

What is Eco-Spirituality?



"I have known for many years that the next step in our evolution [will] include a quality of cosmic consciousness, as humanity becomes aware of the deeper significance of its place not just within our solar system but within the greater cosmos. How this will unfold we do not know, except that there will be an inner and outer relationship between our planet and the cosmos. A time of isolation or separation within our own individual world will have come to an end.

Rather than projecting this transition into science fiction images of aliens or galactic travel, I would begin with the microcosmic understanding of what it means to us individually to step outside of the isolated sense we have of our own separate self, and instead embrace and live from a consciousness of oneness in which we KNOW how we are part of an interconnected whole." Llewellyn Vaughn Lee

Dear Pilgrims,

On this trip many of you will be experiencing new ecosystems, i.e. new aspects of your own being in the form of African fauna and flora that will hopefully awaken you to the awe and wonder of your soul. An aspect of our work together is understanding this whole new realm of what people are calling "eco-spirituality."

For me, eco-spirituality means waking up to the fact that there is no "Humanity" on the one hand and "Environment" on the other hand - we are the environment and the environment is the body of which we are a part. Our language belies our separation and distance from nature....eg. "I love being in nature." One cannot enjoy "being in nature," when you are nature and part of nature. This statement reflects a perception of subject and object, is determined by a certain circumstance and is time limited. How wonderful it would be rather, to know one's experience as one of joy, in unity with all, at all times. In the biggest sense then, eco-spirituality is a commitment to healing all the splits and divisions in our own perception and psyche, so that it can translate into the experience of wholeness and oneness within ourselves as an integral part of the universe.

At the macro level, destroying and exploiting the larger body means destroying ourselves. At a microcosmic level - if we do not care for our own body - then it cannot serve as a vehicle for awakening - it becomes a prison of pain, sickness and immobility. In the same way, if we do not care for the larger body of the planet, it can no longer serve as a vehicle of awakening to awe and wonder, joy, peace and interdependence, but becomes an ugly prison of starvation, misery and destruction.

Think of the ways in which you harm your own body. If you drink in excess - there are consequences not only to your physical body but to the body and soul of the world. If you over-eat you contribute in the same destructive way. Consider the consequences to the world of the cumulative addictions to sugar, salt, fat and refined foods. Seek to understand, connect and love everything you have rejected - most importantly your own body and psyche. Every time you hurt your own body in all the ways modern man does - you hurt the planet.

And conversely, every time you hurt the planet through a lack of mindfulness, right living and right relationship, you are hurting yourself and everyone else too. At the most mundane level, littering hurts the entire body of the world, as does judgment, greed, exploitation, materialism, waste, consumerism, self entitlement, lack of empathy, control, power mongering, instant gratification, laziness and so it goes on.

It is easy to recognize the ways in which each of us has contributed destructively to our own lives and lives of others, once we get past our rationalizations, excuses and denial. However, the next way in which we can hurt ourselves is to judge ourselves for all the ways in which we have already mindlessly and out of unawareness contributed to our own destruction and that of the planet.... All that is needed is to WAKE UP - not punish, judge, reject or split off some part of yourself. If you do this you will judge what you think are the ugly parts of the planet - eg. spiders and snakes etc. which are merely a symbolic representation of some quality or energy within yourself of which you are unaware). To the extent that you are closed off to aspects of yourself is the extent to which you will close your hearts to the rest of creation, and not seek to understand embrace and reconcile. The trick is to just notice, embrace and accept what you have done, change it and move on as quickly as possible. Ruminating and obsessing in a sea of shame helps no-one. Martin said it beautifully. Can we be **intimate with ourselves**? Fully present to our own suffering, hurt, shame, fear, judgments - without judgment, splitting, rejecting? This then becomes a moment of unity and integration.... and can we then create that with one another?

Does this mean we condone, excuse, rationalize ‘wrong doing?’ Absolutely not. We see it, accept it, embrace it, CHANGE IT and move on. Change and growth is the limit we have to set with ourselves and others. Conversely, we WILL excuse and rationalize when we refuse to accept and embrace the shame and fear and beliefs that informed the “wrong doing” in the first place.

Wholeness means accepting everything, every aspect of self and creation. Acceptance, means bringing to awareness without judgment. Wholeness means recognizing that every destructive act towards ourselves and others was rooted in the deep dark unconscious matter of pain, fear and shame and did not arise out of an intrinsic badness as we have been taught.

Nothing is redundant, nothing is bad and nothing is wrong with any part of creation. Judgment is not helpful. Questions are helpful. And the question is, **“How do we live in harmony as a fully functioning planet?”** Lora has so powerfully demonstrated and generously shared with us the process. She faced her fear of spider. Her decision to not judge but connect with spider and learn about spider, has brought her in touch, not just with an abstract understanding of the symbolism of creation and destruction, weaving and matrixes of belief, knowing how to get to the center of herself etc. but actually brought a shift in her consciousness in which she could find unity in consciousness with spider - WOW. Her fear of spider turned to reverence, awe and healthy respect!

Saving ourselves and the whole of this creation means waking up with acceptance for every aspect and energy of LIFE, reconciling with all we have rejected within and without, connecting with what we have spurned, understanding with compassion the motivations that have compelled us, and always questioning instead of judging, when we do not understand.

As Llewellyn Vaughn Lee says, "If we embrace the sacred within all of life, we will find that life will speak to us as it spoke to our ancestors. A veil will be lifted and this innate knowing will be present again. This is the ancient wisdom of the Earth itself, the Earth which has evolved and changed over millennia, whose wisdom we desperately need at this present time if we are to avoid an even greater ecological disaster."

It is also imperative to understand that unawareness is a necessary pre-requisite to awareness - we cannot become aware of ourselves as consciousness itself until we experience the pain and suffering that unawareness brings. All destruction and suffering comes from this realm of unawareness. However to judge this state of consciousness and stage of evolution is to fall back into the pit of unawareness. Perhaps nothing on the spiritual journey is as challenging as seeing what we have done in the past with equanimity, acceptance, true humility, trusting that the light of awareness is all that is needed to immediately change our perception, feelings, needs and actions in the world. And the quicker we can move away **from judgment to change** the sooner we will bring about a different world order.

Only by waking up, expanding consciousness, becoming more aware and ultimately being forgiving of ourselves for our past blind ignorance, can we heal ourselves and our earth and find creative ways to co-exist in mutual harmony, creating a world where there is room for all.

Well, the first thing to recognize in human-earth relationships is the Earth is primary and humans are derivative. Humans are for the perfection of the Earth rather than the Earth is here for the perfection of humans. Because the Earth project, reading people like Aristotle, some of the great classics, and particularly Aquinas at an earlier period in human history, mentions that the planet Earth or the universe is the ultimate and noblest perfection in things and everything in the universe is ultimately for the perfection of the universe. So humans give to the universe a consciousness of itself. In fact, in a certain sense, humans are the way in which the universe creates itself, because the human can be defined as that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself in a special mode of conscious self-awareness. So in this manner, the first thing to recognize is that humans must become integral with the Earth. This is a very new approach, to the Western world, who have been so transfixed with the glory of the human and with the rights of humans that they have missed the point as regards humans and their relationship with the Earth.

Thomas Berry - interview 2006

Suggestion:

Write your own definition of eco-spirituality and your own commitment to the planet and yourself for the trip

Start collecting quotes that speak to you on eco-spirituality and feel free to share with pilgrims

