



## Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth

*Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (Editor) , Wendell Berry (Editor) , Thich Nhat Hanh , Joanna Macy , Sandra Ingerman , Richard Rohr , Bill Plotkin , Mary Evelyn Tucker , more... Brian Swimme , Vandana Shiva , John Stanley (Contributor) , David R. Loy (Contributor) , Thomas Berry (Contributor) ...less*

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Showing the deep connection between our present ecological crisis and our lack of awareness of the sacred nature of creation, this series of essays from spiritual and environmental leaders around the world shows how humanity can transform its relationship with the Earth. Combining the thoughts and beliefs from a diverse range of essayists, this collection highlights the current ecological crisis and articulates a much-needed spiritual response to it. Perspectives from Buddhism, Sufism, Christianity, and Native American beliefs as well as physics, deep psychology, and other environmental disciplines, make this a well-rounded contribution. The complete list of contributors are Oren Lyons, Thomas Berry, Thich Nhat Hanh, Chief Tamale Bwoya, Joanna Macy, Sandra Ingerman, Richard Rohr, Wendell Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker, Sister Miriam MacGillis, Satish Kumar, Vandana Shiva, Pir Zia Inayat-Kahn, Winona LaDuke, John Stanley, John Newall, Bill Plotkin, Geneen Marie Haugen, Jules Cashford, and Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee.

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# From Reader Review **Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth** for online ebook

## **Stephanie Bogdanich says**

I thought this would have some interesting and unique ideas about communicating about climate change but it's the same old stuff I've read elsewhere.

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## **Daniel Behn says**

Most excellent, these are the great thinkers of our times. Real paradigm shifters. More to come soon!

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## **Justin says**

This is an extraordinary compilation of short essays that successfully updates the concept of deep ecology. The well chosen authors offer a diversity of perspectives that run the entire imaginable gamut. I am especially impressed with this book because the authors are not afraid to boldly state and explore the vital spiritual dimension of ecology.

As Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee says, "In only relating to our planet from a physical perspective, much of the ecological movement perpetuates the concept of the earth as something solely physical, without sacredness or soul, and so reinforces the divorce of matter from spirit."

Our external world accurately reflects the current state of our internal world. I like that very few lines in this book were dedicated to describe the symptoms of the current ecological crisis as this turns into scare tactics all too easily. Rather, several authors took the time to bring to light this spiritual dimension of both humanity and the soul of the living Earth.

Perhaps the essay I enjoyed most was written by Joanna Macy called The Greening of the Self. In it she argues that the current environmental crisis comes from understanding of ourselves based on Newtonian physics which separates us from the material world and gives us dominion over it.

The argument that we are part of the Earth system is one of the two or three deepest roots of all ecology. It goes without saying that since we want to take care of ourselves, then it is obvious that we need to take care of our environment. This perspective is brilliantly explained by Joanna Macy:

"The obvious choice, then, is to extend our notions of self-interest. For example, it would not occur to me to plead with you, 'Don't saw off your leg. That would be an act of violence.' It wouldn't occur to me (or to you), because your leg is part of your body. Well, so are the trees in the Amazon rain basin. They are our external lungs. We are beginning to realize that the world is our body."

Logical enough, but it contains a nearly fatal flaw that the author fails to address.

This thought process is aimed at Western culture because it is based on logic. However, it won't hit its target

because it fails to take into account that Western culture has long since decided to not take care of itself.

The mantra that advertising agencies bombard people with is: be free; do as you wish. Happiness comes from a life unhindered by restrictions to pleasure.

Nowhere is this attitude more evident than in our diet. The so called Western diet can be described in no uncertain terms: it is the antithesis of what our body has evolved to use as nourishment. It is manufactured for maximum immediate pleasure (read: taste). It rests on the bedrock of refined sugar, refined wheat and alcohol. Take these away and far too many people will lose all pleasure they find in life, that is if they survive the withdrawal symptoms.

It is also illustrated in our attitude towards corporal beauty. If you are not pleased with any certain part of your body, then just have it surgically improved. A friend of mine recently attended her 20th high school reunion and found out that she was the only woman present who had not undergone cosmetic surgery. It is increasingly becoming a popular 15th birthday gift from parents to their overjoyed daughters. Undoubtedly the improved self esteem of these girls cannot be overrated, but at what cost?

If by living this type of life you get, for example, high blood pressure, then you take a pill to control it and continue with your life. In fact there are pills for just about every ill imaginable. In this way, we have gradually lost our intuitive sense for our body's proper functioning. Obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure and even some cancers are increasingly considered normal, even inevitable, exposing both the shortsightedness of our current historical perspective and what can only be called having the wool pulled over our eyes by the broadcast media.

As Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee affirms, "A sacred substance that nourishes our souls and the soul of the world is diminishing. And we do not even know that this is happening."

So, if individuals under the influence of Western culture are not even interested in caring for their own body in a way that would make sense to any of our great grandparents, then what makes us believe that extending our notions of self-interest will result in harmony between humanity and the Earth? If the body is not sacred, let alone the soul, then how could anybody find sacredness in a tree or a mountain or a pond or a fish or even another human being?

I don't think that self-interest has a place in this discussion. The self ceases to exist as we know it because we fit into a tide of unity like that among fingers on a hand, like that among fruit on a tree, like that seen among waves on a shore. In this sense we don't focus our energy on taking care of ourselves, or even others. Rather it is the act of taking care that demonstrates our true nature. In this material world, that takes will, planning, effort, coordination, reflection and strength. Before these, though, it takes comprehension and vision of who we truly are and our place in the world, as Joanna Macy states so eloquently in this book.

Only once does this book wander into the entirely esoteric, new age quagmire. In that essay the author tells us at least 30 times what humanity **MUST** do to restore harmony. The essay is a sore thumb, though, it stands out from the rest which are insightful, well researched and original.

Overall, this is a must read for anybody interested in deep ecology.

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## **Carmony says**

“Spiritual ecology is the fire by which you can sit, to hear the stories of our human legacy and responsibility told once again in clear voices. It is the place where you can understand most intimately and immediately that spirit and nature are one, and that what affects one thing ultimately affects everything.”

I read this book for a class. The message from each author, while coming from a slightly different place of realization/philosophy/spiritual tradition, was powerful and important. It provides a good reflection on the common thinking of humans being separate from nature to acknowledging that humans are part of nature. It just got a bit redundant chapter after chapter.

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## **Paul Rack says**

A really important and beautiful book including reflections from leaders and thinkers in many different spiritual traditions. The theme is the soul of the planet, which is a different tack than most books like this that examine the physical side of ecological degradation. These writers are more about the degrading of our spirituality and our sense of the earth as sacred, and the disastrous consequences thereof. One essay postulated an expansion of the "I" to include our identification with the planet, rather than just with our own personal current physical self. Why are the water molecules that were once part of "me" now not still "me?" The ecological crisis of our time will not be solved just by laws and policies. It can only be solved by our spiritual maturity and growth, so that we are no longer prone to treat others (things, life-forms, and people) as objects to be used and spent, but as expressions of the Creator with their own integrity and beauty. As a pastor I remain even more convinced that our worship and mission has to be increasingly creation-centered in order to honor and obey the Creator. The other thing about this book that is important is the inter-faith aspect. Yes there are differences between the shamanistic, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian takes on creation. But none of them support the psychotic fear and hatred of the earth that has resulted in our current exploding crisis. In the end, we are all earthlings fashioned by a good God and placed in a blessed and beautiful garden. Finally, the book makes the point that what we do to the earth we do to our own bodies/souls; they reflect each other and killing the earth is suicide.

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## **Ilona Meagher says**

This book is so refreshing, so empowering, so magic-revealing and so human meaning-making. If your response to the environmental challenges we face (yes, they *\*are\** serious and quite painful to digest) is to tune out and weep as if all is already lost, this book may buy you some hope.

More of us putting its concepts to practice may also buy Gaia (and all of her life forms) more time.

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## **David Salmon says**

Spiritual Ecology is a collection of essays illustrating humanities past relationships with the Earth and the

current issues our relationship faces. It is beautiful, insightful and inspiring to read. Not only does it motivate you to deepen your connection to the land, it also keeps you grounded. Each writer comes from a unique background and shares their understanding of spiritual ecology in a beautiful way.

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## **Diogenes says**

There could be so much said for this collection of truly didactic and spiritual voices not only raising a heightened awareness of our increasingly sickened planet, but also rallying a call to moral arms for each and every one of us to DO SOMETHING about it, by communing with nature, appreciating the universal spirituality of life on both micro and macro levels, and by waylaying the vices of consumerism, myopic narcissism, wanton waste, ruination, and insatiable greed, for the greater good of the planet and all life upon it, present and future. The task is herculean, but one way or another we will all face the drastic imbalances taking over Mother Earth and bequeath it all to the next generations.

"EARTH IS WHERE we all live. Earth sustains us. Earth allows us to be here temporarily. Like a good guest, we [should] respect our host and all the beauty and bounty we are lucky to experience. We [should] do no harm. And then we leave."

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## **Dana says**

A stirring collection of essays discussing the calamity of climate change. Because of our spiritual connection to the earth, we suffer as Gaia suffers.

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## **Guttersnipe Das says**

If you arrive suddenly in a foreign city, a city where you do not know the landmarks and do not speak the language, you may find yourself urgently in need a guide. In the same way, this book is vitally necessary, now that we find ourselves in a changed and unfamiliar world. If we wish to survive as a civilization, we need to find new paths - and we need to find them quickly. You would do well to call in sick to work - and stay home to read this.

A few of the texts here I'd found previously, including one that blew open my mind when I read it aged 19: Joanna Macy's "Greening of the Self". It is even more amazing than I remember. Thich Nhat Hanh is here as well and just because he's a beloved Zen master who knows the right way to eat an orange doesn't mean he pulls his punches: "In my mind I see a group of chickens in a cage disputing over a few seeds of grain, unaware that in a few hours they will all be killed." He knows we may not make it. Even acknowledging we may not survive, there is a way forward, a way to take action and not be paralyzed by helplessness.

Of the thinkers I discovered for the first time while reading this book, the most helpful and inspiring was Sister Miriam MacGillis. The interview here with Sister Miriam, a contemplative inspired by Thomas Berry, was stunning - perhaps the most profound example of skillful means united with a vast perspective that I have ever come across. Her understanding is so vast - and she brings it to bear on the farm that is in her stewardship. I read it three times in a row. It is magnificent.

I loved, too, Susan Murphy's essay, "The Koan of the Earth". Susan Murphy is a Zen teacher in Australia and her gaze is stark and clear. When the situation is as serious as this one, it is best to have a physician who does not mince words. In order to survive, we will need vast compassion, and it is compassion like this, tough as nails. (After reading this essay, I wanted very much to read 'Minding the Earth, Mending the World', Murphy's book on this subject, but it appears to be unavailable. Somebody please bring this book back to print!)

I was particularly grateful to Geneen Marie Haugen and the essay "Imagining Earth". Haugen writes about how the imagination can be used to reacquaint ourselves with the sacred in the land and how this practice, which involves some "make-believe", might turn out to be essential for our survival.

Haugen helped me a lot to understand my own experience. As a boy in New Hampshire, I experienced my family's farm as a place vastly alive and full of spirits. Certain places had certain powers; there was even an area I believed to be "the heart of the farm". I grew up, thought myself foolish, and it was years before I was able recognize how correct I'd been as a child! This essay is a beautiful guide to this practice. She helped me understand, too, why I find the unfortunate fate of my family's farm (and life in Tokyo) so wrenching. Haugen writes, "A practice of attending an animate world may have a cumulative effect of rearranging our own consciousness in a way that we cannot later withdraw from without pain"(166). Yes, indeed.

Anthologies like this one aim to reach many people by providing many styles and approaches. I admit there were a few essays here that seemed to me "keynote addresses" - general statements aimed at an audience already convinced. I hope that this book will serve as a sort of general introduction for a series of books on this subject.

Hopefully these essays will serve to fuel discussion. Admittedly, I did not agree with all the approaches found here. A few, like the essay by Sandra Ingerman, seemed to be examples of cheesy, old-style New Age thinking that is too busy being airy and optimistic to actually be useful. This sort of thing was good enough for 1987 (when "The Aquarian Conspiracy" was going to save us all) but - we're going to need to think a lot harder now.

In a book of strong essays, there was one essay that dismayed and even offended me: Satish Kumar's "3 Dimensions of Ecology: Soil, Soul, Society." As a keen student of Hinduism and Buddhism, I think the ecological perspectives of these traditions are both fascinating and urgently necessary. This essay, however, is an embarrassing concoction of platitudes, generalities and sentimentality. This is not 1893, Mr. Kumar is not Swami Vivekananda, and we do not need dumbed-down, platitude-ridden, soft-serve presentations of Hinduism anymore. Pardon me for being rude, but I think this is an argument worth having!

Kumar translates yagna, tapas and dana as soil, soul and society. I'm sorry, but that's not what those words mean. If he wishes to give a creative translation or reinterpretation, that's great, but he should give the traditional meanings and the reasons for his reinterpretation - not just assume that we are ignorant and cannot handle the actual definitions of words. It is no longer necessary to gloss over what is complicated in these faiths -- we can handle the complexity of the real tradition. For a brilliant discussion of how Hindus see the divine as manifest in the land around them, please read Diana Eck's marvelous book *India: A Sacred Geography*, a book that is as necessary to ecologists as it is to students of religion.

I am grateful to this wonderful collection of essays for giving me so much to investigate and ponder - as well as a few things to argue about! May there be more books like this one - and fast! May the conversation continue deep into the night.

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## **Melissa says**

I absolutely loved this book and fought the urge to highlight and apply tabs to every page, but only because it was the library's copy...my own copy coming soon.

This is a fantastic collection of essays on behalf of the earth. In these varied essays, we are faced with all the ways we, as a species, fail the planet, how we started failing thousands of years ago, and how industrialization is taking us beyond the tipping point. Susan Murphy's essay really drove home ways we are failing. Through our insistence that earth and its plants and animals are provided for the use and exploitation of the obviously superior humans, we are killing our own life support system. These essays also bring to light evidence that the earth is not a dead thing to be abused and pillaged, but a living entity and critical player in the life of the whole. Each essay looks at the situation from a different perspective, but all to the same conclusion. We must not just "save the earth", but "unite with the earth" and start developing rules for the sustainability of ALL life, not just the advancement and economic windfalls of the current population of humans.

Religion comes up a lot in the essays. Why? Because many believe that the only sustainable solution is to regain the spiritual relationship with our mother (earth) and learn to live in harmony with nature, not as its master/assassin. What I found most interesting, was that most of the world's spiritual paths and religions heavily incorporate the care of the earth in practice or doctrine, except the Judeo-Christian religion which is predominant in the most materialistic/Imperialist areas of the world. I also really enjoyed Kumar's essay about how key movements/philosophies/dogmas use a trinity of one sort or another to relate essential messages. Khan's essay on Sufi and Zoroastrianism theology and efforts to sustain life were quite interesting, as was Cashford's essay on Gaia, and Rohr's inconvenient truths to members of his religion. All the essays were extremely thought provoking.

As the author notes in her essay, "Our present ecological crisis is calling to us and it is for each of us to respond. This crisis is not a problem to be solved, because the world is not a problem, but a living being in a state of dangerous imbalance and deep distress. This distress belongs to its body and soul, and as the voices in this book show, there are different ways we can respond to this calling."

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## **Florence Millo says**

Don't you love it when a book puts into words what you have felt but couldn't articulate? That is what this book did for me-- things I had pondered and felt but couldn't quite turn into words.

This is a collection of essays by several thoughtful, spiritual people writing from a variety of perspectives. All point toward a lack spiritual groundedness at the core of the ecological devastation we are currently participating in.

It is not a book to be read in one easy sitting but should be read slowly, carefully, thoughtfully.

It would be difficult to pick a favorite but if I did, it would be Wendell Berry's

"Contributions."

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## **Wil says**

This is certainly the most powerful book I have read in years and one that I hope to continue reading for the



rest of my life.

Spiritual Ecology is a collection of essays written by religious/spiritual and environmental leaders. I was blown away by the selection of authors that were chosen for this book and the insight that each of them shared. Each essay touches upon ecology in a unique, inspiring way.

I originally bought this book because I was interested in Thich Nhat Hanh, who wrote a great piece for this book. However, some of my favorite pieces were written by Joanna Macy, Wendell Berry, Bill Plotkin, Thomas Berry, and Richard Rohr.

The authors come from diverse backgrounds: from Thomas Berry and Richard Rohr who are Christian ecotheologians, to Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk, to Chief Oren Lyons, a member of the Onondaga Nation.

If you know and appreciate any of the writers, reading this book is a great way to find other writers that you will really enjoy.

I also want to point out that essays are really uplifting. A lot of ecological literature, like *Eaarth* by Bill McKibben, use fear tactics to spread environmental awareness, which I don't think is as enlightening. This book invokes concern, but it is also very positive, and practical.

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### **mylene says**

kind of redundant but still a good read

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### **Daveed-yisrael Halevi says**

Powerful and eloquent essays on eco-pedagogy and our need to return to a loving relationship to our ecosystem .

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