they can become known.

edge which enables the realization to arise that puruṣa is absolutely different from prakṛti."[15] *Prakṛti* depends on *puruṣa* to animate it. Once animated it carries the realization that it is free and distinct from *puruṣa*. How can it be free and distinct if only through the process of *puruṣa*, *prakṛti* is animated and thereby able to know/witness itself?

In knowing we are not, so we are. *Puruṣa* is the very force that allowed *prakṛti* to see itself through the recognition that they are distinct. When the *ahamkara* ("I" sense, evolute of *prakṛti*) is able to separate from the *buddhi* (intellect or will, pure "I" sense, also an

15. Ibid.

evolute of prakṛti) and *buddhi* can then be isolated from *puruṣa* the illusion of separateness dissolves.[16] This means that by distinguishing one's sense of "I" from what one seeks to define, "I" can be known by what it is not, but only in the paradoxical and dynamic tension of neither being without the other. Hariharananda's explication of *sūtra* 1.17 explains that this "beginningless alliance between Consciousness and the object is the cause of the avoidable, i.e. misery,"[17]that happens when *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are identified and fused with one another. When the essence of being is confined by the boundaries of matter, in identifying with either spirit *or* matter, even within the most subtle degree of thinking, the demonstrative power of both vanishes. In effect, by entering into deeper relationship with the natural world (being as *prakṛti*) one discovers that they are not *prakṛti* but exist through it because the distinction between the forces of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* is what allowed them both to be known. If we can witness something, we are not it, but we must resist the urge to identify with witnessing where that which is witnessed is conceived of as concrete. When *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* can be known through perception as separate, the one doing the "knowing" (I, the self) disappears because it is no longer fused with either. The moment one identifies with either *puruṣa* or *prakṛti*, the truth of them both evaporates as potentiality is reduced to product.

As Chloe enjoys eating the apple, she recognizes the apple is distinct from herself, but both her self-understanding and the understanding of the apple are dependent on their engagement with one another. Here, *prakṛti* comes to know itself through itself as the force of *puruṣa* supports emergence and the drive for self-knowledge. In eating the apple, Chloe and the apple both are, but they are not each other and neither of them are the things they could be defined as. *Prakṛti* knows itself by what it is not (*puruṣa*), while simultaneously not being any *thing*. If *apple* or *Chloe* must remain constant by being defined, then the true nature of their existence is stifled because their being is distinct but relational. Chloe cannot be without every other thing that is, but when she is relating with the apple both she and the apple can be known.

To know ourselves, we must end the need to identify as something, particularly within a paradigm where people, places, and

16. Larson and Īśvarakṛṣṇa (2014: 10–12).
17. Patañjali, Mukerji, and Hariharānanda Āranya (1983: 153).

spaces can become objects with the slip of the tongue and the slight of a pen. When we can allow self and nature to *be* as they are, we come into alignment with our true nature. When we are no longer looking to know self and nature, they can become known. What was conceptual knowing can become perceptual if we resist the urge to distance through definition and instead enter understanding by relating. This means walking deeper into the wilds of your nature because what lies within you lives around you. We can become intimate with experience, feeling so close and knowing it so well that we come to know we aren't it. Living this self-knowledge allows for greater 'knowing' as we come into deeper intimacy with what is.

We know the world around us when we know the world within us, where the dance of self and other, internal and external, spirit and matter, unity and diversity are in continual play. This means being willing to consistently relinquish your sense of self while remaining open to the potential world continually unfolding. Uncovering our true nature allows us to be in a more harmonious relationship with ourselves, each other and the earth, because we know through felt sense that we are not separate. We can live knowing that we are not separate from the natural world, but exquisitely woven into it, as it. Steeping ourselves in ecological environments reminds us of the truth far beyond our words where we feel the unity of diversity. We truly live when we die to ourselves, uncovering who we are and finding nature in the process.

Why does any of this matter? Because we *feel* we matter. When we can know and honor all parts of ourselves, including the parts that scare us, then the other or the unknown within no longer masquerades as the others we find around us. The shame, blame, confusion, hurt, fear and violence no longer exist as concrete entities part of a naturalized world order. Instead we are called to look at those forces within us as we can no longer understand them as separate from us. In this way, our nature, all of nature, changes. Nature is not something to be named, used, protected or defined, but rather, lives *as* everything and somehow so *are* we.

Morning Altars

Day Schildkret is internationally known for Morning Altars and has inspired tens of thousands of people of all ages across the globe to be awed with impermanent earth art. Day is the author of *Morning Altars: A 7-Step Practice to Nourish Your Spirit through Nature, Art and Ritual* published (The Countryman Press). Day's next book on Rituals will be published in Fall 2021 by Tiller Press. Morning Altars is igniting an international movement of nature, art and ritual with a 7-step practice that renews our relationship to the living world.

A Window Onto

A WINDOW ONTO

Xʷənenəč • Salt Spring Island, BC • Spring 2020

Made from varnish clam, pampas grass stalk, purple hellebore petal, camellia japonica petal, green leaf, earth

Process: The whole plan has changed. Time to slow down amidst the moving pieces. Whats calming my mind is collecting shells at the beach. And exact placements.

May we become skillful practitioners of precision and surrender

Viśvarūpa: Universal Form

GENTLE GIANT

Xʷənenəč • Salt Spring Island, BC • Spring 2020

Made from grand fir leaves (young and aged), red berry, dried leaf, acorn, earth
Process: The rains have come. It's so quiet on the forest path. The moss is drinking in the wet. The baby tips of the gentle Grand Fir trees are glistening with fresh new green growth. With all the craziness in the world, these three fingered sprouts, so vulnerable and vibrant, are easing my heart.
May the way we walk down the street be the way we walk in the world.

LION'S MANE

Land of the Seminole Tribe • Deerfield Beach, FL Spring 2019

Made from guiana chestnut stem and sundried flower, earth
Process: In a tropical arboretum. Discovered gorgeous drying flowers with long hair-like petals. The hair's tips were drying an auburn color. Found another tree whose flowers were already fully dried auburn. Wove the two flowers together to create an ombré effect. In love with these colors.
May we see a potent reflection of our own beauty in the earth's beauty.

Right: Peacock Rangoli

STORMBORN

Land of Cherokee Nation • Weaverville, NC
Summer 2019

Made from Hawk feather, pinecone, quartz rock, blackberry flower, Virginia creeper leaf, red earth
Process: Storm on the horizon. Found about a hundred feathers scattered on a walk. Maybe a fight with a hawk or the remains of a turkey. Built this at the foothills of a historic log cabin, which probably was owned by slave owners and now hosts medicine healers from North and South America.
May we be harbingers of change, transforming trauma into beauty and pain into grace.

Kṛṣṇa Gopāla: Divine Player

Rādhā: Rapturous Love of God

MYSTERY'S MISTRESS

Chochenyo Land • Richmond, CA • Winter 2016

Made from flower, leaf, berry, fruit, acorn, earth
I found a tree laden with clusters of electric phlox (purple) fruits, swollen and bursting with their own ripeness. Built on Christmas, this altar seemed to be beckoning me to follow her down into the true spirit of the season: the otherworldly movement of mystery.

May we welcome the wintertime and darkness as the renewer of our capacity to love the great uncertainty of life. As the dream interpreter Toko-Pa muses, may we recognize in this time that we are no longer who we used to be and not yet still who we will become.

Annapūrṇā: A Return to Wholeness, Balance, and Earth Mother Wisdom

By Laura K. Amazzone

Shiva begging from Annapurna. Watercolour drawing. Source: Wellcome Collection.

During these fierce and challenging times of a global pandemic and increasing ecological disasters, we would be wise to look to ancient and indigenous ways of honoring the Earth as a Great Nourishing and Protective Mother. Eco-conscious traditions like the non-dual Tantric traditions of Śākta Tantra and Śrī Vidyā can reveal alternative and sustainable ways to thrive and co-participate in sustaining a response and recovery that honors the delicate interdependence among humans, non-humans, and all ecosystems on this planet.

Since earliest times, cultures around the world have respected and worshiped the Earth as Mother, as Goddess. Understanding the mythology, history, rituals, and beliefs that are connected to Earth Mother Goddesses around the world offers sustainable ways to restore balance and to live harmoniously with the many cycles of life, death, and rebirth.

One powerful Earth Goddess in South Asia, Annapūrnā, has much to teach us. Earth Mother, Mountain Goddess, Goddess of Grain, Goddess of Fullness, Annapūrṇā is a Goddess of nourishment, creativity, fertility, and growth. As a mountain Goddess, She is the source of the rivers, and Her śakti (power) sanctifies the waters. As a grain Goddess, She feeds and nourishes Her people. She is honored for Her generous, abundant, and protective nature. Annapūrṇā means, "She who is full of food." Annapūrṇā also has a fierce and destructive emanation, Annapūrṇā Bhairavī. Throughout this essay, we will look at many of Annapūrṇā's emanations in order to understand the non-dual perspective within Sākta Tantra that, as Goddess of all aspects of existence and the natural cycles of birth, life, and death, this Earth Mother is both this deadly virus and its remedy.

GODDESS ANNAPŪRṆĀ AND HER MANY EMANATIONS

In Śākta Tantra, the Divine Mother is the Earth Herself who provides for Her human and non-human inhabitants from the bounty of Her body. When we look to Goddess' earlier forms, She is Śākambharī, Goddess of Vegetation who was widely worshiped during the 1st to 5th centuries CE. She is the Śākta Tantric Goddess of the Harvest and of Justice, Durgā. She is Pārvatī, the Mountain Goddess and Beloved of Śiva. She is Lakṣmī in Her beauty, harmony and abundance, and Śrī in Her auspiciousness, sovereignty, and earthly majesty. She is Pṛithivī, Goddess of the Earth from the Vedas. In the Tantrasāra, Annapūrṇā is depicted with Goddesses Bhūmī and Śrī standing on either side of Her. Together their triadic form represents Mother Earth as the giver

In Śākta Tantra, the Divine Mother is the Earth Herself who provides for Her human and non-human inhabitants from the bounty of Her body.

of good fortune. While She sometimes appears as three Goddesses, or with various epithets, each is ultimately the same Goddess in Her full power but with different names.

In Śrī Vidyā,[1]Annapūrṇā is an expression and field of Absolute Consciousness. She is Tripurasundarī Herself, Goddess of Ultimate Reality, both immanent and transcendent. She appears in the *Lalitā-sahasranāma*, a sacred Śrī Vidyā text of the 1000 names of the Divine Mother Lalithā/Tripurasundarī, as Mahī and Dharā "earth" (718 and 955), She who Gives Food, (Annadā 669) and Nourishment (Puṣṭi, 444).[2] Through Her desire to create, She brings the whole world into form, and this desire continues to propel the cycles of birth, life, and death on this relative plane. In all these forms, She is the mysterious power that promotes growth. She is a potent enlivening fertile presence inherent in all living things.

As Mother Earth, Annapūrṇā is benevolent and symbolic of the bounty of the earth, producing rice and other food. One of the myths about Annapūrṇā found in both the *Devī-bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the *Devī-māhātmyam* tells of a period of drought and famine threatening to wipe out human existence. Over 1500 years since these sacred texts were written, most species on this planet face similar issues of extinction due to the effects of greed and overconsumption that have upset the harmonious interrelationship of our precious ecosystems.

1. Śrī Vidyā is a Goddess-centered lineage stream within the Śāktā Tantra tradition that began to gain prominence by the 7th century. The central Goddess within this tradition, who is conceived as both transcendent and immanent reality, is Tripurasundarī.

2. David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press (1988: 143).

The myth's cautionary call to live in balance with the Earth and all its inhabitants is just as critical today as it was in the 5th century CE. The timeless wisdom of this myth speaks to the heart, conveying shared values that are embedded in the earth.

In the 5th century text, the gods approached Devī for help and relief of the devastation on this earthly plane. She first appeared in Her emanation as Sātakṣī with one hundred eyes and cried when She saw the terrible conditions and suffering. For nine nights heavy rains fell from Her many eyes and filled the lakes, ponds, and rivers. Life began to grow again on earth in abundance. The Divine Mother bestowed Her compassion and grace through the flow of Her tears that nourish and replenish the earth. We see that when the earth is suffering, the Mother and all Her inhabitants suffer. Even though from a Śākta orientation the suffering is also part of Her *līlā* (play), on this relative plane of existence, *adharmic* (unethical) actions outside the natural rhythm of Her cycles have devastating and life-threatening effects. While the many man-made crises we face today may seem overwhelming and insurmountable, we are reminded that our compassion toward all beings everywhere is one crucial step toward reconciliation. Often it is the tears shed about injustice, cruelty, violence, and inequality that can inspire us to actions that feed, support, and bring needed change – something we are currently witnessing in the international protests for racial justice for Black lives everywhere.

Also, the appearance and actions of Devī in these texts remind us to look to sources and resources that nourish and replenish us. She shows that there is a place for our grief and our tears. And while from time to time a retreat within ourselves to replenish is necessary, when we become complacent in our grief and fear, we will not survive. With Devī's infinite abundance comes myriad ways we can be inspired to take action and lend support to communities— specifically in 2020, to those most impacted by the coronavirus and by racial violence and systemic injustice. We can look to Devī's many forms that express Her endless generosity and life-giving support: She is Śākambharī, adorned with vines, branches, fruits, and flowers, and Annapūrṇā, with Her golden overflowing pot of food and spoon, and She is the Lajjā Gaurī in the *uttapanad* pose displaying Her Yoni with a lotus flower instead of a human head.

[Lakshmi or Parvati] on a flowering plant holding a baby elephant. Watercolour drawing. Source: Wellcome Collection.

LAJJĀ GAURĪS AS ANNAPŪRṆĀ

The Lajjā Gaurī were worshiped between the 2nd to 15th centuries CE, a time in the common era of the history of South Asia when tribal and indigenous peoples were being marginalized and displaced through processes of brahmanization and Sanskritization. While many of the ancient earth and Goddess-centered values and beliefs became assimilated into the later orthodox traditions, the Lajjā Gaurī, as an early emanation of Annapūrṇā, comes to be a prominent yet paradoxical figure of enduring significance. Lajjā Gaurīs express the regenerative, creative powers of Mother Nature through the beauty of their naked female body.

While the word *lajjā* comes to mean "shameful," there is actually nothing shameful about the unabashed display of beauty, fertility, abundance, and auspiciousness these divine Earth Goddesses convey. The Lajjā Gaurī are depicted in a "sacred display,"[3] with round full breasts and bellies. Sometimes flowers and vegetation are growing out of their yonis or navels, or a lotus flower replaces their heads. When approached in a temple or shrine, devotees touch the Lajjā Gaurī's breasts and/or yoni in an act of reverence and devotion that reminds me of the sacred act of *nyāsa* in Śākta and Śrī Vidyā practices. One of the meanings of *nyāsa* is to "anoint." It can also mean, "to renounce."

3. See Miriam Robbins Dexter, *Sacred Display: Divine and Magical Figures of Eurasia.* New York: Cambria Press (2010).

Through *sādhana* (a dedicated spiritual practice), and through acts of reverence, prayer, and devotion, performing *nyāsas* is a practice to renounce our egocentricity and conditioned sense of self. Through Her grace, we can open and experience a sense of merging into the greatness of Her (and ultimately our own) true Nature. In non-dual Tantric lineage traditions, *nyāsa* also expresses the dictum, "To worship Goddess, we become Goddess." The motion of reaching out to touch the beauty of the Lajjā Gaurīs is to connect with blessings of auspiciousness, abundance, Beauty, and fertile creative powers.

The Yoni of the Lajjā Gaurī is the cosmic Yoni of the Divine Mother, the sacred womb from which all life emerges and to which all life returns. Yoni means many things: origin, resting place, seat, abode, and female genitals.[4] The Yoni includes and yet is more than a female reproductive and sexual symbol. On a cosmological level, it is a symbol of the regenerative force, of infinite creativity, and of the inherent erotic power that is creative, life-giving, and life-affirming. As a sacred "seat," the Yoni is metaphorically a place of return to internal power (Śākti) and authority that is inherent in all beings. In Śākta lineages, the human heart is also a Yoni. It is a sacred portal of wisdom where the Absolute and relative meet.

All of the blessings the Lajjā Gaurī grants can serve as a healing balm to emotions like fear, pain, grief, rage, and experiences of racial injustice and illness. In considering this sacred act of *ny*āsa, what can this form of the Earth Mother teach us about what we reach toward in our own lives? When we extend ourselves to connect to others, to Nature, to a passion project, a cause for justice, and anything we love, a sacred transmission occurs— one that gives meaning and reminds us of our place in the world. In a world that is plagued by suffering, violence, and injustice, our attention to the divine Beauty that these forms of Devī express restores a sense of empowerment, hope, and dignity.

In the Śrī Vidyā tradition, Beauty is understood as that which helps one find their place in the natural order of things. In its highest essence, Beauty gives a sense of harmony and belonging.[5] When we experience the Beauty of the natural world, there are moments when we become so moved by what we are witnessing and experiencing that we are taken out of our limited sense of self. Time seems to stop, the

4. Tracy Pincthman, *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition.* Albany: State University of New York Press (1994: 38).
5. Personal teachings of *Uma-parvathinandanath.*

mind is suspended, and for a moment we merge with an experience of deepened connection, recognition, belonging, and presence. This is Annapūrṇā in Her form as Tripurasundarī, She who is the Beauty of the Three Realms and Beyond. Beauty in this non-conventional, non-objectified experience gives a sense of value, meaning, co-participation and connection. Where there is Beauty, there is consciousness. Where there is presence, there is wholeness; and there is fullness, which circles back to the fullness of being that Annapūrṇā offers.

As we have been locked up in our homes to prevent the spread of a deadly virus, mental illness, domestic violence, and other social crises have arisen. Many express a longing to return to the balancing and restorative presence of nature. On a deep level, all of us remember what it is like to live in accordance with natural laws that support and enhance rather than restrict, repress, exclude, and reduce. It is a common adage that nature heals. Feelings of peace, calm, connection and interconnection are some of the many positive effects we experience in communion with the Earth Mother. Walking on the beach, in a forest, sitting in a park under a tree, conversing with flowers, planting a vegetable garden, all of these experiences can become part of our *sādhana*, our daily practice, as simple acts of worship. Finding a sense of calm and composure within our own hearts is a necessary ground from which we can act and lend support to others.

There are other myths in ancient mythological traditions around the world that are reminiscent of the grief we find expressed by Sātakṣī, the Goddess who cried about the devastation She witnessed in the world in the early *Devī-māhātmyam*. And interestingly the remedy that is presented is reminiscent of the Lajjā Gaurī. The Greek Earth Mother Demeter and the Japanese Sun Goddess Amaterasu become so grief-stricken from the injustice and violence that has been perpetuated toward them that they hide away, refusing to shine their light anymore. Through the withdrawal of their Śakti, nothing will grow and all life is threatened. The witnessing presence of a loving attendant, who displays her yoni in a bawdy act of resistance calls them out of their misery—and makes them laugh. The direct action of women coming together and displaying their vulvas is not only mythological. Nakedness as a form of protest has been used in social justice movements as an act of non-violent resistance when other forms of protest have not been successful in effecting necessary changes.[6]

6. "Shell oil has created an ecological disaster zone with their dripping in the Nige-

Collage: Lajjā Gaurī ca. 6th century, and watercolour drawing. Sources: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Wellcome Collection.

The enduring worship of the Lajjā Gaurī suggests an inexhaustible source of nourishment and creativity that has long been understood as Earth Herself.[7] This form of Annapūrṇā reconnects us to our naked wisdom and power--- naked in the sense of being stripped

rian Delta. Women in the Niger Delta resorted to using the "curse of nakedness" as a weapon after they had failed to have their demands met through more conventional protest actions. Though greatly feared and rarely used, nakedness as a form of protest is legitimate within the cultural context of the Niger Delta. In this instance, it was one of the few occasions when women were able to manoeuvre themselves into a position of power. Also, because it is used only under extreme provocation, it has remained a powerful weapon of women's collective resistance." Sokari Ekine. https://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/Academic/WOrg-VAW_WomResponsesNigerDelta_Ekine_2008.pdf

7. Kinsley (1988: 127).

of the conditioning and limitations imposed through patriarchal systems of dominance, oppression, violence, and injustice.

In these harrowing times, we may consider how to be a loving attendant to someone who is in the throes of grief, and to express our solidarity with those who are directly under attack. We can create acts of humor to lift heavy hearts. We can focus on the wisdom of our bodies to tune into our inner authority, to know when it is time to personally retreat and grieve, and when it is time to find creative ways to act on issues that are close to our hearts.

ANNAPŪRṆĀ AND DURGĀ

In Nepal, Annapūrṇā is regarded as a Mountain Goddess and Grain Goddess. During the annual fall Durgā Festival, Annapūrṇā is ritually linked with Durgā, Goddess of Justice, Strength and the Harvest. Each autumn on the new moon, just after the fall equinox, Durgā is worshiped in Her various forms for nine nights (Navarātri). The numerous battles She has been called to face are recounted from the *Devī-māhātmyam* and symbolically reenacted during this period. These festival rituals have many layers of meaning. On a personal level, it is an opportunity for participants to honor and embody Devī's qualities of fierce compassion, courage, fortitude, and strength, and to consider how they can be applied in their lives and communities. It is a time to consider what internal and external struggles must be confronted and approached through the wisdom expressed in the *Devī-māhātmyam* narrative. The Navarātri festival period offers the opportunity to reset and realign personal and collective energies with the natural earthly, lunar and cosmic cycles in order to restore harmony, equilibrium, and balance.

GODDESS OF KĀSHĪ

Annapūrṇā is the Goddess of Kāshī (also known as Benāras or Vārānasī) where Her temple is near the temple to Visvanātha, a form of Śiva. Here She is also known as Bhavanī, a name for Tripurasundarī. In Annapūrṇā's traditional iconography She is golden and sits on a lotus throne. She has two hands holding a bowl of rice and a spoon to feed Her devotees. Sometimes Śiva is depicted before Her, receiving alms. Annapūrṇā has a prominent place in the Purāṇic texts. One of Her myths describes how She got upset by the sages teaching their devotees that this world was only *māyā*, or illusion. How could the nourishing foods and pure water She provided not be real? To

demonstrate Her divine powers, She created famine and drought on the earth. As life became threatened by the lack of nourishment, the gods appealed to Her to return, and She does.

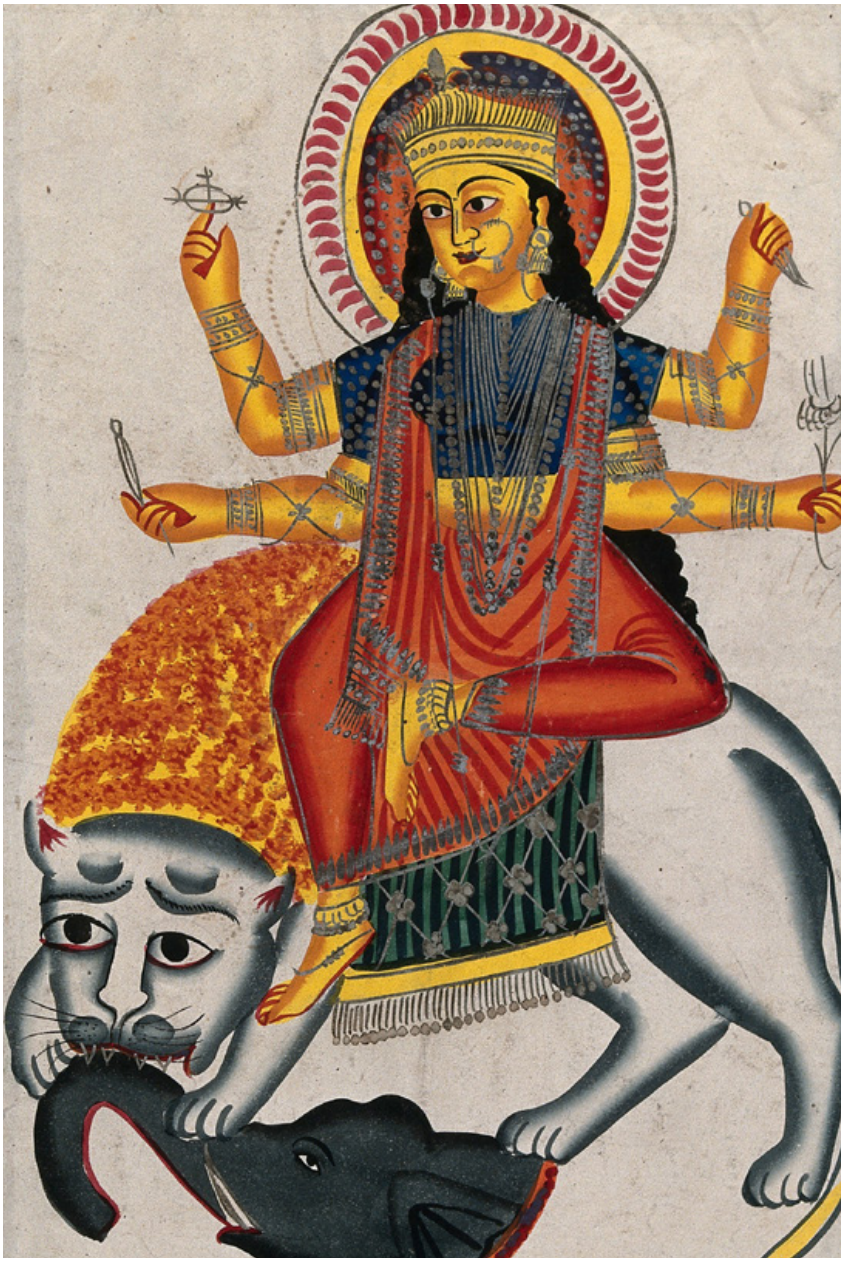
A fall festival for Annapūrṇā in Kāshī gives more insight into how we might bring Her energies into our communities. During Annakūta ("Food Mountain"), She is celebrated as the sustainer of life. Mountains of food are offered to anyone who visits the temple, and an abundance of food is also offered from people's homes. On this day, everyone who is able participates in sharing and distributing food as a ritual act.[8] Food is offered back to Annapūrṇā as an expression of gratitude.

In these threatening and unstable times, what can we learn from Annapūrnā when addressing the many issues we face around food? The coronavirus has highlighted the need for sustainable agricultural practices and affordable access to organic, non-GMO foods. A shift from a meat-based to a vegetarian diet would be beneficial on numerous levels. A vegetarian diet is prescribed in some Śākta lineages for reasons ranging from the spiritual benefits of raising and sustaining levels of consciousness to ecological benefits such as lowering the carbon imprint of food production. Millions on this planet are starving and do not have adequate and affordable access to clean and healthy food and water—issues that have been heightened during the current pandemic. How can we embody the generosity of spirit and abundance Annapūrnā lends as part of our daily rituals? As Earth Mother, Annapūrnā provides enough food on this planet to feed everyone. What will it take to distribute Her bounty fairly to all? What would it mean to praise and sincerely thank this Divine Mother and all who participated in the planting, growing, harvesting, and distribution process to bring food to our tables? How would this awareness and honoring of the Mother as an all-providing source benefit the welfare of all?

GODDESS OF PROTECTION AND WELFARE

Annapūrnā's role and function most commonly relate Her to food and the earth. She is also a Goddess of Protection. In some of Her mythology, She gives assistance to the poor. She provides food to those in need, sometimes in disguise. Like Her emanation as Lakṣmī, She has no tolerance for domestic strife and unhappiness and seeks to offer

8. Diana L. Eck. *Banaras: City of Light.* New York: Columbia University Press (1999: 162).



Durga riding on her lion killing a demon. Watercolor Drawing. Source: Wellcome Collection.

nourishment wherever there is struggle.

Legends from 18th century Bengal tell of Annapūrṇā appearing as an old woman and helping a boy who was out collecting wood to sell but could not find any. She handed him cow dung patties that turned to gold. Other stories of empty bowls overflowing with rice at the mention of Her name are common.[9] Annapūrṇā is said to have come from Kāshī to Bengal where She appeared to the poet Ramprasad Sen and nourished his speech.[10] She shares powers of wisdom and eloquence with Her form as Saraswatī. Annapūrṇā is the fullness and completeness of speech. As an emanation of *jñānaśakti* (the power of knowledge), She is both the word and the Absolute consciousness behind and within language and all its expressions. We can turn to this form of the Mother for inspiration of language that empowers, inspires and, liberates. We can also learn from Her compassionate nature in assisting those in poverty and in need. Just as Annapūrnā disguises Herself to give support to those in distress, it has been heartening to witness many humans engaging in *seva*—selfless action in support of and in solidarity with those who experience the detrimental and life-threatening effects of racial injustice and violence as well as from

9. See Malcolm McLean. *Devoted to the Goddess: The Life and Work of Ramprasad.* Albany: State University of New York Press (1998).

10. Most of Ramprasad Sen's poems were devoted to Kālī and yet there are stories of Annapūrṇā being a source of inspiration for his poetry.

the coronavirus.

While Annapūrnā's iconography often depicts Her with bowls of overflowing food, fruits, and abundance, She does have a destructive and fiery side. She is also known as Bhairavī in Nepal. She appears surrounded by flames, a giant serpent winding up Her body, holding various implements and weapons. Annapūrṇā is an Earth Mother who does not only give, but also destroys through natural disasters, especially when things are not in balance or in harmony. Perhaps it is through this form that the Divine Mother has appeared as the deadly virus we are facing today?

If we take the Śākta Tantric and Śrī Vidyā orientation that the Mother is everything, then we see how She gives disease, is the disease, and removes disease. She is both illness and wellness. She is the feast and the famine, the droughts and monsoons. She is also the quaking of the earth. At the time of writing this paragraph, a 4.9 earthquake struck four miles from my mountain home. The intensity and duration of the force of the quake was a direct experience of Her immense power and sovereignty. In that moment Annapūrṇā Bhairavī seemed to be reminding me that the Goddess is the earth in all its beneficent and destructive aspects.

ANNAPŪRṆĀ AS WATER AND THE HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINS

In Nepal, there are several mountains referred to as Annapūrṇā in the Himalayan range. Here there is a belief that to consider the mountain, one must honor the water. Water is a divine life-giving and life-maintaining substance, the earthly counterpart of *amṛta*, the divine nectar of the Goddesses and Gods that grants immortality. It is believed that the celestial waters circulate as rain, as the sap of vegetation, as nourishing milk, as life-giving blood, as generative semen. At specific times and places, water harbors the essence of divinities. Therefore we find fountains, water tanks, and ponds throughout the Kathmandu Valley. Establishing these was considered an act of religious merit in earlier times.

Even in death regardless of caste, the dead are bathed in water. In Benares the Ganges River is the most sacred place to die and people travel from all over to spend their last days and hours there. In Nepal, the Bagmati river has a similar function and at Paśupathinātha,[11]

11. Paśupathinātha is a sacred site to Śiva in his form as Paśupathinātha, Lord of the Animals. It is also a place on the Bagmati River in Nepal, which similar to Varanasi, is where people go to die.

When we experience the Beauty of the natural world, there are moments when we become so moved by what we are witnessing and experiencing that we are taken out of our limited sense of self.

the sacred ghāts serve as cremation platforms for the dead. As in Benares, the ashes of the dead are swept into the river to reintegrate with worldly waters. One of the many losses of the coronavirus is that we cannot gather to bury and mourn our dead.

In Nepal we find innumerable *tīrthas*, sacred pilgrimage sites located near water either on the banks of rivers and streams or at the confluence of rivers, streams, ponds, pools, and wells. Bathing in these sacred waters is one of the most auspicious activities for Nepalese. *Tīrthas* are places of crossing over, where the sacred and mundane intersect. Different *tīrthas* have different purposes.

One of the most meritorious and potent *tirthas* resides in the Annapūrṇā range at Muktināth̄a. Here a temple with 108 Makara (crocodile-like creatures) spouts pour the mountain waters into the temple compound. Thousands of feet up high in the Himalayas the powerful Annapūrṇā bestows Her blessings with the offering of sacred waters. In the valleys and land below, She provides food, healing herbs, and refuges of natural Beauty and Wholeness for all who inhabit Her bountiful body.

CONCLUSION

We have always been sustained and nourished by Annapūrṇā, the Mother Goddess, even if we did not know these expressions and forces as Her emanations. We need to return to wholeness, to interconnection, to purity of food and water. It is important in these unbalanced and threatening times to remember our Mother Earth through ritual, *sādhana*, meditation, non-dual teachings, acts of kindness, and contemplation. We need to consider how our personal dharma aligns with that of the world. We need to ask the Mother within our

hearts, within the trees, flowers, and stars, how we are to dedicate our energies to promote balance, harmony, and equilibrium for all. We need to give ourselves space to grieve the many injustices and pain. Not only does Annapūrṇā offer nourishment in the form of food and healing herbs and plants, but also She offers spiritual nourishment and wisdom. She challenges us to correct our relationship with the natural world. She offers inspiring and healing ways to replenish ourselves and the earth. And She reprimands us when we are out of balance and participates in creating disharmony, destruction, and violence through our ignorance. Her appearance in such a threatening form as the coronavirus also presents solutions that will not only show us how to stop the destruction, but also how to restore harmony and find more fulfilling ways to live respectfully amongst all of life on this planet. Annapūrṇā is a Divine Mother to call on, to respect, to honor, and to worship—not only in these perilous times but also when we are again thriving, for She is Life itself.

NOTE ON STYLE:

When referring to absolute conceptions of divinity such as God, Brahman, Paramaśiva and other forms within both eastern and Judeo-Christian traditions, one does not find references to the Absolute using the lower case, especially when referencing a masculine deity. I capitalize nouns and pronouns to emphasize the Divine Mother, Goddess, Devī as a divine expression of Absolute Consciousness.

Marx: Dialectical Materialist, or Nondual Materialist?

An Ecofeminist Rereading

BY REBEKAH NAGY

As laid out by the ecofeminist critical framework, the staggering environmental degradation and human cost that underpins our contemporary way of life stems from a fundamental dualistic error: a cultural disconnect from nature. This rupture includes the needs of our own bodies as a part of nature, the human and more-than-human bodies around us, and the entire global ecosystem, comprised of all of these bodies and the environment in which they are situated.[1] A global paradigm shift to course-correct these alarming climate and human crisis trends now seems more urgent than ever, and yet the challenge of any context is imagining another context. The context or culture in which we are enmeshed "designates what we pay attention to and what we ignore," functioning as a selective filter on what we are able to perceive and imagine possible.[2] This includes our individual self-conception.

The attempt to extricate ourselves from the political, ethical, and spiritual morass of environmental and human exploitation we've co-created begs radical systemic overhaul, and yet, the scope of change needed is staggering. Change must take place in both non-hierarchical grassroots movements and in more centralized ways on the global political stage. As a teacher of somatic movement, I'd like to examine how this radical overhaul can begin with ourselves as individuals through embodying new philosophies. For my purposes here, I'm qualifying somatics as self-inquiry through movement, which can engender an increased range of choices, and the possibility of change. In my experience, when I open up space for change and new ways of being, my relationships change, multiplying outward through my interactions. In this way, I experience that I'm an individual, and yet I am not separate from the whole. This is how I define nonduality.

There are many roads which lead to an understanding or experience of what I call nonduality. The term "nonduality" begs a little bit of unpacking; the word is sometimes used to mean something different than what I'd like to convey, and at other times, I find that folks are embodying nondual ethics without using the term at all. "Nonduality" is a transliteration from Sanskrit, *advaita* (अद्वैत). *Dvaita* (द्वैत) is a state of two-ness, or duality, and adding the prefix

1. There are a number of different reasons for the nature/culture rupture put forth by various ecofeminist scholars, some of which I discuss in my explanatory piece here in Tarka, "What is Ecofeminism?"

2. Edward T. Hall. *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor Books Editions (1989: 85).

"a-" in Sanskrit negates, implying the obverse. However, *advaita*, as nonduality, is not the same as unity, *ekatā* (एकता). This distinction, between the flat oneness of unity or monism, and the diverse multiplicity of nonduality, between homogeneity and possibility, is incredibly important. My body feels different depending upon which idea I consider. In unity, there isn't room for individuality. So when I choose the term "nonduality," I am deliberately making room for a plurality of perspectives which co-generate a whole, like an ecosystem or community. I am highlighting our interconnectedness, our inseparable imbraidedness, without flattening identity and intersectionality. We can have different experiences and yet choose to collaborate towards a common goal. If we are one, there is no possibility of relating. If we are many and interconnected, possibilities proliferate.[3] We are a comm-unity.

Don't get me wrong; I'm happy to march en masse and chant that "the people united will never be divided." I take this activist chant to mean something that is aligned with the nondual perspective I describe. But when it comes to embodying the specifics of different language ways, what we say matters. Parsing nonduality is a delicate matter; it is common for nondual ideas and traditions to be read through unconsciously dualistic cultural lenses, because that is the Eurowestern cultural inheritance. This is where I find it personally important to be very detailed. Nonduality read through a dualistic lens is flattened into oneness rather than ecology, a coextensive, interconnected, and diverse community. Ecofeminist writer and deconstructionist Vicky Kirby says of this dualist construction, "... what makes human species-being special, indeed, exceptional, is our self-definition as *un*-natural."[4] This legacy is inherited from mechanistic Eurowestern ideas about the specialness and solidity of our selves and our egos, separate from nature. With a nondual perspective, we are distinct but not separate.

The nondual ideology which permeates some Eastern wisdom traditions, particularly Hindu Tantra and Vajrayāṇa Buddhism, tends

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3. I would go so far as to say that mainstream liberal ethics necessarily require the homogenization of unity, while leftist ethics preserve space for diversity and appropriate cultural relativism of nonduality (at least, in my idealistic sense of the distinction! I'm aware this unfortunately is not always maintained in practice). In *Ecofeminism*, Marie Mies and Vandana Shiva write, "this capitalist-patriarchal perspective interprets difference as hierarchical and uniformity as a prerequisite for equality." (2) Marie Mies and Vandana Shiva. Ecofeminism. New York: Zed Books (1993, 2014: 2).

4. Vicki Kirby. "Matter out of Place: 'New Materialism' in Review." *What if Nature was Culture All Along?* New Materialisms. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (2017: 3).

to be practice-oriented, a kind of embodied philosophy. But read as monist and thought-centered through the Eurowestern philosophical lens, what cultural anthropologist Agehananda Bharati calls the "psycho-experimental-speculation" of these traditions is mistaken as analogous to Eurowestern philosophy, which is predicated on the dualistic distinction between spirituality and materiality, rather than the play between the two. Bharati recommends substituting "'philosophy' by some such word as 'ideology' or "speculative patterns" for the bulk of Indian (and hence, Tibetan) scholastic lore; in fact, short of logic (*nyāya*, *tarka*), Indian philosophy [is] ideology."[5] Or I might add, a paradigm or framework for engagement rather than a philosophy for speculation's sake alone. So how does Marx fit in?

When I began to write this piece, it wasn't really supposed to be centered around Marx. I thought I'd briefly revisit his writing, because it is a large part of the foundation of much ecosocialist and ecofeminist thought, and his ideas continue to both inspire and divide. I started with rather critical (and mostly incorrect) ideas about Marxism, formed by many unconsciously dualistic and spiritually lackluster Marxist readings. I hadn't revisited Marx's writing in almost two decades, coincidentally back when I was a pretty new yogāsana practitioner without any notion of nondual philosophy or how it would radically shift my worldview and integrate spirituality, embodiment, and politics into a coherent whole for me. While Marx was certainly a product of his time, and bears certain biases which I'll go into later, he had a gift for thinking beyond his cultural context. It seems that his subsequent interpreters, many but not all Marxists, miss the nondual insight that makes his work so important and enduring, despite having potential access to nondual Eastern wisdom traditions that Marx lacked. Marx shaped his ideas in his environment: a dualistic, mechanistic, rational, and rapidly industrializing Europe. In his criticism of these aspects of culture, he laid a rich foundation for ecofeminism and ecological insight including nondual reappraisals of the relationship between humanity and nature. An important note about terminology: Leftist academics use the word "Marxist" to indicate the orthodox philosophy of the Soviet Union, and the term "Marxian" to indicate other thought influenced by Marx. Generally I agree with Marxian interpretations,

5. Agehananda Bharati. *The Tantric Tradition.* Newburyport: Samuel Weiser (1975: 15).

and disagree with Marxist dogma. I will use these terms accordingly.

In a society predicated on unconsciously dualistic philosophical structures, both Marxian thought and nonduality are often misunderstood. As a result, our transformative imaginations are limited in their scope of the new ways we might organize ourselves and our societies, engender a more egalitarian world and perhaps even turn around the destruction of the global ecosystem through the climate crisis we've wrought. I'm not abandoning hope yet. Let's explore the relationship between the generative tension found in both Marxian dialectical materialism and nondual spiritual frameworks in more detail.

Dialectical Materialism

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels collaborated on a number of important socialist works, including *The Communist Manifesto* (which they co-wrote) and *Capital* (which Marx wrote and Engels edited), forming the basis of what is now known as Marxism. They approached philosophy through the lens of what has come to be called dialectical materialism. They based their materialist philosophy in opposition to idealism, "by which they meant any theory that treats matter as dependent on mind or spirit, or mind or spirit as capable of existing independently of matter. For them, materialist and idealist views were irreconcilably opposed throughout the historical development of philosophy."[6] Their dialectical approach to understanding materialism is in response to G.W.F. Hegel's idealist dialectics, reversed and reconstituted through their materialist worldview. What is important about Hegel's philosophy is that, as opposed to metaphysics – which views things as fixed, unchanging, and separate – dialectics focuses on movement and change, relationship and interaction. Everything is impermanent, continually coming into being and ceasing to be; the driving force of change and transformation within things is their internal contradictions. For Marx and Engels, change was an inherent quality of the material world, and rather than theorizing or enshrining systematic principles of their dialectics, they rooted their insight in real-world events from which dialectical principles were derived. Ecofeminist activist-scholar Ariel Salleh underscores, "Marx and

6. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. *Dialectical Materialism.* Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc, May 26,2020. https://www.britannica.com/topic/dialectical-materialism. Accessed 7/12/2020.

Everything is impermanent, continually coming into being and ceasing to be; the driving force of change and transformation within things is their internal contradictions.

Engels were very much ahead of their time in seeing a dialectical interplay of Humanity and Nature."[7]

Now, do we really need to argue about materialism or idealism at all? My experience has been that, somehow in the great mystery, the great collaborative and myriad-perspectivized reality which I could stab at by naming it nonduality, the immaterial and the material suppose one another; neither would have meaning without the other, and occasionally, in brief and profound glimpses, the possibility that they could even be that distinct breaks down for me. At the same time, because I'm a somatics person, that is, a person interested in discovering spiritual, psychological, and even political insight in embodied experience, I'm also engaged in swinging the pendulum in the materialist direction. To the best of my ability, I prefer to ground suggestions of spirituality in ever-arising whole-body and relational inquiry rather than relying on what I believe to be tired, dualistic dogma.

7. Ariel Salleh. *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern.* London: Zed Books (2017: 109).

The Metabolic Rift

Though critical ecofeminism seeks to refine Marxian thought, Marx's description of the fourfold fissure between the Eurowestern self-concept and nature remains a salient jumping off point for ecological insight, and is central to his critique of capitalism. This is the context or paradigm which I believe needs to change. What Marx called the metabolic rift describes what he saw as four interlocking factors in our alienation from nature, arising in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. As land began to be appropriated through enclosure and conversion to private property, which Marx called 'original accumulation,' most people were suddenly deprived of a direct relationship to their means of subsistence, resulting in what Marx described as four-fold alienation:

1 **the products of our labor no longer directly meet our needs (money gained from products or services rendered for others' profit mediates the satisfaction of our needs instead),**

2 **we have become alienated from ourselves, as humans-doing, in the disruption of the labor process itself. Marx says that working, and working together (collaborating), is what makes us distinctly human,**[8]

3 **we are alienated from one another as social beings in the creation of unnecessary competition and a scarcity mentality, which replaced communal endeavors and mutual aid with atomistic competitive pursuits for self-gain and/or mastery-over, further alienating us from ourselves in our alienation from one another, and**

4 **we are alienated from nature, which Marx calls our inorganic body. He says "that Man must grasp 'the recognition of nature as his real body."**[9] **The process of enclosure and original accumulation resulted in people migrating to towns and cities to find work, or staying in the countryside but shifting**

8. Marx in his anthropocentric bias didn't think or didn't care, that other species might collaborate among themselves or with us. Not to mention that perhaps all of what we call reality could be considered collaboration!

9. Salleh quotes Marx from *Grundrisse*, trans. M. Nicholaus. Salleh (2017: 111).

from subsistence labor to becoming workers in commercial agriculture.

As described in this fourfold rupture, for Marx, alienation from labor is inseparable from alienation from nature, because it is at the heart of being human to shape the part of our nature which is outside ourselves, the environment in which we are enmeshed, to meet our needs, from basic sustenance to the development of culture. When we change the world around us, we change ourselves. John Bellamy Foster elaborates, "For Marx, all human activity has a basis in nature... Labor and production constitute the active human transformation of nature, but also of human nature, the human relation to nature and human beings themselves." I'd like to reframe this a bit, adding that it then follows that alienation from our bodies is also alienation from nature, and thus from ourselves and one another. Per teacher and writer Elizabeth Terzakis,

> ...as we interact with nature we change it, but we are also, at the same time, changing ourselves. For Marx, our relationship with nature when not distorted by capitalism, is closely interwoven... Marx thus defines human labor as a metabolic exchange between human beings *as* nature and nature in general, between our organic bodies—that is, what is attached to us—and our inorganic bodies—that is, nature as it exists apart from our bodies. Nature supplies our needs: food, clothing, and shelter, certainly, but also air, water, and sunlight. We cannot live without these things, yet they are external to us, and according to Marx, the way that we supply our organic bodies with these necessities taken from our inorganic body, nature, is the basis of our labor.[10]

One very concrete example of the way in which this metabolic relationship has been disrupted is in the necessary role humans play in nourishing the land itself with human and animal waste, balancing what is taken through subsistence farming. Instead, we practice extractive monocropping, and we flush our waste away in what could be drinking water so that we don't have to look at it, chemically processing said water to make it safe again, while also dumping

10. Elizabeth Terzakis. "Marx and Nature: Why We Need Marx Now More Than Ever." *International Socialist Review (*Issue #109).

Marx says, "all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil."

chemicals on our land and food to replace what we have extracted and are no longer able to directly give back through small scale compost-based waste processing. The pollution from poorly-disposed-of human waste (or any waste) also gets called 'externalization of cost;' becoming 'environmental racism,' that is, waste is dumped in nature, and most often in poor and BIPOC communities, and is considered 'free' to or outside of capitalist accumulation.[11] We see this on a global scale in the environmental cost of all of the byproducts of production, for which polluting corporations pay nothing and reap only profit. Short-term financial gains for the few take priority over long-term sustainability for everyone and the planet. Marx says, "all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil."[12]Salleh puts it in nondual and succinct terms, that "profit contains its opposite in poverty."[13]

The sense of metabolic scarcity that capitalism generates is simultaneously false, and very real. Facilitator, lecturer, and philosopher Bayo Akómoláfé calls capitalism "a machine that generates scarcity, versus the lived experience of the fullness of present moment

11. Mies and Shiva (2014: 4).
12. Karl Marx. *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy.* London: Penguin Classics (1992: 638).
13. Salleh (2017: 223).

felt experience and nature. The experience of 'scarcity' is both false, in that it convinces us to consume more than we need, and is also real-- ultimately capitalism is creating true scarcity in the diversity of life on this planet, is the true threat of not enough."[14] Capitalism's unstable dialectical crux is that it relies on infinite growth, in a material world that is finite, or at least not infinite in the way that capitalism requires.

The use of the term "metabolism" is perfect; it grounds macrocosmic global imbalances in the microcosms of our bodily ecosystems, appropriately recontextualizing humanity as a piece of the larger ecosystem. "Metabolism" suggests a need for embodying our relationship to the whole in the great balancing act of global homeostasis, the balance of which we have clearly shifted through the capitalist system we've co-created. Could rediscovering a balanced human niche in the metabolic whole perhaps be part of spiritual practice? Could embodying nonduality be a doorway into a new paradigm?

Subconscious Dualism

Marxian thought has the reputation of being so thoroughly materialist that there is no place for religion; Marx may be most well-known for his often misunderstood statement that, "religion is the opiate of the masses." Here is a longer version of this quote, translated by Andrew McKinnon:

Religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.

The transcending of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions of their condition is a demand to give up a condition that requires illusion. The criticism of religion is therefore the germ of the criticism of the valley of tears whose halo is religion.[15]

McKinnon goes on to state that, "for Marx, the criticism of reli-

14. Bayo Akómoláfé. "Coming Down to Earth: Sanctuary as Spiritual Companionship in a Time of Hopelessness and Climate Chaos."
http://bayoakomolafe.net/project/coming-down-to-earth-sanctuary-as-spiritual-companionship-in-a-time-of-hopelessness-and-climate-chaos/. Accessed 7/12/2020.

15. Andrew McKinnon. "Reading 'Opium of the People': Expression, Protest and the Dialectics of Religion." Critical Sociology 31(1):15-38. April 2005. DOI 10.1163/1569163053084360. Accessed 7/12/2020.

gion ... is not an end in itself, but rather a means." Marx is not criticizing religion itself, but rather the ever-more-miserable conditions of increasingly alienated workers, for which religion is a balm. This famous quote of Marx must be reread with the intrinsic dialectical tension that Marx intended, which is dynamic, and transformative in its movement potential. I'll come back to this momentarily. It's important to note that Mckinnon also makes a point of contextualizing the cultural placement of opium in the time that Marx was writing, which was different than it is today. Marx was neither being literal nor purely negative; he even used opium himself to treat minor ailments. It's totally my conjecture, but I can't help but wonder if in Marx's time, opium, in the form of laudanum tincture, was not unlike CBD is becoming -- though even more widespread and culturally accepted than CBD is now -- both symptom-treater and cure, and touted as somewhat of a panacea. So if we assume Marx only means to highlight the soporific qualities of opium, we project our view from a cultural context in which "puritanical prohibitions against opium use have been naturalized."[16]This dualistic point of view is still preserved in discussions of other consciousness-altering plants as either 'medicinal'/'therapeutic,' or 'recreational' (but that's a discussion for another time). Recognizing one's own context sure can be tricky!

Despite how next-level dialectical materialism was for Eurowestern philosophy, Marx also failed to recognize his own andro- and anthropocentric dualistic assumptions; he succumbed to the limited vision of his time and cultural context.[17] This is where ecofeminism continues Marx's nondual project with integrity, and, as Ariel Salleh says, a "new appreciation of material agency." She continues,

A number of ecofeminists such as Ruether, Merchant, Mies, and Shiva have been influenced by the generous spirit of Marx's work. He too was writing at a time when land enclosures by powerful interests were displacing self-sufficient communities. Then, enclosures took place for sheep grazing; today they are done for agro-industry, cash cropping, dams, and golf courses... So North and South, country

16. Ibid.

17. In Marx's writing and most of the socialist thought that has followed, so-called women's work, or caretaking and reproductive labor, are excluded, considered necessity rather than a question of freedom or personal development. Regarding this blatant sexism, Salleh forgives Marx, acknowledging that "his passion -- and immediate focus -- was to be rid of the suffering that he witnessed in the nineteenth century factory system. Had he been writing in another era, he might well have developed different vantage points -- this is certainly implied by his dialectic of internal relations." Salleh (2017: 108-130).

folk still straggle into cities looking for other ways to survive... This nascent proletariat leaves behind a habitus organized by kinetic values for an artificial reality split off from the intricate circuitry[18] of ecological processes. As opposed to active land-based ways of life, which ground the senses, industrial production disconnects people from the pulse of their material being...

Alienative consciousness now reaches new depths. Thus, Marx describes how by selling his own bodily powers, a worker's well-being and identity are impoverished by removal from his own self-directed capacity to work creatively with nature... As a human creature, one of a species, the worker becomes alienated from what his own species is or might be. Ensnared in somebody else's idea of production, the worker is reduced to accepting daily survival as 'the meaning of life'... he comes to feel separate, even competitive.[19]

This is what Salleh means when she states that "profit contains its opposite in poverty." She is referring to impoverishment in all senses of the word, including an impoverishment of creativity and transformative human potential. "For indeed," she continues, "the body comes to know itself, through its environmental interactions."[20]

Human Nature

So, as humans are we cooperative or competitive by nature? If we take for granted that qualities of self-interest and competition are concrete human traits, 'natural' ways of being, we're ignoring that however we are, is adaptative only within a particular context. In other contexts we could be different. And indeed, we are -- there are plenty of adaptive examples of human cooperation, mutual aid, and shared resources such as the commons, as guiding principles in how we self-organize into communities of scale. Cultural assumptions which concretize what it is like to be human, for instance, that human nature is selfish, ignore the relational fluidity and movement that is a truer identity than the false permanence of a static ego. Astrida Neimanis writes,

18. Personally I dislike technological metaphors for nature, bodies, spiritual practice, etc.

19. Salleh (2017: 108).

20. Ibid, 291.

> ...claims that the logics of global capitalism and the market economy 'naturally' befit humans – that it is 'natural 'for people to want to work for themselves, and so forth – similarly naturalize both personal traits and political and economic orders as either innate or commonsensical. 'Natural' in both of these senses is closely linked to the concept of naturalization -- a process whereby the givenness of certain qualities or associations becomes accepted as innately true, and the mutable premises upon which such a 'given' has been established are hidden from view. Because oppositional dualisms are manifest both politically and psychologically, 'naturalness' in both of these senses is integrated into psychic structures and resists critical scrutiny.[21]

Examining the concept of naturalization is an important ecofeminist concern for dissecting the gendered and racialized oppression inherent in it. Entrenched cultural dualism and the nature/culture binary (and other value hierarchies) conceive of humans (read: white cis hetero male humans) as alienated from nature, while women and racialized others are considered to be closer to nature, or nature itself. While I've been making a case for those who have inherited Eurowestern dualistic ideals to reconsider themselves as a part of nature, if we don't remove the value hierarchy, nature, BIPOC, and women are subjugated by default, characterized as passive, irrational, mysterious, primitive, innocent, and/or carnal in tropes like "hysterical women," "noble savages," and "darkest Africa."[22]

Nature is also subjugated in unconsciously dualistic attempts to elevate or romanticize it; nature is pure, timeless, or pristine when untouched by humans. Rather than being a blank slate awaiting our cultural interpretation, what if nature is entangled with culture?[23] The fractured relationship between white cis hetero male humans and nature allows and even encourages the exploitation of women, indigenous folks, and people of color; all are considered resources, free and externalized, in the cultural instrumentalist attitude of capitalism, which is structural enshrinement of white supremacy and cis hetero patriarchy.

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21. Astrida Neimanis. "Natural Others? On Nature, Culture and Knowledge." *SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory.* Sage (2014: 5).

22. I want to note here that Hegel, whose dialectics inspired dialectical materialism, contributed to this core tenet of racist ideology. He saw himself and his fellow cis white men as part of cultured humanity and BIPOC folks as part of "degraded, 'savage' nature... not surprisingly,... women also belong to this 'prehistoric' realm." Mies and Shiva 2014: 178-79).

23. Neimanis (2014: 28).

Nondual Materialism

The assumption that there is no place for religion in a materialist worldview is in itself dualistic, and at the same time, the basic tenets of any religious worldview must be interrogated. Marx was writing from a culture enmeshed in the dualism of Protestantism, which enabled the birth and proliferation of the capitalist cultural context he was critiquing. This unexamined dualism continues to engender the ongoing proliferation of climate-cataclysmic norms and practices. Though contemporary culture bears less outright Protestant influence, structural vestiges remain, as I explored above in largely unconscious nature/culture value hierarchies and concepts of naturalization. While me may excuse Marx as being a product of his time, ironically it is contemporary Marxist and socialist thought that maintains these unrecognized value hierarchies, and simultaneously fails to see the transformational power which Marx saw, and which ecofeminist criticism recognizes and brings to fruition in its new materialist readings. Ecofeminist collaborators Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva describe the rediscovery of spirituality through ecofeminist thought:

> As women in various movements -- ecology, peace, feminist, and especially health -- rediscovered the interdependence and connectedness of everything, they also rediscovered what was called the spiritual dimension of life -- the realization of this interconnectedness was itself sometimes called spirituality.[24]

Dialectical materialism is one of few places where Eurowestern philosophy stumbled on nondualism without help from Eastern wisdom traditions. Marx's ideas about how we are a part of nature while simultaneously enmeshed in it were radical in his time, and are perhaps also radical today, in a context still stuck in Eurowestern cultural dualism. His dialectical method for breaking things into their component parts gets misunderstood as dualism, because this is still our prevailing contextual lens.

Dialectical materialism is nondual and transformative through its sensitivity to contradictions. What is missing in this lens is the potential for reintegration and a deeper understanding of the whole.

24. Mies and Shiva (2014: 16).

Exploring nondual frameworks can help us understand how the instability of dialectics, a kind of struggle or opposition within everything, which engenders change. This instability could also be called generative dynamic tension, complementary rather than oppositional, continually seeking balance through thermodynamic energy flows akin to healthy metabolism, bodily or ecosystemic. What if, as Vicky Kirby asks, "culture was really nature all along?"[25] What we need is ecological insight grounded in embodiment. Nondual approaches to spirituality, politics, and relationships, in their acknowledgement of difference and sensitivity to interwoven relationships are particularly suited to providing this foundation. In my body, this feels like gaining a sense of the boundaries of myself, through the feeling of difference created by being in relationship with others. Simultaneously, I witness the fluidity of my identity in my relationships, and how in relationships that are balanced, new and surprising possibilities emerge. Per McKinnon,

> Marx's analysis... does offer us useful tools with which to begin analysis of, not just "religion", but also culture as a whole. It calls for attentiveness to the oppressive and the emancipatory, the ideological and the utopian, within each social moment. It requires attentiveness not only to heart and spirit, but also to the concrete heartless and spiritless situation in which heart and spirit are expressed. Religion as culture "reflects" those situations, but it also plays a role in constituting those heartless, spiritless situations; at the same time it points beyond them to other possibilities. Such is the dialectics of religion for those who want to follow in the spirit of Marx.[26]

After all, religion or spirituality of any kind has the potential to inspire visions of new and more ethical, emancipatory, and integrative ways to organize ourselves, as it does to treat our pain, or encourage complacency within structural systems of oppression. This is the ambivalent nature of dialectical materialism or any tool we employ, because the tool is only as nondual and transformative as our ability to envision and organize ourselves and our societies. Perhaps at its core, this potential is simply the capacity for change, which is an abiding part of what I seek to convey when I use the term "nonduality." As I like to say, one way to get to nonduality is

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25. Kirby. Foreword (2017: xii).

26. Andrew McKinnon. "Reading 'Opium of the People': Expression, Protest and the Dialectics of Religion." *Critical Sociology* 31(1): 13-38. April 2005. DOI 10.1163/1569163053084360. Accessed 7/12/2020.

What would it mean in action to redefine spiritual practice as a revaluing of the choice to remain in balance, in conscious relationship with the whole?

through exploring the play of duality. If I'm looking, though not too hard, nonduality may just wink at me. For me, nondual frameworks of understanding open up space within my identity, so that I may communicate how I experience myself through movement and change, relationship and interaction, rather than as a static self or concretized ego. It is an ongoing practice to not get tangled up in mistaking concrete identity for this fluidity of relational being and how I change who I am, responding and adapting to a context or interaction. To reframe a well-known quote from Italian Marxian Amadeo Bordiga, "the sterile and pathological solitude of the ego does not deserve the name of life, just as the treasure of the miser is not wealth, not even personal wealth."[27] What would it mean in action to redefine spiritual practice as a revaluing of the choice to remain in balance, in conscious relationship with the whole? Could

27. Amadeo Bordiga. "The Guignol in History." *II programma communista* 7 (April 3-17, 1953). Quoted in End Notes 5, Autumn 2019.

this be one definition for the nebulous buzzword "embodiment?" What about "spirituality?"

Internal contradictions are forces that eventually cause a system to tear itself apart, engendering positive transformation. Nonduality as a practice is conversely about integration and relationship. In this way, dialectical materialism is a perfect foil, a śiva to the śakti, of nondual practice. Or perhaps if you're a Vajrayāṇa Buddhist instead of a Nondual Tantrika, it's the other way around, a Sakti to Śiva![28]

Alienation from our labor is inseparable from alienation from nature, because it is at the heart of being human to work to shape the part of our nature which is ourselves. When we change ourselves, we change the world around us, the environment in which we are enmeshed. The attempt to extricate ourselves from the political, ethical, and spiritual morass we've co-created begs radical overhaul, and it begins with ourselves, multiplying outward through our interactions. Rather than creating systems of value based on falsely concrete notions of what anything 'is,' perhaps instead we can begin to value that whatever something seems to be, it contains the capacity for change.

28. Referring to Hindu and Buddhist tantrik doctrines, and their diametric cosmological notions of active and passive principles, Bharati notes, "their respective ascriptions to the two poles are obverse to each other. The Hindu assigned the male symbol apparatus to the passive, the female to the active pole; the Buddhist did the opposite; the Hindu assigned the knowledge principle to the passive male pole, and the dynamic principle to the active female pole; the Vajrayāṇa Buddhist did it the other way round." Personally I think this obverse relationship between the two traditions is tantrik af, and speaks to gender fluidity rather than essentialism. Bharati (1975: 19).

Mindful Ecofeminism and the Multispecies Sangha

By Greta Gaard

When practitioners set foot on a spiritual path, we want to bring our whole selves—our ethics and values, our commitments to social and environmental justice, and our embodied interbeing with all animal and plant species, water-bodies and air-bodies, soil and rock. Yet when it comes to multispecies relations, a diversity of practices appear: some Buddhist communities and cultures follow a vegan or vegetarian practice, while others do not. Like every part of the dharma, exploring the multispecies sangha provides practice in releasing attachment to view (and its co-arising righteous self-identity) and committing to the precepts.

Dharma Diversity

Since its founding in 1978, the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) has offered a channel for dharma practitioners whose practice links social, environmental, and species justice, yet multispecies justice has not often been at the forefront of BPF. To provide that consistent focus, Buddhists Concerned for Animals formed in 1982, and grew into Dharma Voices for Animals, a robust international organization

that includes well-known practitioners such as vegan author Will Tuttle, and dharma teacher Tara Brach, whose talks on "Compassion for Non-Human Animals" and "Compassion Towards All: Moving Toward a Plant-Based Diet" clearly link dharma teachings and practices with all sentient beings.

Other esteemed dharma practitioners have a different standpoint. Even the Dalai Lama is not strictly vegetarian, stating that "it is all right to have meat of dead animals, not those slaughtered or purposefully killed for meat"—a teaching attributed to the Buddha in his guidance for monastics.[1] Interpreted for western industrial societies, this guideline might follow Peter Singer's animal rights standpoint, which endorses eating road-killed animal bodies (i.e., deer, squirrels, racoons) but not hunting, raising, purchasing or consuming the bodies of animals raised and killed for human consumption.

Framing this diversity of dharma perspectives, Buddhist and ecofeminist philosopher Deane Curtin spent two years studying with the Dalai Lama, and continues to describe his own practice as *contextual moral veganism*, an ethical interspecies perspective sensitive to cultural and circumstantial contexts. "Economically well-off persons in technologically advanced countries," along with "persons who have a choice" of "what they will count as food," Curtin explains, are ones most responsible for using their privilege to embody nonviolence, and practice non-harming through their diets.

Entering this diversity of Buddhist perspectives, I write as a human-bodied animal for readers who are also human-bodied animals, exploring a mindful ecofeminist perspective on what I call the *multispecies sangha*--our spiritual and ecological community of belonging and right relationships. Ecofeminism is a lens that illuminates how the conceptual divisions between humans (whether by race, gender, class, sexuality, age, ability, or nation) are often mapped onto and reinforce divisions between privileged and the other beings who share this planet. Ecofeminists recognize that in

1.Rahul Karmakar, "Dalai Lama: Alright to Have Meat of Dead Animals, Not Those Slaughtered," *Hindustan Times*, April 7, 2017, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/dalai-lama-alright-to-have-meat-of-dead-animals-not-those-slaughtered/story-LfTDgXxkRO8iDyPHClDyVJ.html.

many industrialized cultures, each human-human division reinforces other divisions: racism reinforces speciesism; sexism and classism are co-constituted; sexuality, race, and species are interlinked in devaluations of all kinds involving power, political decision-making, self-determination, and economic well-being.

Awake in the Multispecies Sangha

In Minneapolis where I live and write, our human community has awakened as never before to the vast injustices of race and class, illuminated by the murder of George Floyd, whose dying words are only the most recent of at least 70 people who have died in U.S. law enforcement custody,[2] pleading "I can't breathe." In the U.S., Black people have been "treated like animals" for centuries, as Julia Feliz Brueck explains in *Veganism of Color: Decentering Whiteness in Human and Nonhuman Liberation*[3]: "animalization . . . is a tactic often employed to otherize marginalized groups." Her volume advances a "veganism of color" that "rejects all forms of oppression and supremacy," because "all oppression is wrong and interconnected." As a euro-american ecofeminist, I write in conversation with the larger community of antiracist, social, environmental and interspecies justice perspectives and texts such as Aph and Syl Ko's *Aphro-Ism,*[4] Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's *Becoming Human,*[5] and A. Breeze Harper's *Sistah Vegan*.[6] While the focus here brings a mindful ecofeminist perspective to cultivate awareness within a multispecies sangha, that sangha emerges from mindful attention to intersectional justice within and across all species.

To begin this exploration, I suggest we bring mindful attention to the primary ways many human-animals encounter other animal species, who are:

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2. Mike Baker et al., "Three Words. 70 Cases. The Tragic History of 'I Can't Breathe.,'" *The New York Times*, June 29, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/28/us/i-cant-breathe-police-arrest.html#:~:text=But%20while%20the%20cases%20of,I%20can't%20breathe.%E2%80%9D.

3. Julia Feliz Brueck. *Veganism of Color: Decentering Whiteness in Human and Nonhuman Liberation.* Sanctuary Publishers (2019).

4. Aph Ko and Syl Ko. *Aphro-Ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*. Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College (2019).

5. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson. *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*. New York: New York University Press (2020).

6. Dr. Amie "Breeze" Harper. *Sistah Vegan - Anti-oppression, food justice & veganism, n.d.*, http://sistahvegan.com/.

- confined in zoos, experimented on in laboratories, slaughtered to make our clothing and furniture, confined and forced to perform for us in circuses and rodeos;
- produced as "food"—whether on factory farms, through small locavore farms, or through hunting (fishing, shooting, bow-hunting, trapping, baiting);
- under our power as "pets" (for human-owners control these animals' diets, sexuality, reproduction, companions, range of movement, life and death);
- influenced by our behaviors of transit, building, consumption and waste in our homes & garages, streets, skies, lakes, and wildlands.

What guidance can the dharma offer us in our relations with other animal species? With at least six clear guiding principles, the dharma helps promote clear seeing and right relationships.

1

First, the *Brahmaviharas* (heavenly abodes) of *metta* (lovingkindness) and *karuna* (compassion) give us a clear path to happiness for ourselves and others, as stated in the *Metta Sutta:*

> May all beings be at ease.
> Whatever living beings there may be;
> Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
> The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
> The seen and the unseen,
> Those living near and far away,
> Those born and to-be-born,
> May all beings be at ease!

Being at ease is not congruent with being hunted, confined, stunned, drugged, separated from family, or slaughtered. How could we *keep separate* this beautiful wish for lovingkindness, and our current practices of citizen vs. undocumented, or human-nonhuman animal relations? Such dualisms are incompatible with the dharma.

2

In effect, the strategy we use to maintain this separation of values from behaviors is *delusion*, one of the *three root defilements* or poisons (the others are *grasping* and *aversion*) that keep sentient beings trapped in the cycle of suffering.

Of these three defilements, delusion is seen as the root cause. It is our wrong understanding, or wrong view of reality, our inability to understand conditions free of perceptual distortions. The antidote for overcoming delusion involves cultivating wisdom, insight, and right understanding, experiencing reality just as it is. Practicing mindfulness in our relations with other animal species—in all the ways that we encounter them—offers the second guiding principle in our multispecies sangha, offering a strong foundation for choosing behaviors and practices that dissolve delusion, grasping, and aversion, and move us closer toward ending suffering for all beings.

3

A third strategy involves using *the Precepts* to illuminate our relations with other species, and I draw particularly on three precepts. In Thich Nhat Hanh's *For a Future to be Possible*, the first precept, to *refrain from killing* becomes *reverence for life*. He writes,

> Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life.

When we buy animal bodies as food, we are effectively hiring and affirming the practices of those who breed, confine, medicate, mutilate, transport, and slaughter these animals. If we continue to pay for the products of animal suffering, we are indeed promoting and responsible for their suffering, practices that are not in accordance with the first precept. We can remember the purposes of consumer boycotts, used by social and environmental justice activists as a strategy for withdrawing funding from products and practices we find unethical. As members of a multispecies sangha, we can cultivate compassion by withdrawing funding from practices that require killing other sangha members.

A mindful consumer's boycott of animal suffering leads clearly to the second precept, to ***refrain from stealing*** or not taking that which is not freely given, as explained by Thich Nhat Hanh:

> Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I vow to cultivate loving kindness and

> learn ways to work for the well-being of people, animals, plants, and minerals. ...I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

We can be fairly certain that mothers do not freely give their offspring to be confined, chained at the neck, deprived of nutrition and affection, dropped into plastic bags and ground up, slaughtered, or taken into reproductive slavery. We can be fairly certain that most mammal mothers want to give their milk to feed their newborns, and not have their offspring torn away from them or sold at only a day-old to be confined in veal crates for four months until slaughter, while their mother's nourishing milk is stolen to feed adults of a different species. Instead, as the *Metta Sutta* suggests,

> ...Even as a mother protects with her life
> Her child, her only child,
> So with a boundless heart
> Should one cherish all living beings:
> Radiating kindness over the entire world.

The animals whose bodies we eat, wear, or sit on most likely did not "give" their skin and flesh for us to use; it was stolen from them.

Practicing the second precept of not stealing includes the first-precept practice of not killing and also not stealing the lives and *offspring* of other species, whose artificial production via forced insemination can be seen as ***sexual misconduct***, a third precept that Buddhist practitioners vow to refrain from practicing or supporting. As Thich Nhat Hanh describes the precept of sexual misconduct—"Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I vow to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families and society"—this awareness easily includes our multispecies sangha.

4

Recognizing our own inter-being with other animal species and other lives, we move closer to understanding *anatta* (not-self), one of the *three qualities of existence*, the understanding of which brings peace. In effect, separating humans from other animals is itself a product of delusion:

it suggests humans are not animals, and gives rise to a false sense of self (and attachment to selfhood) as separate and superior to other animal beings.

5

The suffering and death of other animals is linked with the suffering of many others, illuminating the principle of *dependent origination*.

For example, the exploitation of slaughterhouse workers co-arises with the slaughter of other species, for it is not possible to slit the throats of up to 900 sentient beings per hour, slip on bloody floors, be kicked in the face by conscious animals dragged along a conveyor belt without being physically and psychologically harmed. According to the U.S. Dept. of Labor's "Safety and Health Guide for the Meatpacking Industry," operational hazards for workers (who are often recent immigrants and/or non-native speakers of English) include amputations, eye injuries, fractures, cuts, falls, exposure to toxic substances, upper respiratory irritation and damage, and more. This multispecies ***dukkha*** is also linked to environmental harm.

From the United Nations' report on *Livestock's Long Shadow* (2006)[7] to Paul Hawken's *Drawdown* (2017),[8] repeated research studies confirm that the meat industry promotes climate change (through greenhouse gas emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide), ranking plant-rich diets at #3 of *Drawdown*'s top 100 solutions to climate change. Environmentalists report that production of a meat-based diet requires more than ten times the water required for a totally vegetarian diet, and is responsible for deforesting 55 square feet of Amazon rainforest per single hamburger. Meat and dairy consumption have been linked with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, various cancers, diabetes, and obesity. Then there's the waste: farmed animals produce 130 times as much excrement as does the entire U.S. human population. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, through run-off from factory farms, the suffering of animal-bodies spreads to water-bodies, polluting rivers and lakes more than all other industrial sources combined.

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7. "Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental Issues and Options," (Rome: Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2006), http://www.fao.org/3/a0701e/a0701e00.htm.

8. "Project Drawdown," Project Drawdown, n.d., https://drawdown.org/.

With the advent of COVID-19, we recognize how cross-species virus transmissions ("zoonosis") can produce pandemics such as AIDS and HIV, SARS, Ebola, swine flu and bird flu--all influenced by human intrusions into wildlife habitat, and the consumption of wild or "exotic" species, hastening species extinctions and pandemics alike.[9] Through humans' practices of consuming other species, these linked crises of coronavirus, climate change, and species extinctions illuminate the fifth dharma principle for the multispecies sangha, ***dependent origination***.

6

At the root of dependent origination is *delusion*, the view that our actions will somehow avoid the outcomes of actions. Instead of being guided by delusion, mindful Buddhist practitioners need a sixth dharma principle, the *discerning practices of skillful behavior*.

Buddhist morality offers us excellent tools for understanding animal suffering. Instead of the terms "right/wrong," Buddhists talk about *discernment* and *skillful* behaviors, meaning those choices and actions that move us in a direction that *reduces suffering*. In our lifetimes, we might not achieve a destination wherein all suffering has ended, but we can certainly make choices that move in that direction. Buddhist morality also emphasizes the difference between judgment and *discernment*: while judgment has a punitive flavor and creates a separation within oneself, or between self and other, discernment does not rely on a separate self. Instead, it simply encourages clear seeing in choosing skillful actions.

Mindful Ecofeminism and Womanism

Ecofeminism is an ethical-political-spiritual practice that fits well with Buddhist perspectives on the *Brahmaviharas*, the three poisons, the precepts, dependent origination, the qualities of existence, and the practices of discernment and skillful behavior.

Instead of "ecofeminism," Alice Walker created the term "womanist"[10] to mean a "black feminist or feminist of color," "committed to survival and wholeness," who "loves the Spirit" and

9. Emergence Magazine. "Shaking the Viral Tree: An Interview with David Quammen". Emergence Magazine Podcast. Podcast audio, March 25, 2020. https://emergencemagazine.org/story/shaking-the-viral-tree,

10. Womanist, n.d., https://www.womanistworkingcollective.org/womanist.

"loves herself. Regardless." At the opening of her dharma talk for an African American Buddhist retreat at Spirit Rock,[11] Walker describes the toll of slavery, quoting a story about

> White masters [who] raped black slave women who bore their children . . . . George Slaughter [was] a white farmer's son by a black woman, who came to a horrible death because he "didn't keep his place." Ambushed by white men, including his own father, he was shot while riding his horse because the saddle horse was "too fine." The story goes that when he was found, "the horse was drinking his blood."

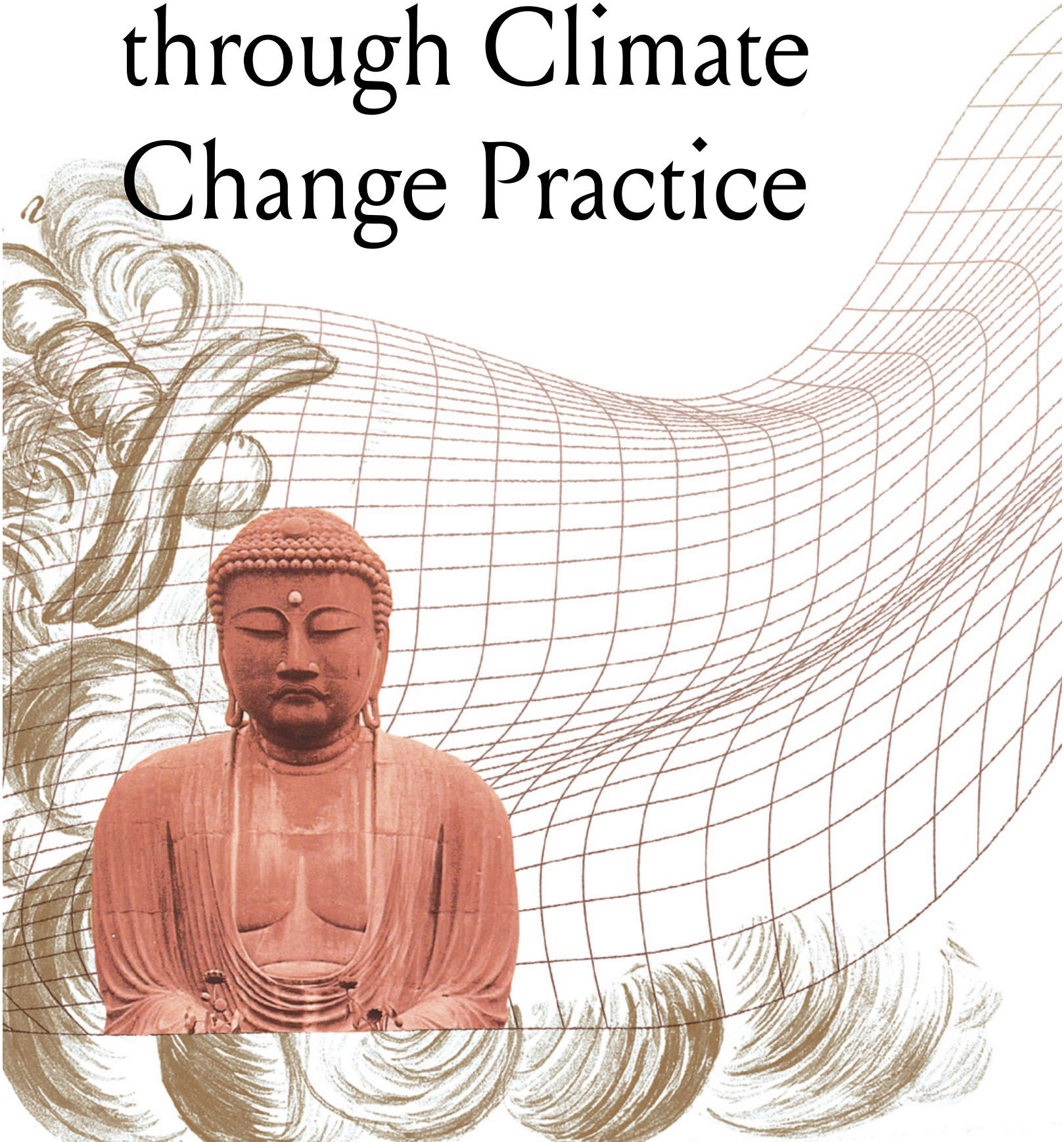
At the conclusion of her talk, Walker guides practitioners in offering a *metta* meditation for this multiracial, multispecies sangha: for the young man, George Slaughter; for George's mother; for George's father-owner; for those who rode with the father; and for the horse George was riding.

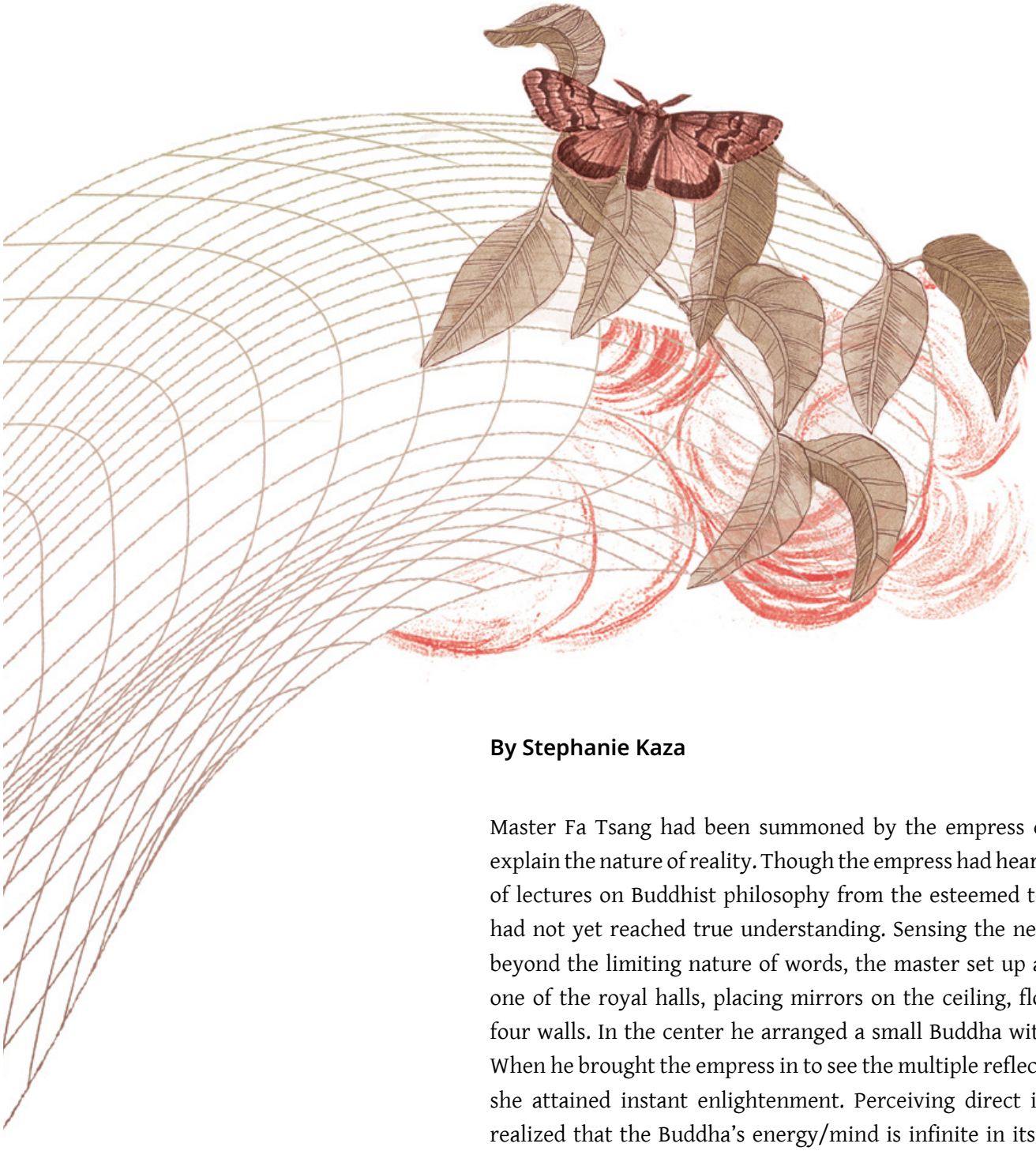
Through mindfulness, practitioners cultivate the capacity to turn toward suffering—our own suffering and the suffering of others, seeing these as linked. Through loving-kindness, through the precepts, through mindfulness of the effects of our actions on others, and through awareness of our fundamental interbeing, our practice cultivates a soft heart.

With this practice, may *all* beings in this multispecies sangha—all species, races, genders—be happy, peaceful, free.

11. Alice Walker, "Suffering Too Insignificant for the Majority to See," Lion's Roar, July 24, 2019, https://www.lionsroar.com/suffering-too-insignificant-for-the-majority-to-see/.

Forging the Spirit through Climate Change Practice





By Stephanie Kaza

Master Fa Tsang had been summoned by the empress of China to explain the nature of reality. Though the empress had heard a number of lectures on Buddhist philosophy from the esteemed teacher, she had not yet reached true understanding. Sensing the need to point beyond the limiting nature of words, the master set up a display in one of the royal halls, placing mirrors on the ceiling, floor, and all four walls. In the center he arranged a small Buddha with a candle. When he brought the empress in to see the multiple reflected images, she attained instant enlightenment. Perceiving direct insight, she realized that the Buddha's energy/mind is infinite in its manifestations throughout space and time.

Indra's net, a similar teaching metaphor from the seventh century, also points to the multifaceted nature of the universe as core understanding. In the Hua Yen school of Chinese Buddhism, key texts emphasize that the mind of every being is identical with the mind of the Buddha, and that enlightenment depends on this recognition. Spiritual practice is grounded in this insight as the source of all ethics and virtuous action. To picture the net, imagine an enormous web of linked lines stretching horizontally across the vast universe. Now

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add a second web of similar scope and shape stretching across space vertically. Holding this structure in your mind, add yet another web at each diagonal, observing the clarity and organization of these multiple overlapping nodes. Indra's net consists of an *infinite* number of crisscrossing nets, with a jewel at every point of intersection. Each jewel has an infinite number of facets that reflect every other jewel in the net. A truly wondrous conception!

In this metaphor, there is nothing outside the net and nothing that does not reverberate its presence throughout the net. The image communicates in a direct way the interdependent nature of reality, infinitely linked in relationship and infinitely co-creating every being. For modern environmentalists, this image fits well with an ecological worldview, conveying the scale of complexity we can barely perceive. The links can be seen as food webs, carbon pathways, parasitic cycles, soil building. The metaphor easily illustrates human impact: tarnish a jewel with soot or sludge and it shines much less brightly; break critical links through clearcutting and ecological relations suffer. Likewise, we see that each of us is a jewel in the net capable of effective action.

Here I want to take a look at how to *practice* with this understanding in everyday life, how to see our actions as grounded in such a net of relationship. But first, we need to see the shortcomings of the metaphor so we will not be limited in our true understanding. It does not, in fact, represent the constantly changing nature of reality; these crisscrossing lines and jewels are but a map or model of a single moment in time. To even get close to seeing what is going on, you would need to imagine all the webs in motion — shifting and blowing, jiggling and tearing, growing new threads and repairing broken links. The jewels, too, are changing constantly, expanding and shrinking, moving closer to and farther from other jewels, changing behavior by day and night. In other words, the whole universe is morphing, growing, moving, learning, adapting beyond any human comprehension. No single model can even come close to capturing all that is happening.

Thus it would be impossible to offer a definitive approach to practice that would meet all circumstances. Instead let me explore two arenas as a sample introduction — the physical world of climate change and the emotions that arise in response — a rich practice field, indeed, and one in which we are inescapably involved and impacted, and most certainly way beyond our usual capacities.

KEY TERMS

Furyu: Flowing Wind
Seishin Tanren: Spirit Forging
Mui: Deep Calm
Myo: The Mysterious
Myo: The Mysterious
Yugen: The State beyond words and intellectual activity
Shoshin: Beginner's Mind
Kobai: Those with less experience
Sempai: Those with more experience
Reigi: Respect for self and others

Read almost any book on climate change and you are quickly immersed in the dynamics of shifting temperatures, amplifying feedback loops, and potential tipping points. I found *The Fate of Greenland* by Philip Conkling et al. to be particularly informative, with Gary Comer's stunning aerial photos of ice phenomena and shifting shorelines. The Indra's net of climate change is composed of ice floes, jet streams, coal plants, traffic jams, and soil microbes. And of course, much much more. Climate scientists in many countries are working to put the puzzle pieces together that explain and predict the shifting nature of the global ocean/atmosphere/soil system. Climate models take observed patterns and project them into the future. But unexpected combinations of causes and conditions keep adding complexity to the models and demanding a stance of humility.

What, then, does it mean to practice with Indra's net as we look at climate change? How can such practice help develop a perspective or approach that will develop our true understanding of the nature of the universe? Certainly climate change encompasses most of the major systems drivers that are shaping the physical world today as well as its future. Practicing with climate change requires us to have expanded spatial and also temporal understandings of the dynamic processes at play. We must learn not only about the range of sites and shifting patterns taking place today, but also about the historic precedents and how they set certain global trends in motion. This is more than what most of our minds can handle! Human neural patterns are formed primarily in relation to immediate stimuli and needs in the family, home, and community — a much smaller scale than the immense globe. Learning about climate change processes literally stretches the mind to grander scales than our normal conditioning. The practice part of this learning is to stay the course as our small-scale minds take in the vast complexities and endless flux of climate change.

It is, as you may have already tasted yourself, both enlightening and sobering all at once. Climate studies reveal patterns, such as the oceanic conveyor belts, that cannot be seen by any one individual but are the sum of many data sets. Practicing with Indra's net requires an active imagination to grasp the full impact of such enormous currents of water on not only global weather but the distribution of marine species. For the climate novice, the patterns can be overwhelming in their implications and complexity. To stay with the practice, then, one focuses on the nature of the dynamics — how they are shaped by amplifying or dampening feedback, how patterns reach tipping points, how cycles interact over long and short periods of time. You become large and nothing all at once. In climate terms, a single human life is relatively insignificant, but this does not mean you subtract yourself from the net. Instead you taste the vastness of mind, one might say, that stretches in all directions and across all eons of time. This standpoint provides quite a contrast to the usual short-term thinking that characterizes most of our politics, economics, and human relations.

Perhaps already you are feeling some of the emotions that swirl around climate change — fear, discouragement, helplessness, despair, frustration. These are all part of the web, too, and therefore part of the practice field. The practice mind aims first to observe and be aware of what is happening, to stay alert in the present moment and engage what is at hand. To practice with the web of emotions is to observe dynamics, nuance, flavor, the shape of what arises and what passes away. This may be one's own internal and personal response to climate change or social patterns of emotional response. Often these are influenced by personal and shared history, beliefs and values, and long-standing emotional habits. To see clearly can be very challenging.

From quite an unexpected source, I came upon a set of Japanese terms related to emotional states, but described in terms of their contribution to art practice. Emotional sensitivity is highly valued in Japanese arts for expressing the ineffable while also acknowledging the fragility of human experience. Feeling tone is seen as a reflection of the dynamic universe, the ever-changing Indra's net. *Mono no aware* points to the sense of poignancy from the fleeting and impermanent nature of the world and the tinge of sadness that comes with this recognition. Being with this feeling stimulates an appreciation for things as they are right now, even as we know they will pass away. The acceleration of climate change can evoke this feeling on

an almost daily basis as shorelines erode and sea levels rise. Taking this up as a practice opportunity, you engage the nature of impermanence, including your own fleeting existence.

Climate change raises issues of attachment: we yearn to decelerate the rates of change, to protect the vanishing species, to stop the escalating damage. The quality of *furyu*, or "flowing wind," is a sense of energy moving through life that touches everything fully while clinging to nothing. This supports appreciation for all we are part of, but also detachment. This is not about giving up to emotional defeat, but rather realizing that we too are transient. Embracing this means wasting less energy in resistance and accepting how deeply aligned we are with the patterns of nature. We may even be able to attain a state of *mui*, deep calmness in harmony with nature, that allows us to "do nothing" until the time is right, a very Taoist approach to conserving personal energy.

Responses to climate change can tend to overemphasize the dark and sometimes destructive emotions of depression, anger, and grief. In Japanese arts practice such as the Way of Tea or flower arranging, the emotional tone leans more toward myo, the mysterious. By practicing alertness to the pace, the timing, the frame of mind for a given activity, the practitioner expresses the unique aspects of a single moment. Some of this is revealed in the actions of the practice, but much points to yugen, the cloudy and unfathomable state beyond words and intellectual activity. This quality may not seem at all related to climate change, but it can provide a deeper emotional perspective as an alternative to the passing states of anxiety and anger.

Working with Indra's net is a practice that develops character and builds capacity and resilience. Japanese teachers speak of *seishin tanren*, or "spirit forging." Practicing tea ceremony and practicing with climate change both purify and strengthen the spirit, through facing repeated challenges and committing to the discipline that is required. Just as forging a fine sword develops its strength and stability, so, too, does Indra's net practice build spiritual capacity to meet the challenges of climate change yet to come. Rather than resisting the frustrations and setbacks of climate policy, one simply keeps going, leaning into the commitment of the practice. With this orientation, all elements of climate change are part of the practice field — damaging hurricanes, political trade-offs, denial campaigns, climate refugees. You keep working with what is arising, both physically and emotionally.

The Japanese arts thus offer some helpful supports for practicing in the various *Do*s or Ways of art practice. It seems to me that they can be applied to a broader practice approach with Indra's net and are certainly worth exploring. *Shoshin*, or beginner's mind, is the ability to bring a fresh perspective to any situation, free of the clutter of opinions or history. You approach the situation at hand as if you are seeing it for the first time. To such a mind, in even the most entrenched circumstances, there are always untapped possibilities. Beginner's mind is sometimes called "don't-know mind." This helps us remember that we actually can't know all the factors at play and that the situation may shift in a way not yet apparent to us. To sense even these small beginnings, we might develop *kan,* or intuitive perception, through strengthening our capacities for observation and our trust in direct experience.

The Japanese arts are passed down from one person to another across generations, depending very much on those who have mastered the disciplines and techniques. In every tradition, the *kobai* (those of less experience) are expected to learn from *sempai* (those of greater experience). You know where you stand on the scale of experience and there is always someone with more wisdom and skill to turn to for support. While climate change practice may not be organized that clearly, it can help to situate yourself in relation to others who have more skill in this practice terrain. We can ask those with more experience to be mentors for those of us with less. And no matter how little we think we know or have mastered in this territory, we can always provide support to others with still less confidence.

In the contentious context of today's climate debates, it can be very helpful to take up the practice of *reigi*, or respect for self and other, especially in group settings. Sometimes this is narrowly interpreted to mean "bowing," but the more important focus is on one's attitude. Respecting one's self means not dividing the mind and body, thoughts and actions. If you are able to act with integrity from a place of alignment, it will reflect your own self-knowledge and discipline in the practice. Remembering that others, too, are jewels in Indra's net can help mitigate against disrespectful judgments and acting out.

None of this is easy. Practicing with Indra's net offers many opportunities to develop mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual discipline. Taking up climate change work or any other difficult environmental or social justice work as a life project requires resilience and stability that can carry you through the failures and setbacks. Seeing the work as a practice can shift the frame to a longer view and provide guiding principles that deepen your capacities. The good news is that many people are very interested in this approach, and there are *sempai* out there leading the way. We have just this life, this moment to take up the practice. *Ichi-go, Ichi-e* — "one encounter, one meeting"— every moment offers a unique chance to be fully present. When we are aligned completely with that moment and all that is arising in Indra's net, our practice can be very effective indeed.

The Spiritual Biology of Creation & Creativity

By Isa Gucciardi

The Earth is our Mother.
— *Paiute chant*

There is much to be learned about the spiritual path the creative power of a woman's body mediates. A menstruating woman's body naturally aligns her with the cycles of the earth and the moon, and these cycles are the basis for new forms and new life. Women's bodies enable them to give, sustain, and nurture life.

This natural alignment reveals a woman's true nature to her. Women are beings who work intimately with the powers of creation that characterize the creativity of the universe. They work with this power almost every day of their lives as their bodies continuously move through the stages of initiation. Their responses to this power coursing through their bodies determines the way they engage with life and the way their spiritual path can open to them.

When we learn to look at biological experience in this way, we realize that our biology significantly informs our spiritual path. Because much of women's physiology is dedicated to the creation of new life, there is much in women's spiritual paths that has to do with creativity and generativity. Within their biology, women have the power to direct, nurture, and inspire change. Men who become students of this alignment can also learn how these powerful forces

of change can be harnessed and directed.

The initiations of the sacred feminine do not belong only to women. Men also experience significant changes in biology over the course of their lives and each stage of initiation has important lessons to offer them. The teachings of creativity and nurturing do not belong to women alone. Men can follow the spiritual path their bodies open to them and step into greater alignment with wholeness, generativity, and the flow of change as well.

As human beings, our bodies go through different stages of creation and dissolution. These stages mark us and define us. Let's review the significant markers of biological change women experience. These include the initiations of birth, puberty, menstruation, sexuality, giving birth (or making the decision not to give birth), menopause, and their own death as important phases in their physical journey through life.

Again, men share many of these changes within their own physiology. Though these are biological experiences, they carry intense emotional and mental components for both men and women. We all have emotional and mental reactions to these biological events that determine what meaning we assign to them. This assignment of meaning is an important aspect of the spiritual path that is also part of our journey through life.

The Initiation of Birth

As we are born, we no longer exist as part of someone else's body, but exist independently. We move from an existence of aquatic dependence to independence in a world of air. The needs we have at this time involve intense physical care. We learn the role of safety, nurturing, and security.

Stanislov Grof, an influential transpersonal psychologist, states that our birth can be a template for our life. He expounds on this idea in his book, *Realms of the Unconscious*, where he presents his theory on Basic Perinatal Matrices. This theory states that the way we experience our birth and the type of nurturing, or lack thereof at that time, becomes the foundation for everything we experience later in life. If we are well-nurtured, we carry that experience with us, and learn to care for ourselves. If we are not nurtured well, our emotional response can be informed by this lack and we can feel unprotected. The good news is, if we find ourselves in the latter experience, we

are often motivated to seek out a sense of protection. Many spiritual quests begin in this way.

Trusting in the possibility of protection can sustain us as we move through the most challenging parts of our lives. This trust can pierce through anything that might frighten us, allowing us to be in the world with less fear. As we begin to trust that we can confront our fears and find protection in our willingness to trust, we can be in the world in an entirely new way. The nurturing that this protection provides is an essential quality of the sacred feminine.

The concept of the sacred feminine, also known as the great feminine or the divine feminine, and often called the "great mother" is common to many cultural and religious traditions. These terms all refer to the essential source of life. The many icons of the sacred feminine are viewed in these traditions as the generator and caretaker of life. The images of the great feminine vary from tradition to tradition, but the values and qualities of these images are surprisingly consistent. Whatever her form, she is always considered a protector and guardian of life.

The Initiation of Puberty

The change at puberty is very clear. As children, we were incapable of reproduction, but with puberty, we can now participate in the creation of life. As we step into puberty, our childhood falls away and our journey into adulthood begins. The lessons that are offered to us at this time revolve around identity as we become capable of creating new life. Who am I if I am changing so radically? Who was I before, and who will I become? What does it mean to be a woman? What does it mean to be a man?

It is often around the time of puberty that we begin to question those around us and our role in the social structures that surround us. This type of inquiry is an essential aspect of the spiritual path. This is an initiation where we can begin to understand the nature of our authentic experience, where we learn who we truly are, what our deepest aspirations are, and where they might lead us. As we develop this understanding, experiences of transition and change give us many opportunities to expand our awareness.

At puberty, we are trying to distinguish our individual experience within and apart from the context of our family and society. We are trying to understand what our individual desires and needs are

and how to express them within the context of the collective. As we move into the transformation into adulthood and the further initiations we encounter there, we come to know ourselves. Much of this learning is catalyzed by our biology.

For instance, one of my students was distressed that her newly developing hips kept her from running as fast or climbing as high as she had been able to before puberty. It was only at puberty that she entered into the conversations around gender roles and found that she was not suited to the ones that she had, as a woman, been assigned by society. Sometimes a path to knowing ourselves better is to stay close to what our biology is revealing to us about who we are and how we express ourselves in the world

The Initiation of Menstruation

The experience of change at puberty is emphasized for many women through menstruation. With women's menstrual cycles, there is a constant ebb and flow of change in their bodies every month. This change is central to many women's experience of being human. Women's bodies require them to continuously engage in life and death with the building of form and the tearing down of form each month. Through the phases of the menstrual cycle, women can be naturally directed toward a deep inquiry into the nature of change.

The quality of the sacred feminine emphasized with menstruation can best be expressed as generativity. In order to generate new forms, women have to accept the dissolution of old ones. Women who are able to embody this experience can access depths of creative potential. Creativity and generativity, and their intimate connection with life and death, are the essence of our human experience.

If we cannot find peace with the birth and death of the forms of our life, we can find ourselves in defensive postures which prevent us from deeply participating in life. For instance, some women reject their monthly periods. They may mourn the lost freedom of childhood before their monthly cycle defined so much of their experience, or they may not be able to tolerate the pain their cycles cause them. This rejection can lead to a loss of connection with their bodies. On a physical level, this can translate to a rejection of the spiritual path that the creative impulse of menstruation provides.

If this happens, a woman's spiritual inquiry can become constricted and restrained because she is rejecting the path her

We all have emotional and mental reactions to these biological events that determine what meaning we assign to them. This assignment of meaning is an important aspect of the spiritual path that is also part of our journey through life.

biology has opened for her. Women can lose connection with the messages from their bodies as they move away from its needs. This can lead to confusion for them.

The hormonal shift of a woman's monthly cycle offers her a way to access deeper emotions. These emotions are always there, but they become more evident as a woman's period nears. These emotions are often dismissed as premenstrual syndrome. However, it is actually an important moment where the veil lifts between our conscious mind and our complex emotional and mental experience. This can feel inconvenient or difficult when we are confronted with emotional and mental states we might normally try to keep at arm's length.

But attending to our deeper experience is necessary if we are to stay healthy and whole. This understanding is one of the many teachings the flow of change offers menstruating women as they move through their monthly cycles. It is an important aspect of this stage of the initiatory process our bodies present us. And again, , the way each woman responds to her cycle can deeply inform emotional and spiritual development.

The Initiation of Sexuality

The next significant change in our experience of our biology occurs when we encounter another person sexually. This is especially true when we have sex for the first time as this initial experience can become a template which can inform later sexual experience. We are changed by interacting with the needs of another's body in this intimate way. The qualities of the sacred feminine that are emphasized in sex are receptivity and mutuality. This experience can be disrupted if our first sexual encounter is not consensual or traumatic. If, for any reason, we are unable to receive another's experience or our own experience as we engage with another sexually, we cannot fully open to the wisdom that the sexual encounter offers us.

The wisdom that is gained through engaging with another sexually centers around how well we maintain our sense of self even as we seek to transcend it through orgasm. The sexual encounter challenges us to reconcile opposites on multiple levels. The teachings that emerge as we express ourselves fully to another person can be revelatory. This revelation deepens as we move beyond our usual definitions of who we are and move toward orgasmic union with the other.

Through our sexuality, we can learn to open to another person even as we maintain our individual identity. We learn how another person's expression informs us and how it takes us beyond the way we define ourselves. These are deep spiritual questions that are discovered and explored through the initiation of sexuality. The effort to know the self in relation to the other or in relation to the transcendent is at the heart of spiritual inquiry and this exploration is directly accessible through sex.

The Initiation of Giving Birth

The process of giving birth to a child reveals much about how the

creative force at the heart of all manifestation moves. The birthing mother needs the same thing that all those who create need. She needs protection, care, strength, and concentration. She needs perseverance, and she needs to be able to trust her own creative instincts. She needs to feel connected to the forces of creation, and she needs to be able to open and surrender fully to these forces. For the mother, the outcome of all this work is her child. For the artist, the outcome is the manifestation of their art.

For all initiates on the path of creativity and generativity, the experience of the birthing process provides important information about where they are on the path that the Great Mother mediates. It can help them know what they have not yet mastered and offer them an opportunity to meet challenges and overcome them. It can empower them to become more intimate with the forces of creation and help them learn how to align with them and direct them. The loss of connection with this creative power is one of the reasons people struggle as they move from one initiation to the next. By engaging with the creative force through birthing or through other creative endeavors, we enter a path that can help us connect to the power of our native creativity.

Participating in the birthing process can help us understand the power of the creative force in a new way. However, the wisdom generated from giving birth is easily lost if the power that belongs to the mother or the artist is appropriated by those to whom it does not belong. The power of the creative process must be protected. For instance, a pregnant woman who is encouraged to schedule a C-section to suit hospital timetables may give up her power to doctors and administrators as she loses contact with the natural course of her birthing.

In her book *Pushed*, Jennifer Block gives an excellent example of the way our culture has come to regard medical interventions, which can be life-saving and beneficial when applied when needed, as the norm for birth, rather than the exception. She explores how intervention is applied when it is not necessarily the better choice for mothers and their babies. If we, as a culture, value the forces that drive a natural, unimpeded path to creative manifestation, we can reclaim and dedicate its power to its proper sources. In doing so, we preserve the wisdom at the heart of creativity and dedicate it to the welfare of mothers, their children, and the forces of society that seek to preserve this power properly.

It is important to remember that we don't have to give birth to a child to know what it is to give life. We all know what it is to bring a new idea into the world, to nourish it, to watch it grow, and to develop nonattachment as it evolves beyond us. Certainly, as women give birth, they enter into a whole new level of learning about what it is to nurture and protect both themselves and their child. Partners who participate in the birthing process and in the care of children also experience dramatic lessons about generosity, receptivity, and nurturing. Anyone who cares for stray animals, tends a garden, or who supports others in any way is already in intimate connection with these teachings. These are some of the primary spiritual teachings our biology can open to us.

The Initiation of Menopause

With menopause, there is a change in biological state where people are no longer able to reproduce. Menopause is more defined for women than it is for men with the ending of their menstrual cycles, but many men also lose the ability to procreate and have decreased erectile function as they age. This initiation, and the meaning the individual extracts from it, is central to the way many women and men define themselves. It can be an opportunity for new inquiry into the definition of self and meaning.

The experience of menopause not only affects the way people define themselves and the way they relate to the rest of society, but it also defines how society relates to them. For instance, many women and men feel they are somehow less valuable once the creative potential of their biology shifts with menopause. Indeed, many cultures reinforce this idea.

However, in many traditional societies, women step into positions of power as they go through this change. For instance, among the Haudenosaunee, Native Americans of the eastern seaboard of North America, it is the highly respected grandmothers, the Gantowisas, who manage the economic, social, and spiritual imperatives of that society. In her book, *Matriarchal Societies*, Heidi Goettner-Abendroth demonstrates the way the Gantowisas maintain economic and political parity in their societies. Through regular feasts and ceremonies, they direct the redistribution of goods to ensure that no member of the society stays poor.

This respected position of older women among the Haudeno-

saunee is due in part to the recognition that the massive creative power that a woman's body holds in her reproductive years is now retained within her. It is understood that this power can become a source of wisdom and creativity for the entire community to draw upon. Mystic vision and clairvoyance are discovered internally. They are not found in outward expression. It takes patience and skill to cultivate these qualities. Wisdom must be nurtured internally on the path toward understanding the mystery of their experience. The initiation of menopause is crucial, as its teachings direct spiritual inquiry inward and illuminate the inner paths of awareness.

The Initiation of Death

Death is a definite change in biological state whose import defines many people's spiritual quests. The knowledge that we will lose our bodies drives spiritual inquiry for many. At this stage of our biological development, the teachings on the surrender to the vast spaciousness of the sacred feminine take on new import.

Spaciousness is a primary quality of the sacred feminine. This spaciousness is the essence of 'yin,' an inward, yielding movement, which opens and broadens our experience internally. It is the complementary aspect to the 'yang' or masculine principle of external movement that more generally characterizes the impulse toward life. When these two principles are in balance within us, we are more at peace internally and our external world tends to reflect that peace. Our actions are more measured and effective, and we are able to rest deeply. When we recognize and work with this spaciousness as we move through all of our initiatory moments, we can be better prepared for the last moment of our initiation process in this lifetime.

If we do have difficulty in meeting any of the initiations our biology brings us during the course of our life, our ability to move into the initiation process of our death can be adversely affected. This problem can be compounded by our culture's orientation to death. We are hardly encouraged to think about it as an important event that our walk through this life might be preparing us for.

In Buddhist teachings, awareness of death is fundamental to spiritual practice. There is an acceptance, even a cultivation of an attitude of surrender to the experience of life that is designed as a preparatory process to open to the mystery that lies beyond the experience of life. There is an expression, "To live a good life, live

your life with death on your left shoulder."

Biology and Spirituality

Our biology guides us to confront the inquiry that all religious or spiritual traditions try to address: What is life? What creates life? What is the meaning of life? What are the processes that generate and sustain life? What is death? How are we to understand the rising and passing away of phenomena? How are we to understand how these processes affect our personal and collective experience?

As important as our biology is in forming our experience, there is a mystery beyond the physical that is evoked through it. This mystery is revealed when we begin to understand that our biology is one of the keys that opens our spiritual path to us. It is a mystery that can be understood by becoming a student of the initiations our bodies offer us.

In traditional societies, these moments are recognized as important to the development of spiritual meaning. In these cultures, each of these transitions has its rituals, ceremonies, or processes. These are designed to assign spiritual meaning to these biological events. They become the way individuals define themselves and how others define them.

Although we live in a world where less attention and meaning are assigned to these moments formally, they are still important markers in our physical, emotional, and spiritual development. Our reaction to these biological changes can determine our spiritual path. When we feel congruent with these physical changes, we feel at peace spiritually. When our reactions are out of sync with these changes, our reactions can show us where we have to work to become more at peace with who we are. Either way, our bodies are consummate teachers.

The power of the Great Mother has always been accessible to us. Her power is the power of the Earth. We can learn to acknowledge all that she offers us as we recognize how our bodies, which are part of the earth, open our spirit and our spiritual path to us and show us where we need to learn and mature. We can learn to identify the moments of transition and change in our biological state as important guideposts in that learning. We can become familiar with these guideposts as moments of initiation – a transformation from one way of being to another. We can appreciate how each initiatory moment offers us the

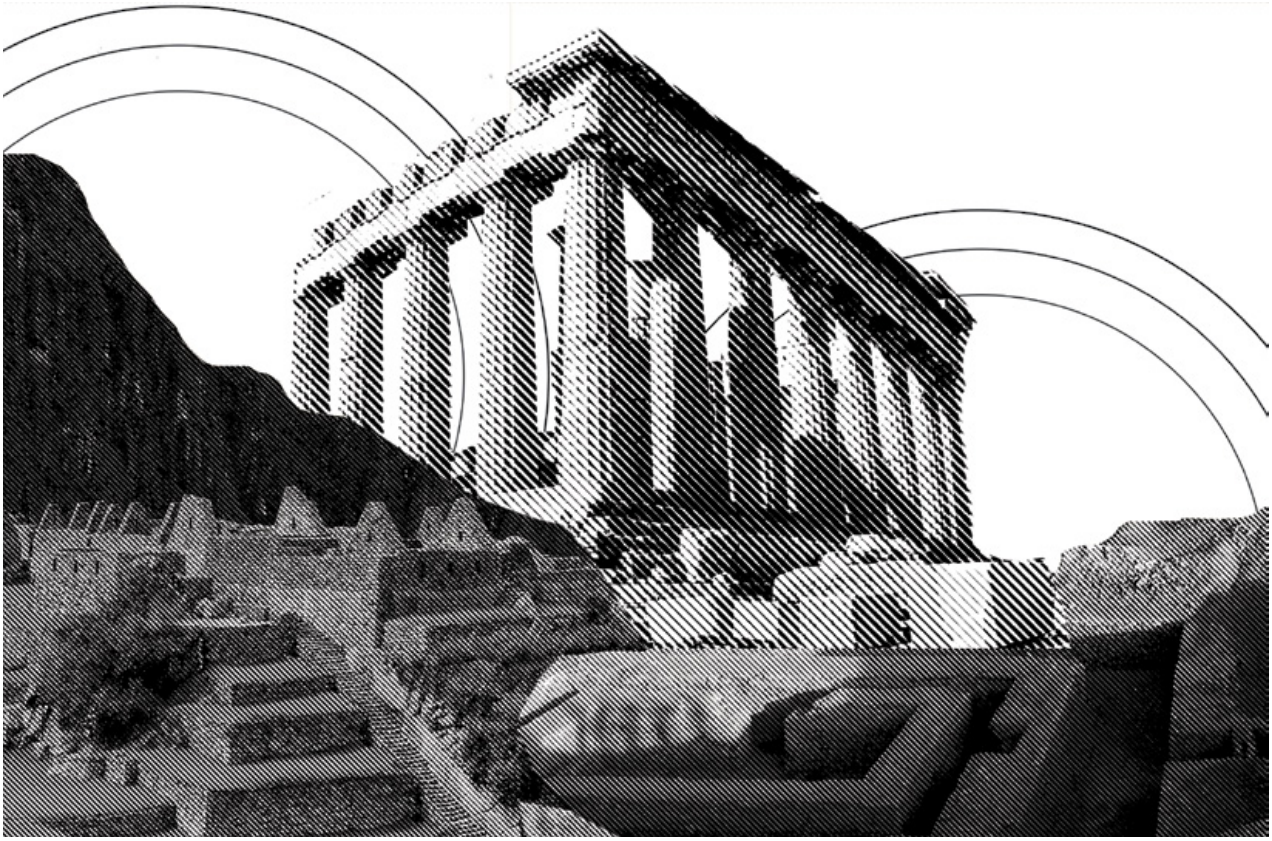
tools we need to develop and understand ourselves. Our lives can take on new meaning and depth when we recognize our connection to the cycles of change mediated by the Earth.

Our biology outlines an initiatory path of great promise. It can lead us step by step through the challenges of life in an organized and coherent way if we allow it. The split between our minds, our bodies, our spirits, and the Earth that comes from living in a society that does not recognize the importance of the initiatory moment causes us to struggle unnecessarily. Nowhere is this more evident than in birthing environments where mothers and children are not allowed to move through the initiation of birth in an uninterrupted way. When we understand our lives as a path of initiation and learn how to protect the moments of greatest vulnerability on that path, our priorities shift. When we learn that it is our duty and our responsibility to safeguard the power of our own and others' initiatory moments, we gain a new perspective on what it is to be human.

Re-Membering Our Relation to the Earth Soil for Ecologically Sound Cities

By Jean Gardner

Climate Emergency, Pandemic, Racial Injustice – all point to *humanity's* fatal error. Humanity is not *the* superior species on the Earth nor is any particular human group more superior than others. We *Humans* are all born from *humus*—from the soil. Poison the soil. We poison ourselves & all other animals, plants, birds, insects – all of life. How? Life in all forms can't live without water, without air, without soil. Can we learn from the past to practice *humility* in enough time to save the Earth – Our Home?



Historical cities offer insights relevant to current efforts to regenerate an ecologically healthy Earth. The following essay explores the bonds between three soil communities and their cities – Uruk, Athens, and Machu Picchu. These cities illustrate three different relationships to soil – as a Parasite on Soil, as a Disease of Soil, or as a Soil Maker. Based on this research, I urge us to re-member our relation to the Earth by making our habitats soil-generators.

THE SEEDING OF CITIES

Six thousand years ago ancient Uruk formed part of a network of settlements that for the first time made urban life possible. Located along the Euphrates River just north of the present-day Persian Gulf, Uruk was the chief cultural center of Sumer and its foremost religious center. In the sacred precinct of the fertility Goddess Ishtar stood her Ziggurat, representing the Cosmic Mountain rising out of the primal chaos at the moment of creation. Her Temple was never surpassed in Sumer in size and richness of architectural details. The terraces of the stepped altar regularly held the vegetable offerings from Uruk's gardens and date groves, transforming the tiered Ziggurat into a

series of "green roofs."[1]

The duty of the King of Uruk was to embellish and maintain his city. City walls dominated Sumerian urban architecture. Gateways displayed the city's wealth, impressed visitors, and served as civic centers. To enhance these, King Gilgamesh defies an ancient sacred prohibition against felling cedars growing in the mountains north of the city. He and his companion, Enkidu, kill the protective forest monster. They clear-cut the cedars to construct a magnificent new gate in the city ramparts.[2]

Gilgamesh's actions anger the supreme Gods, who inflict flood, famine, and sorrow on the inhabitants of Uruk. The Gods also curse Enkidu, who embodies what is 'wild and untamed' in the human. He personifies what we recognize today as our alignment with natural systems. Enkidu dies a painful death. Horrified at the possibility of his own death, Gilgamesh seeks immortality. After fruitless wanderings, the King realizes that he can only achieve eternal life through the longevity of what he builds to sustain Uruk. At the end of the tale, he concentrates on maintaining the city walls, canals, gardens, and temple precincts.[3] He concentrates on, what we would describe as sustaining the city's relation to its ecology...to its place on the Earth.

Modern ecology interprets this nearly five-thousand-year-old tale for us. Clear cutting mountain forests destroys wild nature. It leads to increased water run-off and unexpected, often destructive flooding. Torrential inundations in turn drown crops in the surrounding low-lying lands, creating famine. Cities face the likelihood of demise when their food supply ends. Their citizens have dire choices: starving to death, subjugating foreign territories to supply them with food, being conquered by enemies, or abandoning their city.

Ecological design also illuminates the Gilgamesh legend. Human communities form life-dependent relations with the natural systems of their locality. Through trade, these essential bonds extend to the ecologies of far-distant lands. Sometimes, as in the case of Uruk, cities develop life-sustaining connections with remote territories whose natural bounty they violently seize. The Gilgamesh story, the oldest written record we have, warns us that in order for urban complexes

1. Sigfried Giedion. *The Eternal Present. The Beginnings of Architecture. New York: Bollingen Foundation* (1964: 16, 203).
2. Gilgamesh. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh (Accessed 06/8/2020).
3. Ibid.

to achieve longevity, city constructors cannot ignore these ecological connections. Instead, urban builders need to develop building practices that treat cities, their surrounding regions, the lands of their trading partners, and appropriated lands as one integrated organism.

History records that the rulers of Sumerian cities did learn to co-exist for an extraordinarily long time within the Euphrates-Tigris river system, just as the story of Gilgamesh suggests. They achieved an urban energetics giving their cities a longevity the Greek polis never obtained.[4] Ultimately, the soils of Sumerian cities lost their viability but only after these settlements survived for nearly four millennia. Can our cities achieve a comparably long life?

CITIES INTEGRAL TO SOIL COMMUNITIES

Contrary to modern perceptions, human settlements are not separate from the natural systems they penetrate or from their neighboring countrysides. Instead, cities form vital relationships within their regional soil communities. British historian Edward Hyams describes the basic characteristics of soil communities and the position of cities within them in his extraordinary *Soil & Civilization*, a historical study of humanity's place within the Earth's planetary ecology.[5] Hyams reminds us that soil is not a dead inert resource but an organism. The rock, humus, bacteria, atmosphere, water, fungi, and earthworms that comprise soil constitute a biological, organic, living community. Humans intrude into these communities by the way we create cities.

Hyams organizes the relational dynamics that cities form within existing soil communities into three energetics: Man as a Parasite on Soil, Man as a Disease of Soil, and Man as a Soil Maker. In order for us to understand the functional place of green roofs, urban neighborhood gardens, and other similar soil-makers within today's cities, we need to recognize the ongoing historical consequences of these three dynamics. They continue to constrain life on the Earth today.[6] What follows is a brief description of three historical cities -- Uruk, Athens, and Machu Picchu that illustrates the three major impacts of cities on their soil communities.

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4. A. Leo Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia: A Portrait of a Dead Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964: 128).

5. Edward S. Hyams. *Soil & Civilization.* New York: Harper Colophon (1976: 18, 19, 23, 26, 27).

6. Ibid, 28, 29.

CITIES AS PARASITES ON SOIL: URUK

The success of Gilgamesh and succeeding rulers of Uruk is due in large part to modulating agricultural practices to the cyclical rhythms of the Euphrates-Tigris alluvial river system. Hyams characterizes this relationship between Uruk and the river system as that of a benign parasite to its host. In other words, the people of Uruk fed on the fertility of the river system, much as a few fleas live off a dog, without doing any damage to the canine. As Hyams indicates, the fruitful soils of the Euphrates-Tigris system "do not owe their nearly inexhaustible resources only to stored capital accumulated during countless years of silting, but to annual renewal by present and continuing silting." Such soils "are capable of supporting a parasitic community for long periods, sometimes almost indefinitely." For centuries, the parasitic relation of Sumerian cities to this resilient region did no apparent harm. The annual flooding of the rivers regularly regenerated the soil community. The Sumerians used the flooding as the basis of their irrigation-dependent agriculture whose fruits they offered to the goddess Ishtar.[6]

However, the waters of the river system, which were absolutely necessary to Sumerian irrigation, brought not only fertile silt but, after several thousand years of urban occupation, salt. The Sumerians could see the accumulating silt and took precautions against it clogging their city's irrigation canals. They made dredging and cleaning of canals a top priority. The salt was a different story. It was invisible. Hundreds of years after Gilgamesh first challenged the forest god, the Sumerians gained control of new timberlands, which they exploited. This deforestation exposed expansive areas of salt-rich sedimentary rocks to severe erosion. Devastating floods and rains occurred, carrying salt downstream. The salt accumulated in irrigated farmlands. A serious salinity problem developed because of inadequate drainage that, otherwise, would have flushed the salts out of the topsoil. Non- reversible and increasingly destructive, the salt caused a progressive decline in crop yields, especially barley. After 2000 BC the Sumerian empire crumbled, in large part because of the decline of their food supply. Sumerian rulers subsequent to Gilgamesh had failed to heed the lessons of their own ancestors.

The same story can be told about the civilizations of the Nile, Indus, and Hwang-ho Rivers, which were born on the resilient soils of their river systems. These civilizations, like Sumer, transformed from

being parasites on their soils to being diseases of them.[7]

CITIES AS A DISEASE OF SOIL: ATHENS

"Disease is a failure in the balance by which species live together in community, whether in a relationship of mutual aid or one of parasite and host." Hyams argues that even in the former case, there must be equilibrium. If there is "an adjusted balance between parasite and host, the former is fed, the latter not debilitated." This was the situation in Uruk for about three thousand years after cities first came into existence and a thousand years after Gilgamesh reigned. Then, with the accumulation of salt in the soils, the balance was destroyed, the host soils collapsed and with them parasitic Uruk. Unlike the ancient Athenians, the peoples of Uruk were unable to devise ways to continue to flourish on their destroyed soils.[8]

Improbable as it may seem, it is possible for a city that is a disease organism to create prosperity. The price can be high as such an existence is extremely precarious. Classical Athens is a case in point. Hyams argues that Athens was "forced, by the ancient ruin of her original soil communities, and the consequent spoiling of her top-soil, to conceive, build, man and master the art of a navy," which made her master of Hellas.[9]

The peoples inhabiting Classical Athens developed a city still admired today. They incorporated living vegetation, flowing water, topographically sited roadways, and passive solar buildings into a dynamic urban complex. Their gardens supplied fragrant flowers to purify the air and ward off disease. Water drained from house roofs to retaining basins to feed the gardens. They placed flower boxes against walls with vines trained up them, cooling the surrounding air. They also decorated their gardens with statuary of important people and their Gods.[10] When private green space was scarce, the Greeks devised rooftop gardens.

In addition, on the summit of Athens's sacred Acropolis, whose name means *top of the city*, was an olive tree. Tradition tells us that Athena caused this olive tree to sprout when vying with Poseidon for control of the rocky, naturally fortified hill that came to overlook the

7. Ibid, 29.
8. Ibid, 75.
9. Ibid, 107.
10. Jurgen Rohrbach. *The Ancient World*. http://www.ecoroofsystems.com/history_files/c_historycont.html

Athenian agora. At the time of the contest for the Acropolis, which was long before the classical period, Athena was a Rock Goddess and Poseidon an Earth-Shaker or Lighting God of the sky who could bring rain.[11]

To prove his ascendancy, Poseidon strikes his lightning–creating trident in the rock and a spring gushes forth, an extremely unusual event at the top of a hill. Athena magically evokes an olive tree. The judges of the contest decide in favor of Athena, but Poseidon in great wrath does not accept their judgment and floods the plain. In ways that are, unfortunately, not handed down to us, the gods bring about a union between warring Athena and Poseidon. As a result of this peace, Athens honors Poseidon as well as Athena, especially on the Acropolis, where the Erechtheion stands commemorating their generative powers. This mysterious building protects Athena's olive tree as well as the trident marks of Poseidon. Although these indentations are inside the building, they communicate with the sky through a roof opening. Both the olive tree and the trident marks propitiate the gods in order to sustain the city through the precarious cultivation of the olive tree on the impoverished soils of Attica.[12]

The olive and the fig tree as well as the grape vine belong to a family of plants, which can exploit poor soils. "Historical Attica," as Hyams demonstrates, "inherited from prehistoric times one of the poorest and thinnest soils in Hellas." But classical Athens refused to play the inconsequential role necessitated by the thin and stony soils its ancestors created. Its inhabitants learned to exploit the subsoil as well as create a contrived soil community in which one of its members was a foreign market. Hyams demonstrates that the olive, in particular, became "unquestionably the spring of Athenian wealth, power, and civilization."[13]

But to feed 300,000 inhabitants in the time of Pericles, Athens needed more than locally grown olives, grapes, and figs, and locally produced oil and wine. The Athenians traded these commodities for wheat to make bread. Out of necessity they developed ceramics to contain the wine and oil and shipbuilding industries to support their exporting enterprises. The rising commercial importance of Athens

11. Ibid.

12. Apollodorus, "The Library." James George Frazer, ed., Loeb Classical Library #122. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press (1960: 177-179). Special thanks to Metropolitan Museum classicist Susan Springer for locating the recorded story of Athena and Poseidon and to mythologist Laura Simms for its interpretation.

13. Hyams (1976: 92, 98, 99, 103, 104, 106, 111).

in turn necessitated the creation of a fighting navy so Athens could defend herself. Thus, the "challenge of her wretched top-soil made Athens a great manufacturing, mercantile, and naval power."[14] But as Hyams warns,

> "It is not safe to forget that trading for food which your land will not afford directly, is a precarious and vulnerable expedient. ... The mortal weakness of having a member of your artificial soil community outside your control generates fear in proportion to what you have to lose. Athens had an empire to lose, an empire largely created by her fear-inspired arrogance ... (Nothing) could save the city from the trap which the poverty of Athenian soil had set... the disgrace and decline of the power, the name and culture of Athens."[15]

Just as classical Athens, modern cities are diseases on their soil communities. The Climate Emergency and Covid-19 Pandemic are showing us what happens when cities and nations can no longer supply fundamental necessities, such as food. Modern cities cannot feed themselves within their local soil communities. A fundamental shift in perception is necessary before we can address this and other problems of the sustainability of all species within their soil communities. French archaeologists Sander E. van der Leeuw and Chr. Aschan-Leygonie contend that

> "most, if not all, of the 'environmental' problems we encounter are exacerbated by the 'nature-culture' opposition in our minds. Separating ourselves from what we consider to be "nature", we have tended to favour human intervention in the natural domain as the way to 'solve' ... 'environmental' problems. ... A growing awareness of this issue has triggered a shift in the debate on environmental matters. ... the general tenor of the shift in perspective can be summarized by pointing out that the role of human beings in socio-environmental relations has gone from **re**-active, via **pro**-active, to **inter**-active. The first two perspectives are anthropocentric: either we make exceptions of ourselves by taking no responsibility, or we do so by taking all the

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid, 114.

> responsibility. **In the last perspective, humans become "*just another unique species*"..., and take part of the responsibility – which is much more difficult, as it necessitates determining, in every instance again, where the limits of our responsibility as human beings lie.**"[16]

Can our role in socio-ecological relations become co-creative as members of our local soil communities? Can we learn what the latter-day people of Uruk and the citizens of historical Athens did not? Can we become organic soil makers? The ancient Incan city of Machu Picchu with its graceful gardens and agricultural terraces atop an 8,000-foot high mountain demonstrates how a human settlement in the most unlikely place can be a soil maker and an inspiration for co-creating soil-creating efforts.

CITIES AS SOIL MAKERS: MACHU PICCHU

"The true monuments of Inca civilization exist in a context too humble for ready transmission to modern sensibilities. The Incas were arguably the world's finest stonemasons, but they did not lavish their skill on ornate temple complexes." As ethno-astronomer William Sullivan points out in *The Secret of the Incas: Myth, Astronomy, and the War Against Time*, "Instead they built soil." Soil is sacred to the people living in the Andes Mountains in South America. The Earth itself, the Pachamamma, is "the Mother-Goddess of all things." By the end of the 11th century A.D., the Incas had organized the many local peoples of this rugged land into an Empire. Known as Tahua-ntin-suyu or The Four Combined Provinces, it reached at its greatest extent 2700 miles along the present Pacific coast.[17]

The strength of the Inca Empire rooted in a soil community blending humanly made-organic and native soils. As Hyams documents, successful soil-making entails a strict social discipline. For the Incas this meant becoming "the most perfectly symmetrical and stable political units" humanity has ever achieved. Despite its complex organization, the Incas retained the most important of their peoples' ancient tribal customs -- the communal ownership and working of land. From 1400-1532 A.D., this collectively-held, human-

16. Van der Leeuw, Sander & Aschan-Leygonie, Christina. *A Long-Term Perspective on Resilience in Socio-Natural Systems*. 10.1142/9789812701404_0013 (2005).

17. William Sullivan. *The Secret of the Incas: Myth, Astronomy, and the War Against Time.* New York: Crown.

ly-made land produced food surpluses used to supply its armies, feed its orphans and widows, eliminate poverty, and thwart famine for the first and perhaps only time in history.[18]

How was such an achievement possible? Quite simply, the Andean people were not content as parasites on the sparse existing alluvial soils or to become a disease of their soils. "In their narrow, mountainous tract, they lacked not merely fertile soil but level surfaces of any soil at all. It was necessary to expand on to the mountainsides. ... To do this they must check the erosion of the slopes and build surfaces level enough to be worked even without the plough." They must find ways to cultivate the rainless coastal strips of apparent desert as well as the inland desert areas. In order to expand over soils not receiving floodwaters, they must discover the principles of soil regeneration. By carefully regulated and controlled use of manures from fish, by terracing, pit digging and irrigation, the Incas converted their poor natural soil communities into rich, stable, humanly made, organic ones. In short, in contrast to the Athenians and the inhabitants of modern cities, the Incas were able, without recourse to trade, to feed their fast-growing population by becoming organic soil-makers.[19]

The city of Machu Picchu with its one thousand inhabitants provides us with a fitting example of soil-making relevant to contemporary soil-making efforts.[20] Urban ecologists advocate ameliorating modern impacts on the biosphere by constructing cities integral to their natural systems. Some of the functions that the builders of Machu Picchu constructed their sacred city to perform green roofs accomplish today – providing and controlling water flow, making available much-needed space for local agriculture, medicinal herbs, and decorative gardens that buoy up human health and well-being.

Until recently, no one really understood what an extraordinary civil engineering feat Machu Picchu represents. Denver-based hydrologic engineer Kenneth Wright and his team discovered that this magical city in the clouds is nothing less than an astonishing interlocking preplanned system that integrates hydrology, hydraulics, drainage, foundation engineering, masonry building technologies, soil making, and agriculture. After twenty years of requesting permission to investigate Machu Picchu, Wright began extensive

18. Hyams (1976: 202, 207, 223).

19. Ibid, 219, 223, 228.

20. Ruth M. Wright and Alfredo Valencia Zegarra. *The Machu Picchu Guidebook.* Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Books.

on-the-ground research in 1994. To his amazement, Wright realized that this complex of massive stone buildings and agricultural terraces was conceived and built as a single entirety.[21]

Reflecting on Wright's descriptions of what he found, I thought of the comparable size and intricacy of the huge multi-functional structures being proposed today. Cities all over the world compete to build the tallest, the biggest edifices. None of them that I am aware of are designed as a single ecologically-functioning entity rooted in the ecology of the place where they are being built. The continuing functioning of the integrated natural and urban systems at Machu Picchu attest to their sophisticated knowledge of city building, a knowledge that could nourish our own much-needed regenerative processes.[22]

Water is key to understanding Incan civil engineering, just as water is critical to the regeneration of the soil communities in today's urban-natural dynamics. Where did Machu Picchu get its water? How did the Incas bring the water to the city, distribute, drain and carry it away from their city? Even though U.S. explorer Hiram Bingham had uncovered the lost city of Machu Picchu in the early 1900's, no one had documented the city from this point of view until Wright began his work.

Farmers living near Machu Picchu led Wright to the location of the water source on a steep mountain slope north of the city. He realized that the path of the water determined the entire urban layout, including the site of the emperor's residence and the agricultural terraces. The present condition of the system surprised Wright. "The spring works was still intact and still working. It was still yielding a water supply after all these (four and a half) centuries of abandonment." The Inca constructors "built for permanency.[23]

THE FLOWERING OF CITIES

Imagine the Possibilities! Entire urban assemblages of buildings, walkways, streets, plazas, parks, water systems, sewage, waste disposal and more. All integrated into an urban energetics that gathers the movement of water, air, energy, and materials into and out of the entire city as one multi-faceted dynamic that is part of its regional

Earth, is this not what you want, invisibly to arise within each of us?

— Ninth Duino Elegy, Rainer Maria Rilke

21. Ibid.

22. Kenneth R. Wright, Alfredo Valencia Zegarra, Ruth M. Wright, Gordon Mcewan. *Machu Picchu: A Civil Engineering Marvel.* Reston, Virginia: American Society of Civil Engineering (2000).

23. Ruth M. Wright and Alfredo Valencia Zegarra. *The Machu Picchu Guidebook.* Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Books (2001: p. 98).

ecology. No longer either parasites or diseases on soils, these soil-making cities could create a new, regenerative era in city building.

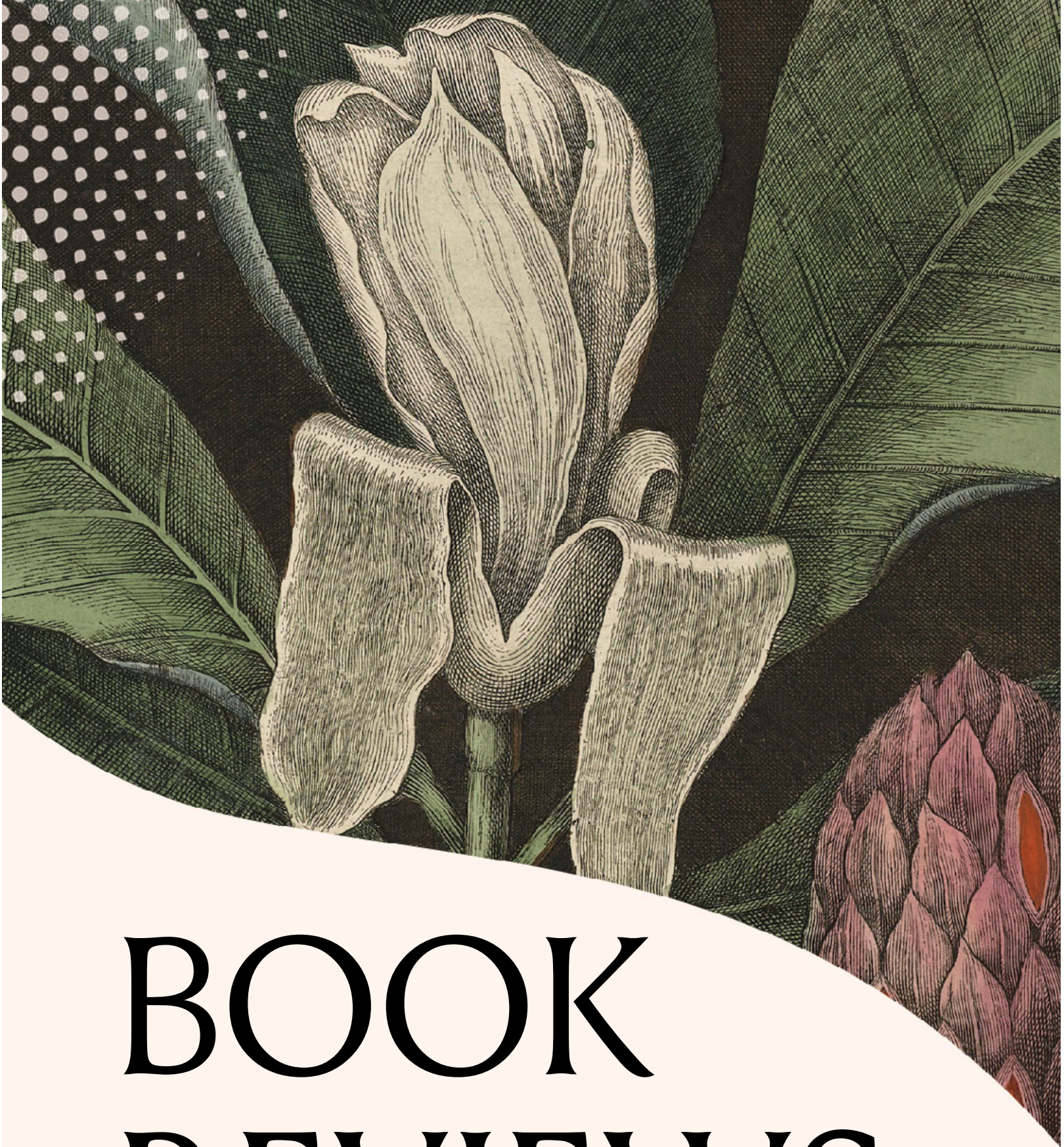
We are experiencing the human-amplified Climate Emergency and the Covid-19 Pandemic killing millions of species of plants and many animals in addition to ourselves. Extensive soil communities in our cities could create a planetary network helping to rejuvenate the Earth and its many life forms. But, as Hyams reminds us, we must design the layout of the our cities in ways that remind us of our place in the Earth Community:

> "Everything touched by and serving living beings must either be adapted to the fact that the user's life is organic, or must corrupt the user by withdrawing his attention from this fact."[24]

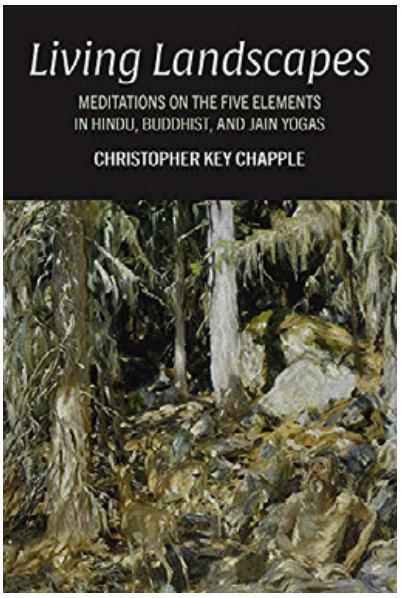
Climate Emergency, Pandemic, Racial Injustice – all point to *humanity's* fatal error. We are not *the* superior species on the Earth. We are Earth Sprouts. Can we stop the violence arising from our arrogance? Can we support the resilience of the Earth – Our home?

* You may have noticed that I use several different tenses in one sentence or paragraph. The reason: to surprise you. You expect consistent tenses. You wonder: are the editors asleep on the job. No! The mixing of tenses alerts you to the fundamental misalignment of linear thinking to the cycles of the Earth. Until we think, write, act, live and die cyclically we will continue to disrupt the fundamental patterns of our Home.

24. Hyams (1976: 110).



BOOK REVIEWS



Living Landscapes: Meditations of the Five Elements in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Yogas

BY CHRISTOPHER KEY CHAPPLE

Review by Stephanie Corigliano

Living Landscapes is uniquely comparative, grounded in contemplative practice, and directly engaged with environmental activism. The author, Christopher Key Chapple, is a leading scholar-practitioner and founder of the Master's in Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Alongside his numerous essays and books related to yoga in the various Indian traditions, including an edited volume on the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and a translation and commentary on Patañjali's *Yogasūtras*, Chapple has long championed the cause of conservation ecology and its relationship to the Indic traditions. In this new book, *Living Landscapes*, he explores the five elements, earth, water, fire, air, and space, in light of Sāṃkhya philosophy and through the philosophy and ritual practices found in Buddhism, Jainism, Advaita, Tantra, and Haṭha Yoga. The first chapter, "The Inner World as Precondition for Experience," challenges the notion that we are separate from nature. It explores the "cosmic person" in Hinduism, the *dharma-kāyā* in Buddhism, and the *loka-kāyā* in Jainism as technical analyses of the human-world connection and as an ontological shift that is at the heart of contemplative practice. An additional chapter looks specifically at animal stories from the classics including Upaniṣads, the Jātaka Tales, the Pañcatantra, Jaina Narratives, and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, observing how these legendary narratives intersect with core teachings within the dharmic traditions and the contemporary rituals and activism that they inspire in India today.

The introduction to the book, "Yoga and Landscape" explores some of the basic precepts of yoga philosophy alongside a concise history of modern yoga, including an outline of the major, early gurus who taught yoga internationally, a listing of pioneering studies on the topic of modern yoga, and discussion of Yoga Day, a celebration now recognized by the United Nations. Then, introducing the connection between yoga, ecology, and contemplative practice, Chapple explains that this book is a work of constructive theology - a term well known within the fields of theology and religious studies, but perhaps less common in the study of Southeast Asian traditions. Constructive theology combines an experience of faith and modern community with knowledge of historical texts and traditions and then seeks to address a problem or ethical issue for the benefit of the modern community. It points to the development of a living tradition that also takes history, orthodoxy, and practice seriously. Thus, while Chapple attends carefully to the textual and ritual history of the traditions, he also intermixes ethnographic observations from contemporary India, and seeks to address what he identifies as a "nature deficit disorder," that is, "a deep disconnect from nature [that] has imperiled a sense of well-being for many persons." This constructive angle sets Chapple's book apart from many of the other studies in contemporary yoga because rather than simply considering what yoga has been in the past, it opens a discussion towards the possibility of scholarship and practice playing a role to shape the future of yoga.

Each chapter of the book presents a kind of meditation, weaving together an engaged reading of historical texts, personal narrative, and contemporary practice in India. The result is a masterful invitation to practice - both a practice of reading and understanding texts and a practice of reimagining one's physical body as deeply immersed and infused with the living landscape that surrounds us.

Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis

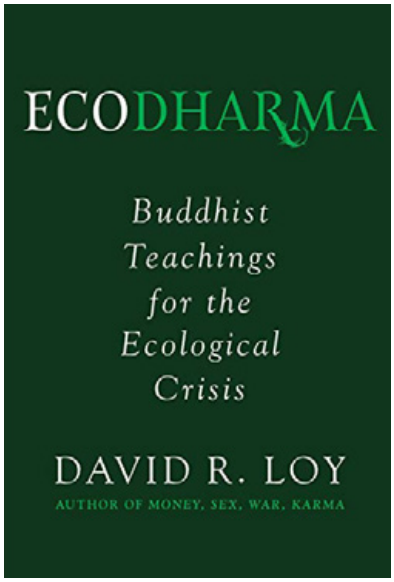
BY DAVID R. LOY

Review by Jacob Kyle

David R. Loy's 2019 book, *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*, is an exemplary model of how to leverage contemplative teachings for modern challenges. It is at once a critique of modern industrial culture, a sobering account of the obstacles we face as a global sangha, and an inspiring act of constructive eco-theology – using Buddhist dharma as a lens onto those social and ideological forces that are pushing us to the edge of ecological destruction.

Loy, who first introduced us to his characteristic precision in *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (1997), has in recent years applied this precision more directly to social justice and ecological issues, notably with his 2015 book, *A New Buddhist Path: Enlightenment Evolution and Ethics in the Modern World. Ecodharma*, in typical Loy fashion, marries a deftness of philosophical acuity with a passionate commitment to collective and cultural transformation.

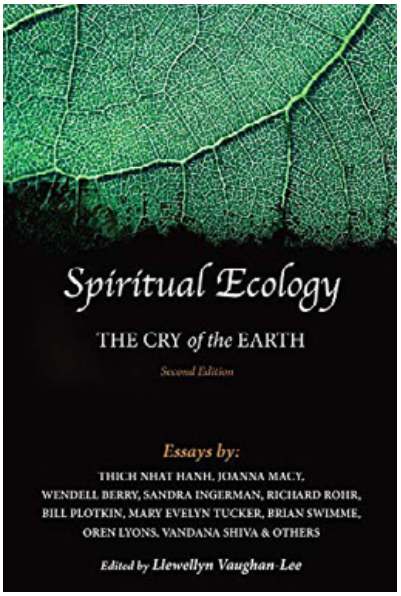
Loy holds a number of things responsible for our current circumstances. Our capitalist profit incentive is a familiar object of criticism, but one worth acknowledging. "We end up sacrificing everything real for a symbol worthless in itself, exchanging what is most valuable for something that in itself has no value whatsoever" (pg. 36). A less familiar, but altogether important object ripe for critique is secularism itself. "Many people take that secularity for granted, assuming that, once superstitious beliefs have been removed, the modern secular view is an accurate account of what the world really is." (p. 38) According to Loy, secularism does not in fact reflect how the world is and, as a prevailing cultural value, is partly responsible for the desacralization of nature that has led to the perception of it as a lifeless thing to be controlled and consumed.



These wider cultural narratives are not the only objects of Loy's criticism, however. Loy invites his own Buddhist community to self-reflect by, for example, asking why talks on "buddhism and ecology" are so poorly attended. According to Loy, the modern Buddhist community still privileges a kind of spiritual purity over and above social and political engagement. Meditation is valued over attention to the affairs of the world. Individual suffering is focused on instead of those institutions and structural problems that perpetuate that individual suffering. Loy expresses the issue in this way: "When Buddhists help homeless people and prison inmates, they are called bodhisattvas. But when Buddhists ask why there are so many more homeless, so many people of color stuck in prison, other Buddhists call them leftists or radicals – saying that such social action has nothing to do with Buddhism" (Pg. 50). For this and other reasons, Loy introduces the "bodhisattva/ecosattva" path, which involves a "double practice" of inner work (meditation) adn outer work (activism).

Where many ecology writers stop at combining an account of our grim circumstances with a passionate appeal for action, Loy takes it one step further in entertaining the difficult question: "what if it is too late?" Here, Ecodharma offers perhaps its most original message: that even if we have sealed the fate of our death as a species, there is still work to be done. That work is partly about encountering our own mortality (needless to say, Buddhism has much to say on the matter) and fully experiencing grief and despair. By allowing ourselves to feel more deeply, we are "opening up to the repressed grief and despair that so often paralyze us, whereupon they can transform into compassionate action."

There are many poignant insights to be gleaned from an engagement with Loy's latest book. While reading it is undoubtedly an uncomfortable experience, experiencing that discomfort is an important step in the process of waking up to the reality of what's happening.



Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth

EDITED BY LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

Review by Jessica Jagtiani

While the 2016 second-edition of Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth may not be the latest book on the market, it might presently be one of the most relevant. A collection of essays, it presents voices from Buddhism, Sufism, Celtic, Christian, Native American, Persian and Indian traditions, as well as from physics, deep psychology, and other environmental disciplines that appeal us to wake up and adjust our lives to our spiritual as well as physical responsibilities toward the planet.

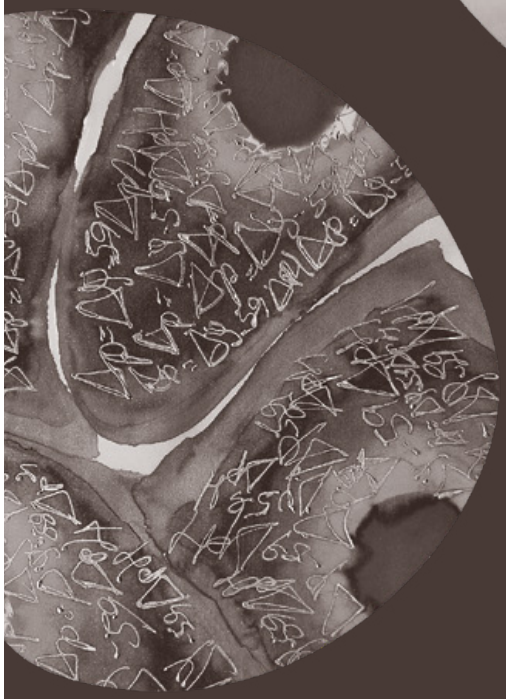
What most of us don't yet have are concrete ways of making our commitment to sustainable living a reality in our daily lives. We haven't organized ourselves. We can't only blame our governments and corporations for the chemicals that pollute our drinking water, for the violence in our neighborhoods, for the wars that destroy so many lives. It's time for each of us to wake up and take action in our own lives. (Thich Nhat Hanh, p. 33)

Sufi teacher Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, founder of the Golden Sufi Center and author of a variety of books on spiritual and psychological transformation, is the editor of Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth. His selected contributors for the book include well-known and less-known spiritual and environmental leaders, such as Chief Oren Lyons, Thomas Berry, Thich Nhat Hanh, Chief Tamale Bwoya, John Stanley, David Loy, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Brian Thomas Swimme, Sister Miriam MacGillis, Wendell Berry, Winona LaDuke, Vandana Shiva, Susan Murphy, Satish Kumar, Joanna Macy, Geneen Marie Haugen, Eleanor O'Hanlon, Jules Cashford, Bill Plotkin, Sandra Ingerman, Pir Zia Inayat-Khan, Fr. Richard Rohr, Stephalie Patel, and Lyla June Johnston. United they illustrate ways in which humanity can transform its relationship with Mother Earth.

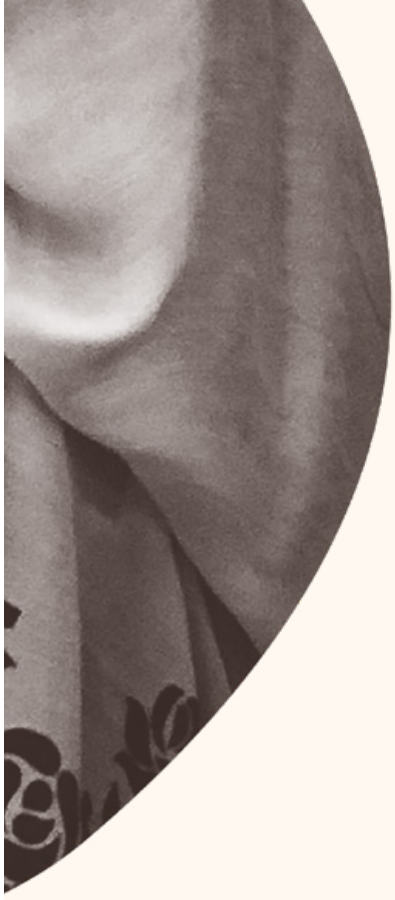
The first edition of the book, published in 2013 and positively received by its readers, highlighted the emergence of the "Spiritual Ecology Movement," and documented the need for a spiritual response to our present ecological crisis. The second edition presents a renewed preface and a revised chapter by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, touching on two key events. First, the publication of Pope Francis's encyclical, Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home, which stresses the notion of our present ecological crisis as being rooted in urgent spiritual and moral questions that require our response. It intended, in part, to influence the second, the 2015 Paris Climate Change Conference, which had the objective to achieve, for the first time in over 20 years of UN negotiations, a binding and universal agreement on climate. The second edition of the book, furthermore, offers new chapters that present insights from younger authors.

Revealing the connection between our present ecological crisis and our lack of awareness of the sacred, Spiritual Ecology presents many voices of different traditions but with a single urgent message for everyone on the planet: we need to increase our personal reflection, expand the circle of conversation, and start recognizing the need for a spiritual response to our present ecological predicament. The survival of our human future depends on it.

Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth is an offering of support to help us salvage the tools known to our ancestors that can help in the work of reconnecting with and healing of the planet. This book belongs in every school, university, library, and household, to help promote involvement and inspire action in embracing Earth as a sacred living being that requires and deserves our full respect.



ON PRACTICE



Introduction to Practice

Embodied Philosophy strives to make connections, between the scholar and practitioner, the various contemplative traditions – across the divide commonly identified as East and West – and, perhaps most importantly, between the physical practices of yoga and meditation and the philosophies that support and explain these practices. The community we aim to support is largely comprised with individuals who practice yoga, meditation, or contemplation, and who are interested in engaging intellectually and in adding new layers of depth to the experience of practice. In addition, encountering and learning to engage with the classics of various spiritual traditions and the philosophical debates and challenges that arise from these texts is a practice in and of itself. The Tarka journal integrates a variety of these approaches and aims to introduce fundamental topics and to also further the dissemination and interpretation of wisdom traditions.

In this section, *On Practice*, we offer a selection of articles aimed explicitly at the practical. This includes a regular feature that pieces together excerpts from various wisdom tradition texts. These might work as inspiration for meditation or as inspiration for further research. Another segment highlights one or more classic texts with a focus on the practice of learning Sanskrit, including a breakdown of the various words and grammar used in the selected passages. Additional articles in this section will correspond to the featured theme of the issue.

Possessed By The Plague

Marcy Braverman Goldstein

INTRODUCTION

People worldwide do not often simultaneously face the same threat to their local populations.

But this uncommon situation has been our collective experience in 2020, more noticeably since March 11th when the World Health Organization officially knit everyone together by declaring that the Novel Coronavirus Disease, COVID-19, is a pandemic. The virus spread easily from person-to-person and across countries' borders through international travel because our porous bodies are vulnerable to invisible, contagious microorganisms that enter and cause disease. To avoid catching and spreading it, we are encouraged to quarantine, wear face masks, avoid touching surfaces, wash hands, and stay six feet away from others. Even though many of us are taking precautions, people continue to test positive for COVID-19. Controlling the virus and its mutating forms is very challenging.

For many people globally, the pandemic is surreal and very different from any ecological crises that we could have imagined. However, in India, Śītalā, the goddess of epidemics, is familiar. She defends villages from disease. If someone becomes sick, she appears as a fever that burns germs away and also as a cooling presence to soothe the heated body. When not properly honored, the goddess brings disease, an indication that demons dwell in the village. At these times, her power is seen as a catalyzing agent that prompts necessary transformation in society. As the one who both guards life and inflicts death, Śītalā teaches people to confront and accept the reality of impermanence.

Viruses, Śītalā, demons, and other entities enter humans and other animals because of the biological fact that bodies are not rigidly compartmentalized, segregated entities. Throughout South Asia, this permeability is understood to create opportunities for possession, a common,

multifaceted occurrence. Possessions can be involuntary or voluntary; they are brought on by benevolent divinities or malevolent beings; and they cause illness or healing. A range of Sanskrit terms reflects these experiences that are mentioned in many genres of literature spanning thousands of years (ca. 15th c. B.C.E. - 10th c. C.E.) such as the Vedas, Āyurvedic medical texts, Buddhist Pali canon, Jain Yogaśāstra, *Mahābhārata*, *Yogasūtras*, Purāṇas, bhakti poetry, and Tantric texts.

The verses below are selected from three classical Āyurvedic medical texts (ca. 3rd c. B.C.E. - 7th c. C.E.) that describe various types of possession.

SANSKRIT VERSES AND ANALYSIS

The *Suśruta Saṃhitā* (ca. 3rd. c. B.C.E.) mentions seizers (*graha*) who ferociously attack and kill an innocent victim:

The attendants of these seizers (*graha*), devouring blood, fat, and flesh, are exceedingly terrible night-wanderers and enter (*āviśānti*) a person.

teṣāṃ grahāṇāṃ paricārakā . . . asṛgvasāmāṃsabhujaḥ subhīmā niśāvihārāśca tamāviśanti

// 6.60.22

yogin — masculine genitive plural
teṣāṃ — 3rd person pronoun, (m) genetive plural (these)
grahāṇāṃ — (m) genetive plural (seizers)
paricārakā — (m) nominative plural (attendants)
asṛg (blood) + *vasā* (fat) + *māṃsa* (flesh) + *bhujaḥ* (devouring) (m) nominative plural
subhīmā — (m) nominative plural (exceedingly terrible)
niśāvihārāś — (m) nominative plural (night-wanderers)
ca — conjunction (and)
tam — 3rd person pronoun, (m) accusative singular (him)
āviśanti — verbal root /viś + ā, 3rd person plural (enter)

The Caraka Saṃhitā (ca. 3rd - 2nd c. B.C.E.) discusses awful conditions that result when *bhūtas* (literally "has-beens," i.e. ghosts) enter through a person's eyes, ears, skin, or nose.

devagobrāhmaṇatapasvināṃ hiṃsārucitvaṃ kopanatvaṃ nṛśaṃsābhiprāyatā aratiḥ ojovarṇachāyābalavapuṣām upataptiḥ svapne devādibhirabhibhartsanaṃ pravartanaṃceti tato'nantaramunmādābhinirvṛttiḥ

// 2.7.11

deva (gods) + *go* (cows) + *brāhmaṇa* (brahmins) + *tapasvināṃ* (ascetics) (m) genetive plural
hiṃsā + *rucitvaṃ* — (n) nominative singular (desire for violence)
kopanatvaṃ stem — kopanatva (n) nominative singular (inclination to rage)
nṛśaṃsa (injuring men) + *abhiprāyatā* (intention) (f) nominative singular
aratiḥ — (m) nominative singular (discontent)
ojas + (vitality) + *varṇa* (good complexion) + *chāyā* (beauty) + *bala* (strength) + *vapuṣām* (body) (n) genetive plural
upataptiḥ — (m) nominative singular (debility)
svapne — (n) locative singular (dream)
devādibhir — (m) instrumental plural (gods and

others)
abhibhartsanaṃ — (n) nominative singular (threaten so as to terrify)
pravartanaṃ — (n) nominative singular (wandering)
ca — conjunction (and)
iti — indeclinable (thus)
tatas — indeclinable (then)
anantaram — indeclinable (immediately afterwards)
unmāda + *abhinirvṛttiḥ* — (f) nominative singular (consequence of madness)

The *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya Saṃhitā* (ca. 7th c. C.E.) describes qualities that are more luminous than what is mentioned in earlier texts possibly because this later treatise was influenced by the contemporaneous Tantric path that values supernormal powers and liberation. The description here reflects a certain amount of acceptance of, and admiration for, deity possession as sanctioned by popular beliefs and practices.

A face beaming like a full blown lotus blossom; a placid gaze; free of anger; slight speech, sweat, feces, and urine; no craving for food.

phullapadmopamamukhaṃ saumyadṛṣṭimakopanam / alpavāksvedaviṇmūtraṃ bhojanānabhilāṣiṇam // 6.4.13

phulla + *padma* + *upama* + *mukham* — accusative singular (face beams like a full blown lotus)
saumya + *dṛṣṭim* accusative singular (placid gaze)
akopanam accusative singular (free of anger)
alpa + *vāk* + *sveda* + *viṇ* + *mūtraṃ* accusative singular (slight speech, sweat, feces, and urine)
bhojana + anabhilāṣiṇam accusative singular (no craving for food)

Exceedingly devoted to deities and brahmins; pure; refined speech; seldom blinks; charming; giver of boons.

devadvijātiparamaṃ śuciṃ saṃskṛtavādinam / mīlayantaṃ cirānnetre surabhiṃ varadāyinam // 6.4.14

deva + *dvija* + *atiparamaṃ* — accusative singular (exceedingly devoted to deities and brahmins)
śucim — accusative singular (pure)
saṃskṛta + *vādinam accusative singular* — (refined speech)
mīlayantaṃ (blinks), *cirāt indeclinable* (after a long time)
netre locative — singular (eyes)
surabhim — accusative singular (charming)
vara + *dāyinam* — accusative singular (giver of boons)

Who likes white garlands and garments, rivers, and high rocky dwellings; does not sleep; and is invincible.

śuklamālyāmbarasaricchailoccabhavanapriyam anidramapradhṛṣyaṃ // 6.4.15

śukla (white) + *mālya* (garlands) + *ambara* (garments) + *sarit* (river) + *śaila* (rocky) + *ucca*

(high) + *bhavana* (dwellings) + *priyam* (affection for) accusative singular
anidram — accusative singular (no sleep)
apradhṛṣyaṃ — accusative singular (invincible)

CONCLUSION

Bodies are porous and therefore vulnerable to elements from the outside environment that can move in and cause a variety of reactions ranging from adverse symptoms to desirable qualities. The perennial awareness of our permeable boundaries is particularly acute during the COVID-19 pandemic. People are concerned that the coronavirus could enter and cause debilitating conditions such as difficulty breathing, lack of strength (*bala*) and vitality (*ojas*), body aches, fever, loss of taste and smell, and mental confusion. It's an exceedingly terrible (*subhīma*) virus that is devouring (*bhuj*) people's lungs, hearts, brains, and other body organs and systems. These medical complications are similar to some effects of seizers (*graha*) and ghosts (*bhūta*) that enter people.

Throughout the world people experience both negative and positive effects that arise from the inescapable interdependence among living entities. A deep ecology binds us together even as the medical, social, psychological, cultural, and economic ramifications of global health threats affect each person in various ways. Another cross-cultural commonality is the human tendency to respond to crises as opportunities for constructive personal and community-level change. South Asians know that Śītalā, goddess of epidemics, is a catalyzing agent who shows up to prompt necessary transformation in society. And some people who don't know of Śītalā are taking time during this COVID-19 pandemic to reimagine their lives, individually and collectively, in new and inspired ways.

Historically, plagues and social tension have occurred simultaneously. Our experience of tremendous social unrest today is no different. Let's hope that everyone is striving to envision a global community where we courageously broaden our boundaries to include more people, and truly create a world where all suffering beings peacefully co-exist.

*To avoid catching and spreading coronavirus, we can take advice from Western medical professionals and also guidelines in the *Caraka Saṃhitā*, which mentions pandemics and suggests that people follow a daily routine (*dinacaryā*) to keep the digestive fire strong. For more information from ancient Indian medical traditions, consult Āyurvedic texts and doctors.

12 Brief Notes on Spiritual Ecology

By Mary Reilly Nichols

1

Om. You are the object of sensory perception; you are the Goddess who distributes the forms of the earth. You are the Producer of the Universe, the Support of all existing things. Sustain the earth, firmly establish the earth, make the earth efficient in its motion.

— Bhu Devi Mantra. *Secret Bīja Mantras of the Chaṇḍī Pāṭhaḥ,* by Swami Satyananda Saraswati - Devi Mandir August, 2019)

Reverence to the Goddess, Mother Earth, known as Bhūmī-Devī in the Vedas. She is also called Pṛthivī: The Vast One. Her consort is Dyáuṣ Pitṛ́ (Vedic Sanskrit): Father Sky. In union they are "Dyavapṛthivī," forming the marriage of the real and the ideal, heaven and earth.

2

I AM nature.

— Jackson Pollock (1912-1956)

Yoga philosophy declares that the human form is a microcosm containing all the elements – or "tattvas" – of the universe, from the material to the subtle. When you are pining to be in nature, use yogic postures to investigate the landscape of your own physical and metaphysical body. Yoga will keep you grounded in terra firma as you use it to plumb the secrets of your own nature. In meditation you can retreat at will to the oceanfront of infinite inner awareness.

3

Yoga is the control of the modifications of the mind. Then the seer rests in his own true nature.

— (Patanjali Yoga Sutra 1:2/3 Pandit Usharbudh Arya, trans.)

Buddha was not interested in some metaphysical existence, but in his own body and mind, here and now. And when he found himself, he found that everything that exists has Buddha nature.

— Shunryu Suzuki - Zen Mind, *Beginner's Mind; Shambhala*

Nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of Heaven is within you.

— Luke 17:21 New King James Version

Enlightenment, *Mokṣa*, *Samādhi*, Kingdom of Heaven, *Satori* or *Nirvāṇa* are names for an innate, primal aspect of human nature, which we carry within us at every moment.

4

[Yogic attainment] comes by the removal of obstacles, much the way a farmer removes a barrier, … to naturally allow the irrigation of his field.

— (Patanjali Yoga Sutra 4:3 - Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati, trans)

Yoga practices remove pollution from the nāḍīs, the channels through which awareness flows in the subtle body. In dislodging physical and mental waste from the system, yoga refreshes and restores sanity, a word from the latin sanitas, meaning health, and forming the root of the word "sanitary." Alternate nostril breathing, or *nāḍī-śodhana*, is a useful way to cleanse and restore the mind to its inherent natural clarity and bliss.

5

O three-eyed one, You drank poison out of compassion for gods and demons when they were distraught over the threatened destruction of the universe, but surely the dark blue stain it left on your throat only enhanced Your beauty.

— Śiva Mahimnaḥ Stotram, v.14. *The Nectar of Chanting* (SYDA Foundation: South Fallsburg, NY, 1975)

Pollution is nothing new. How Śiva got his blue throat is a case in point.

The story tells of the first toxic spill resulting from heedless greed. It seems the gods and the demons were out to churn the ocean of milk (a metaphor for consciousness) to obtain the nectar of immortality; in the process, they churned up all kinds of jewels and gems. Finally, Lakṣmī arose holding the nectar, but both the gods and demons were now hypnotized by greed. They ignored the nectar and kept churning for more treasure. This unleashed a terrible lethal poison that spread throughout the universe. Out of compassion, Śiva drank all the poison, taking on the negative karma and saving creation. His beloved Devī ran to him and held his throat to prevent him from swallowing. His throat turned as blue as the sky – an eternal sign of his love and mercy.

6

When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of human civilization.

— Daniel Webster : "On Agriculture" January 13, 1840.

The heroine of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sītā, whose name means "furrow", was the daughter of Bhūmī-Devī, mother earth. Sītā's father, King Janaka, found her in a furrow when he was plowing his field. The earliest evidence of a plowed field in the world was found at the Indus Valley Civilization site (c. 2800 B.C.).

7

**The spine is the tree of life.
Respect it.**

— Martha Graham

The *Rāmāyaṇa* tells how after being abducted by the demon Rāvaṇa, Sītā sat at the root of an Ashoka tree waiting to be rescued. Curiously, Buddha was born under an Ashoka tree, hence the tree is also sacred to Buddhists. Sītā's situation at the root of the sacred tree is a metaphor for the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* coiled at the sacral base of the human spine, the tree of life.

8

**O my beloved,
touch Earth every time you get scared.
Touch her deeply,
and your sorrow will melt away.
Touch her deeply,
and you will touch the Deathless.**

— Thich Nhat Hanh. *Call Me by My True Names*: *The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh*. Parallax Press.

At the cusp of enlightenment, Buddha sitting steadfastly beneath the Bodhi tree was tormented by the demon Māra, who tried to distract him with doubt. At last he touched the earth with his fingertips in the "bhūmi sparśa mudrā" - the gesture of touching the earth - and the earth cried out "I Am His Witness!"

The Earth is a truthful witness to the quality of our awareness. If you are wondering, "How are we doing?", the earth will unequivocally tell you. If you need to be grounded, let yoga āsana help you touch the earth.

9

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,
He refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
Your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

— Psalm 23: NIV

Besides abundant agricultural metaphors found in spiritual writings, there is a notable thread of shepherding and animal tending in wisdom lore. Krishna (Kṛṣṇa) was a cowherd, Moses and David were shepherds, as was St Patrick.

There must be something about the dedicated tending of animals, in taking care of nature, that instructs spiritual heroes in the peaceful vigilance of enlightened consciousness. Taking care of animals shows us the way of gentleness, respect, discipline and appropriate diet and exercise to be applied to our own animal nature.

10

Those who worship the coiled one with prostrations and with beneficent sacred hymns … become liberated. She is knowledge . She is born of herself. She is maya, the power of delusion, and kriya, the power of action.

— Kundalini Stavaha/ Rudra Yamala Tantra - SYDA Foundation

The first yogis were probably shamans, zealous in the search for knowledge. They discovered the power of chanting, movement and breath practices to liberate the intrinsic flow of dormant psycho-energetic power. Such waves of nervous system energy result in revelations rising from the depths of the unconscious. They venerated this energy as Goddess Kuṇḍalinī-śakti. The Śakti takes the compressed form of a coiled serpent at the base of the spine.

11

Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear

— Mathew: 13 NKJV

Sītā Devī and Her consort, Rāma, exist in the polarity of the human form as the richly innervated sacral root of the spine and the "light of a thousand suns" in the crown center. In balanced alignment they provide an abundant spiritual harvest just as the dynamic marriage of sky and earth brings forth crops. The sacredness of the earth is reflected in the word "sacrum" - the sacred bone. Each breath plants a seed of awareness into the physical plane. To realize goodness in the world, inhale down fully into the base of the spine using each breath to sow compassion, love and joy.

12

A monk asked, "Who is my teacher?"
The Master said, "The clouds rising out of the mountain, streams entering the valley without a sound."
The monk said, "I didn't ask about them."
The Master said,"Though they are your good teachers, you do not recognize them."

— Joshu Roku. *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu. James Green*, trans. AltaMira Press

Reverence to Mother Nature, our ultimate teacher. She teaches us physics, biology, ecology, astronomy and ethics. And she teaches us spiritual enlightenment.

If you seek your teacher, the all pervasive Guru exists in every particle of nature, if you will recognize Her.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Greta Gaard, PhD, has written extensively to illuminate the linkages of race, gender, sexuality, species and environmental justice, publishing six books and over 90 articles on ecofeminism, including several that articulate a mindful ecofeminism. Her most recent book is *Critical Ecofeminism* (2017). As a Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, Gaard uses both mindfulness pedagogy and happiness practices in all her writing classes.

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Martha Eddy, RSMT/E, CMA, DEP exercise physiologist, is an author, researcher and worldwide lecturer and the Geraldine Ferraro Fellow at Marymount Manhattan College where she mentors the Body, Science and Motion students. Her book *Mindful Movement the Evolution of the Somatic Arts and Conscious Action* addresses the history of the somatic field, plus newer trajectories including her own work in eco-somatics (www.GlobalWaterDances.org), social somatics (www.MovingOnCenter.org), & peace education/violence prevention (www.EmbodyPeace.org). She is best known for her dedication to applying somatic movement, dance and exercise to programs for children with diverse learning and physical challenges (www.WellnessCKE.net), as well as adults overcoming the side-effects to medical treatment of life-threatening diseases and trauma (www.MovingForLife.org).

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