

FOOD, VALUES, AND ECOLOGY

by Roar Bjornes

Food, values, and ecology are all intimately linked to our spiritual existence. We have to look at them from a spiritual holistic view.

Human beings, led by self interest, have been neglecting ecology at every step. We should remember that the sky and the air, the hills and the mountains, the rivers and forests, the wild animals and reptiles, the birds and fish, and all sorts of aquatic creatures and plants, are all inseparably related to one another. Human beings must be cautious from now on. They must restructure their thoughts, plans and activities in accordance with the dictates of ecology. There is no alternative.

Many environmental experts and activists would argue that to live a life according to the directives of ecology, is the most urgent task for humanity right now. But what does it mean? What will genuine environmental ethics look like?

For science, viruses represent the smallest accumulation and diversity of molecules which is recognized as "life." Maybe in the near future, when more subtle research-techniques are employed, we will recognize the sentience of smaller aggregations of molecules. For now, viruses personify the boundary between life and non-life. But in the wheel of creation -- whether in the descending and devolutionary phase (to creation of the universe and compressed matter), or in the ascending and evolutionary stage (from creation of life to humanity and spiritual evolution) -- there is Consciousness at every level of the way. Even stones and crystals are "alive" and have dormant minds and are expressions of Cosmic Consciousness. It is therefore impossible to draw a final line between animate and inanimate beings. In the so-called inanimate world there is mind, but the mind is dormant, as if asleep, because there is no nervous system.

Native Americans certainly experienced this mind in the cosmos. In the international best-seller, *THE SECRET LIFE OF PLANTS*, Peter Thompkins and Christopher Bird report that, when killing a tree, the tribal people would have a heart-to-heart conversation with the tree. In no uncertain terms would they let the tree know what was going to happen, and finally forgiveness would be asked for having to commit this unfortunate act of 'violence'.



In the same book, they also documented scientific experiments on plants with a modified lie detector. The instrument would register when a plant's leaves were cut or burnt. Not only that, when a plant "understood" it was going to be killed, it went into a state of shock or "numbness." Thus, the scientists explained it in this way, and the reason was possibly preventing it from undue suffering, which again may explain the "warnings" given to trees by the Native Americans.

Such laboratory tests, may sound outrageous to materialists, but not to the ancient, animist peoples from all over the world, nor to Indian yogis or Western mystics. They have for long informed us that we do not live in a dead and meaningless universe. There is spirit and creative will everywhere. There is longing for song in the heart of stones, and there is love for the Great in the blossoms and bosom of trees. But unfortunately, nature cannot always express its grief when it is damaged or destroyed. To protect it, we should conserve and properly utilize all natural resources.

Poets and sages throughout the ages have observed a deep grief in nature. In *NEWS OF THE UNIVERSE* (Sierra Club Books, 1980) poet Robert Bly writes about nature having a kind of melancholic mood, or "slender sadness". Buddhists associate this intrinsic grief with the incessant wheel of reproduction.

If nature -- earth, trees, and water -- truly experiences a form of existential pain or grief, at least when destroyed and polluted - our conservation efforts and our ecological outlook must first and foremost acknowledge this innate suffering. And by acknowledging it, nature becomes part of us. To paraphrase noted psychologist James Hillman -- one of the innovators in the new field of eco-psychology - - our mind is enlarged to include nature; the world becomes us. And if we destroy that world, out of ignorance or greed, we destroy a part of ourselves.



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Since mind or consciousness is expressed even in so-called inanimate objects as rocks, sand or mud, it perceives an intrinsic oneness in all of creation. Thus in P R Sarkar's world view we grant existential rights or value to all beings -- whether soil, plants, animals and humans. Sarkar concedes that in principle all physical expressions of Cosmic Consciousness have an equal right to exist and to express itself.

This sentiment is echoed by Norwegian eco-philosopher Arne Naess, whose "biospherical egalitarianism" is advocated by the deep-ecology movement, which he founded. But as evolution is irreversible -- amoebas eventually evolved into apes, but apes never transform into amoebas -- Tantra also acknowledges "higher" and "lower" expressions of Consciousness. This differentiation is crucial, and it is on the basis of this that Tantra and deep-ecology differ.

The Tantric ecological world-view is both egalitarian and, because of the evolutionary process just referred to, in a sense, 'hierarchical'. Evolution proceeds by expressing more and more complex beings who are able to express higher levels of consciousness. On this evolutionary ladder, amoebas are at the "bottom" and humans are at the "top." Within this hierarchical system there are various levels of egalitarian cooperation.

This notion is also supported by the new systems science, which proclaim that one cannot have wholeness without hierarchy. As Ken Wilbur explains: "'Hierarchy' and 'wholeness,' in other words, are two names for the same thing, and if you destroy one, you completely destroy the other". Each hierarchy is composed of increasing orders of wholeness -- organisms include cells which include molecules, which include atoms.

In an evolutionary context, the new stage of development has extra value relative to the previous stage. An oak sprout is more complex and therefore endowed with a fuller expression of consciousness than an acorn. A monkey has a more evolved nervous system and mind than an insect, and a human has a more evolved brain and intellect than an ape.

This crucial definition of subsequent higher stages of consciousness, of a hierarchy of being, is central to Tantra. But, and with potential dire consequences, it is often overlooked by many Greens or deep-ecologists. They often equate hierarchy with the higher exploiting the lower by transferring human pathological experiences of hierarchy -- such as fascism, for example -- to the study of nature. But the

ecological universe of nature could not exist without hierarchy, and humans, for good or for worse, are, as the most advanced expression of consciousness in evolution, stewards of the natural world. Hence we need to acknowledge both unity and oneness as well as high and low (or deep and shallow) expressions of consciousness when developing an ecological world view.

We need to emulate nature in advancing what Riane Eisler calls "actualization hierarchies," (Riane Eisler, *THE CHALICE AND THE BLADE*, Harper, San Francisco, 1987, p 205) we must learn to maximize our species' potential, both in relation to ourselves and to nature. In other words, a self-actualized humanity can learn to integrate itself in relation to nature. Learn to realize our oneness with the "other." Learn to recognize that being on top of the evolutionary ladder does not give us the right to rob and exploit those lower than ourselves.

Because of the many pathological expressions of hierarchy in human society -- such as fascism, Nazism, communism, or corporate multinationalism - - many so-called new paradigm thinkers are suggesting a new and supposedly healthier model termed heterarchy.

In a heterarchy, rule is established by an egalitarian interplay of all parties. For example, atoms may have a heterarchical relationship amongst themselves, but their relationship to a cell is hierarchical. In other words, the various heterarchies are strands in the ever-evolving web of hierarchies, and when functioning optimally, the relationship between them is one of coordinated cooperation. By negating hierarchy and favouring heterarchy only, we establish another pathology, because the existence or validity of heterarchy does not disprove the existence or importance of positive or actualized hierarchy. There is an ongoing movement toward greater complexity and higher consciousness in evolution, while at the same time there is, on a deeper level, ecological cooperation and spiritual unity amongst all beings.

In other words, there are both heterarchy and hierarchy. To disprove the hierarchical flow of evolution by saying that all of us -- whether leaf, tree, monkey, or human -- are equal, heterarchical partners in the great web of life, is to impose on nature faulty and limited concepts. It reduces the wondrous complexity of creation to a lowest common denominator, and that serves neither nature nor humans well.

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There is unity of consciousness amongst all beings, because we all come from, and are created by, the same Shakti - which in turn is the manifestative qualifying power of Cosmic Consciousness. But nature is also infinitely diverse, and we need to embrace variety in all its forms. One such unique variety is expressed in terms of unit consciousness. A seedling is more complex and therefore more conscious than an acorn, and an oak is more complex and conscious than a seedling.

Another way of expressing this is that a dog has more capacity for mental reflection and self-consciousness than a fir tree. Both are manifestations of Cosmic Consciousness, 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 other living beings cannot. Even so, no one has delegated any authority to human beings to kill those unfortunate creatures. (P R Sarkar, NEOHUMANISM, p 64) But to survive, we cannot avoid killing other beings.

To solve this dilemma, articles of food are to be selected from amongst those beings where development of consciousness is comparatively low. If vegetables, corn, bean and rice are available, cows or pigs should not be slaughtered. Secondly, before killing any animals with developed or underdeveloped consciousness, we must consider deeply if it is possible to live a healthy life without taking such lives.

Thus, in addition to existential value, various beings, based on their depth of consciousness, have a variable degree of what is often termed "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."



It is also 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, beans, and other legumes for human consumption. It is estimated that only 10 percent of the protein and calories we feed to our livestock is recovered in the meat we eat. The other 90 percent goes literally "down the drain." (WHAT'S WRONG WITH EATING MEAT, Vistara Parham, Sisters Universal Publishing, Northampton, 1979, p 39)

In addition to existential value, and intrinsic value, all beings have "utility value". Sarkar says that human beings usually preserve those creatures which have 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 argue that "only human beings have the right to live, and not non-humans. All are the children of Mother Earth; all are the offspring of the [Cosmic] Consciousness." (Sarkar)

Sarkar also points out that sometimes we do not know enough about the real utilitarian value of an animal or a plant; 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 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 camp grounds provide nourishment for the human soul and mind. As a whole, the forest ecosystem has an abundance of ecological, aesthetic, and spiritual values which extends far beyond its benefits as tooth picks and plywood.

All of nature is endowed with existential and intrinsic value, as well as utility value. This hierarchical, and ultimately holistic understanding of evolution and ecology, formulates the basic foundation for a new, and potentially groundbreaking ecological ethics.

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

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'The main characteristic of PROUT-based socioeconomic movements is that they aim to guarantee the comprehensive, multifarious liberation of humanity.' P R Sarkar

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THE WISDOM OF YOGA

by Acarya Gunadevananda Avadhuta

If you want to know all, know one. Interesting concept isn't it? It is one of the many realizations coming from the ancient wisdom of yoga.

Deep realizations are the product of synthesis, often stimulated by practical experimentation, and yoga falls pretty much within this type of reality, in which bookish knowledge has a very relative importance.

By deeply concentrating the mind, we can go beyond the normal state of awareness, and reach deeper levels of consciousness. This journey within ends when we reach the realization that our own consciousness is the very same endless Consciousness that pervades the entire Cosmos. This feeling of complete unity with the creation is the ultimate goal of yoga and it is a state of unimaginable joy or bliss, which is called "Ananda" in Sanskrit, the ancient language of India.

These spiritual concepts and practices have been inspiring countless human beings to achieve all round progress. While spirituality supports no blind belief, religious doctrine, ritual or dogma, it does follow a subjective approach yet remains adaptable enough to allow external adjustments. You can learn spirituality only through your personal experience and, in this sense, learning meditation and spiritual practices is 95% practical and only 5% philosophical.

A concept that is almost a synonym of meditation is the one of "Sadhana" which in Sanskrit means "the effort to become complete". Any effort made to express the potential of your life constitutes sadhana or spiritual effort. So whatever activity you do, needs to be measured against this simple yardstick. Of course the most important aspect of this is psycho-spiritual development.

Spiritual practices is an intuitional science aimed at the realization of the infinite consciousness and meditation is its key practice. In meditation you make an effort to fully concentrate your intellect on the idea of the Infinite. Eventually you develop a "pointed intellect" or "intuition": this means a direct super-conscious knowledge – it is expansion of the mind to realise Oneness.

