



MEDITATION FOR GAIA

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ABSTRACT

The immediacy of global ecological crises provides two considerations, which I refer to as Soft Edge and Hard Edge arguments. The Soft Edge explores my consciousness. The Hard Edge examines the reality of drastic Earth changes, and points to a different leadership to deal with issues of human adaptation that are scarcely comprehensible at this time. The thread of changing consciousness is woven through both arguments. I reflect on the cybernetic lunacy of a global economy driven by the collective greed of corporations that operate without ethics, responsibility or accountability. I note the ecological illiteracy and indifference of our economic and political leaders, while knowing that business as usual is no longer an option.

Yet my first choice is the stillness and silence of meditation. I write about why meditation provides the basis of my activism, touch upon mythology for guidance, and know that the present global turmoil is a catalyst for a different leadership to emerge – one that has responsibility, compassion and integrity at its core. These qualities arise through the cultivation of mindfulness and meditative practice.

Introduction

*When you've finished your own toilet in the morning, then it is time
to attend to the toilet of your planet, just so, with the greatest care.*

The Little Prince

Since childhood I have intuitively held a naive belief that as I am, so is the world. As an adult steeped in meditation as a way of life, the childhood naivety remains but is now more strategic. I know that without deeply understanding my consciousness, I have little chance of understanding the world of which I am a part. So, I choose to be still, meditate and take care of my consciousness, from that state my clarity and compassion translate into action. If I come from any other space inside myself, I cannot begin to know Gaia as a changing web of life.

If I react to the dehumanising and deterioration of the world from anger and despair, then I further accelerate the deterioration.

I remember as a child how I blithely assumed that nature walked me when I cut school to roam the forest and rivers near my home. When I found hurt animals and birds, I instinctively knew to find a special place within me that touched these creatures before I could be of any assistance. This was all intuitive; no one taught me to be so. It was the way I was and I assumed it was the way everyone was.

I have been an environmentalist all my life, long before I knew what the word meant. It emerged from an intrinsic love of nature and rapport with animals. As a child I was often late for school, as the flowers and songbirds in the hedgerows captivated my attention, particularly in springtime, when creativity and new life exploded into being. I once attempted to explain my lateness in these terms to my schoolteacher. I was kept in at recess for my troublesome nature and made to write out 100 lines of “I will not be late for school.” I adorned my punishment schedule with drawings of birds and spring buds, and was then made to repeat the punishment. I did not understand this adult world, nor did I like it. Something in me persisted. I redid my lines, once again drawing birds on branches opening their beaks to sing joyously. I was kept in at recess for an entire week for my stubbornness, yet refused to let go of my feelings for nature. Eventually the teacher gave up on punishing me for my drawings. I was eight years old, and that is when I learned to mistrust authority figures solely concerned with control and power. I was a relatively late starter in this recognition. In looking back, I am grateful to that particular teacher, as it is clear that my intimacy with nature and the environment was forever forged through the experience.

Yet what a transformation could have been created for the entire class had the teacher acted with sensitivity and wisdom. He could have said:

Class, I want you to listen to the wonderful things Ian saw and heard on his way to school this morning. Perhaps you might all see and hear similar things. Maybe you'll all be late for class one day and may even take me for a walk! Our studies this morning will be about the birds and flowers that caught Ian's attention today.

As a child I had special relationships with wild animals — in particular with one otter and a family of hedgehogs that I kept under my bed (the hedgehogs, not the otter!) My parents were

long suffering over the stray animals I brought home, but their patience was severely stretched over the hedgehogs. The hedgehogs had to be returned to the hedgerow when I became infested with their fleas, which I passed on to my immediate family, classmates, and also to a particular schoolteacher that I was delighted to so infest!

My passion for nature was solitary; it had no encouragement from any quarter, perhaps because it needed none. I have subsequently made studies of wolf and dolphin behavior, and was “adopted” by a wolf. When I first met him he was running free in the interior mountains of British Columbia, and he immediately claimed ownership — I was his! After showing me his mountain habitat and uncannily appearing every time I visited this area of British Columbia, he chose to live with me in my home in the forest. I gave him the highly original name of “Wolfie”! I hope he forgave me for that. He had beautiful russet red fur with white markings. His presence of gentleness, patience and above all, his loving heart, were felt by everyone he encountered.

The fascination with dolphins led to many adventures studying and swimming with them in their oceanic habitat, ranging from the Outer Hebrides in the North Atlantic, to the Java Sea north of Bali, and in the Pacific Ocean off Maui and Vancouver Island. I was always exhilarated and totally humbled by their magnificent presence. For me nature was never to be conquered and mastered, it was simply to help me see my place in a vast, interconnected, and changing web of life. I knew from personal experience that Rachel Carson was absolutely right when she remarked in *Silent Spring* (1962) that:

Our challenge is to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves.

Deliberations and Crises: The Soft Edge

I think about that challenge – of our maturity and mastery – when I reflect on the environmental crises that face us. I think about it at two levels. The Soft Edge is the first level about taking care of my consciousness. The Hard Edge examines the reality of drastic earth changes, and points to a different leadership to deal with issues of human adaptation that are scarcely comprehensible at this time.

I am aware of the highly complex and multifaceted world around me, and choose to remain simple and clear. I think about the environment and the ravages produced by industrial

pollution that endangers all life systems, and know my limitations in directly making any significant physical changes. My mind is informed by reports, which starkly demonstrate a rapid deterioration in every category of environmental quality. I seek to remain still and calm. I know we have a global economic system that relies on an impossible and unsustainable model of growth. I know that the transnational corporations, which pollute the earth and endanger life, are not accountable to any elected body, and that they threaten human rights and democracy. I know all this. Realistically there is not a great deal I can do on my own to alleviate matters directly; except to continually set the record straight in the face of apologists who gloss over the truth of what is happening to our environment.

I have seen and experienced at first hand the devastation and dehumanising consequences of over-population. My first choice is internal stillness. I know that the ideas we hold about ourselves and the exploitation of the earth's resources are a cybernetic lunacy. That the threats to human society and the surrounding ecology arise from errors in our habits of thought – that our ways of knowing are plain wrong. I also know that the ideas that drive us have to be dramatically changed, that we must create a new mind for our species, an ecology of ideas that sustains life rather than destroys it. I also note that many of our political and economic leaders are either ecologically illiterate or indifferent, which is much worse. I worry that the activities of transnational organizations, if unchecked, will destroy the global ecosystem and us along with it. I clearly see the immaturity in our present leaders, the greed and power of elite groups in politics, industry and banking. On a daily basis I am confronted with the addictive behaviour of mindless consumerism, and the collective amnesia that people retreat to rather than face environmental crises. I know that “business as usual” is no longer possible. How can it be, with a hole in the ozone layer bigger than America, with acid rain and global warming threatening the life of forests, lakes and coastal cities, with species becoming extinct on a daily basis due to deforestation and pollution. I know all this. Yet my first choice is to be still. I meditate and practice mindfulness in order to cultivate a clear mind.

There are many other ecological consequences and issues I think about that I cannot directly influence or change in any systematic manner. I also think about myself, and at last

find an arena that provides an opportunity for some direct and dramatic change. This Soft Edge investigation is my primary focus, not for selfish reasons, but so I can be clear about the consciousness I occupy. From that clarity I am then able to better serve the planet. From there I take action, engage with others in a process of activism, non-violent protest and public re-education, and commit myself to a different paradigm of behaviour – one that has respect and responsibility for Gaia, and all upon it.

An Environmental Education

Like all environmentalists, I have been dismayed and appalled at the systematic destruction and slaughter of wolves and dolphins, to mention only two species that I feel closely connected to. I believe that human beings and other species share an interconnected essence that demands symbiotic relationships based upon respect. As we push these species into the endangered zone, humankind becomes in my mind no less endangered. I have always felt physically and psychologically interdependent with nature and see notions of human superiority as serving to separate and alienate us from the environment we live in. The seeds of potential entropy and destruction are sown in these attitudes and values. We do not see the web of interconnectedness as it is, because our worldview moves us in the opposite direction – it sees the environment and its resources in terms of how it can satisfy our greed and the needs of economic self-interest. In claiming the world in this way, the environment has become an extension of human egocentric needs and values -an *egosphere* rather than an *ecosphere*. In this egosphere, our preoccupation is that of consuming mindlessly in a global economy, controlled by the collective greed and power of some 200 giant corporations. There is little regard for ecosystem balance or concern about the creation of global inequality and poverty. There is an illusory sense that pollution does not really affect us, that problems of global inequality are somewhere over there, unseen, and similarly do not affect us. We forget that we are part of an interconnected global system.

To become ecologically literate we must learn to think about the ecosphere in terms of interconnectedness, context and process. These are the basic principles of all living systems. (Capra 2000) An ecosphere generates no waste, one species waste being another's

food; matter and energy cycle through feedback loops continuously forming a web of life; and diversity increases resilience. When applied to our industrial processes, the ecosphere notion means that manufactured products and waste must eventually provide the raw material for further manufacturing, so that industries are linked in ecological clusters. We have the knowledge to create this, but the obstacles that stand in the way are not technological, they are the attitudes, values and concepts that define the present dominance of corporate values.

Manuel Castells (2000) has shown in his three volume work, how the rise of informational capitalism is intertwined with rising social inequality, polarization and social exclusion, which are now embedded in the corporate values that presently shape society. Yet he also argues that the informational networks that facilitate this process, are also being used to initiate shifts in human consciousness, as feminist, environmental, consumer and peace groups have become highly flexible, global networks. Moreover they use the informational systems of the new technological paradigm – the Internet – in a way they are not supposed to! So there is a challenge to informational capitalism, a challenge which seeks to place other values into the informational and financial networks of corporate culture.

The design wisdom of nature is built into Paul Hawken's (1993) call for a Restorative Economy, which an increasing number of manufacturers are paying attention to. Customers are beginning to state a preference for wind and solar power produced products, as their concern about emissions and global warming increases. The exponential increase in oil and gas prices assists this momentum, as alternative sources of energy become competitive. Companies with the foresight to implement low emission energy sources may well be the pioneers of a new industrial order, particularly as fuel cell technology – which produces no emissions – is drawing considerable investment. The Natural Step Program, which began in Sweden with thirty scientists, environmentalists and corporate leaders, articulated a consensus on what it takes to create a sustainable society. (Brower 1998) These ideas are slowly spreading; not producing toxic materials faster than they can be broken down by nature; of realizing that the productivity and bio-diversity of nature cannot be systematically reduced; that human needs must be met by an equitable and efficient use of the earth's resources. The Natural Step strikes a note for optimism in the 21st century.

For myself, there was a turning point in my education about the environment. It occurred in the early 1990s when I worked for a number of environmental organizations as a canvasser. Usually my engagement with organizations was as a consultant, but one summer I decided to join the front line environmental workers in an effort to educate the general public on their home doorsteps. I had already begun a process of talking to kindergarten and grade one and two classes about caring for the earth, and canvassing seemed to be a step in the same direction. The summer I chose to do this was exceedingly hot and humid. As I progressed through approximately 10,000 homes in Ottawa and Kingston, I was encouraged by how generous the general public was, irrespective of class, ethnicity, gender or occupation. I stood dripping sweat on people's doorsteps, talking about the environment, and over 80% of the people canvassed contributed to the organizations I represented. Ambassadors, shop assistants, new immigrants from Korea, out-of-work laborers, politicians, school teachers, taxi drivers — all were generous according to their means.

Yet something was missing, and I spent more and more time reflecting on what it was. My discussions with individual householders were about both local and global issues. Recycling boxes, Great Lakes pollution, public health, global warming, acid rain, rainforests and nuclear waste were all on the agenda as I had studied them, and more, in preparation for this job. Yet a major part of the puzzle was missing. It had two main components. The first was a distinct lack of individual responsibility towards the issues of environmental pollution. For the most part, members of the general public were happy to contribute generously to Friends of the Earth, to Greenpeace, or to kindred environmental groups, but there was no determination to dramatically shift their own patterns of product consumption or attitudes toward the environment. They contributed to environmental groups so that some other body would take action and responsibility. Concern for environmental issues ended with their financial contributions. The second issue that struck me very forcibly was that most people I met that long, hot, humid summer were unaware of any spiritual underpinning about how they and the environment interconnected. It is notable that this spiritual dimension was also absent from the environmental organizations I represented.

I spent considerable time thinking about this and about my own activities as an educator and an environmentalist. I started to lecture to university classes about inner ecology and to participate in playgroups with young children about taking care of the earth. I knew it was important to step out and be visible and vocal as an environmentalist, yet many environmentalists I knew were exceedingly angry and violent in their expressions to industry, government and the general public. This was not my way, and as a canvasser on the streets of Ottawa and Kingston I received an education about what was really at stake. The paramount issue was the internal pollution crisis that affected *everyone* in society — environmentalists and industrialists alike. This was the crisis of Inner Ecology. It was essential to step back inside and examine this. I had to “put my money where my mouth was” so I renewed my own internal journey through meditation. And there I confronted the patterns of inner ecology that polluted my own consciousness, and in the process increased my awareness of the highest qualities within myself, as I became internally stronger. One result of this change in direction in how I spoke and thought about environmental issues is this manuscript. I am grateful to the teachers, students and children who provided guidance and feedback over the last few decades, so that I can better complete the puzzle I now put together. I received quite an education as a canvasser, not the least being the realization that despite all we are doing to the earth, the crisis is not with the planet. The crisis is with us — *homo sapiens*.

Attitude Shifts and Gaia: The Spiritual Dimension

If we understand Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis correctly (1987; 1988), the Earth itself is not in danger, yet in order to survive on it we must discard our ignorance about our interconnectedness with the changing planetary web of life. Despite the ravages of industrial civilization, or more correctly because of them, a new equilibrium is being created. Human instrumentality in destroying the present biosphere has belatedly been recognized. In 1995 the United Nation’ s World Meteorological Organization explicitly connected global warming and ozone depletion to human industrial activity. The Kyoto conference, late in 1997, and the Hague conference in 2000, struggled with very limited success to address this issue.

Yet, there really is no debate about global warming. It is happening, and we are totally unprepared for it. Global warming changes everything, not just climate. We have the capacity to totally disrupt our life support systems, because for the first time in human history the planet's biosphere is rapidly being eroded. At the Hague Conference on Climate Change, polluting industries from Canada, Japan, and the United States traded for pollution credits with companies who had cleaned up their industrial act. The major polluting industries of these countries formed "A Partnership for Climate Action," based on emissions trading. It was this agenda that torpedoed the Hague conference in 2000, as it was pursued with blatant disregard and cynicism for a global ecology that is heading straight for what the Hadley Center for Climate Change (UK) calls a "runaway effect" – ecosystem collapse beyond the point of repair. Trading for emission credits is not the way to encourage polluting industries to change. The Hadley scientists estimate that the "runaway effect" will occur around 2150, as pollutants are presently being released into the atmosphere at five times the rate that natural systems can remove them. (Simms 2000) The Kyoto protocol in 1997 was for a 5.2% reduction in global emissions from 1990 levels. To avoid the runaway effect requires at least a 60% reduction over the next hundred years. The American, Canadian and Japanese delegations' search for loopholes, indicates that major polluters are not serious about reducing the emissions that cause global warming. Their aggressive unconcern about grasping the full reality of global warming leaves the world without an agreement on how to curb the amount of greenhouse gases pumped into the atmosphere. This is not the leadership required for the 21st century.

Furthermore, there really is no argument about the effects of toxic waste on human health. Nearly forty years ago Rachel Carson (1962) produced hard, scientific evidence of the damaging effects of pesticides on human health. In 1996, Theo Colborn detailed the devastating effects of industrial chemical pollution on the health of animals and humans. Her research threatens the whole fabric of the multinational chemicals industry, as does the research that correlates breast cancer with industrial toxic pollution. The stark picture is that health problems from toxic industrial pollution are inevitable byproducts of the manufacturing processes of the Western wealth making machine. Our industries make us ill. This

conclusion is graphically reinforced by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) in her research on a Brazilian squatter town, which reflects similar findings from all over the world:

what I have been seeing for two and a half decades is more than “malnutrition”, and it is politically as well as economically caused, although in the absence of overt political strife and war. Adults, it is true, might be described as “chronically undernourished,” in a weakened and debilitated state, prone to infections and opportunistic diseases. But it is overt hunger and starvation that one sees in babies and small children, the victims of a “famine” that is endemic, relentless and political-economic in origin.

We choose general amnesia towards these environmental and health crises, rather than a deep, mindful look at reality as it is. That reality is stark – there is no debate about global warming or the effects of toxic pollution on human health.

What *is* debatable and problematic is this: Can a particular organism with self-reflexive consciousness change its state of ignorance, patterns of production, consumption and underlying ideology rapidly enough? Can it ensure that a different consciousness is created which can deal with the dramatic changes we are faced with? The unfortunate factor is that we maintain smaller pictures of ourselves and of the crises we are located within. We fail to be aware of the vast, interconnected, and changing web of life and of the very powerful forces on our planet. We choose to remain insulated from reality and cultivate a collective amnesia about what is happening within and around us.

Very often our smaller pictures of ourselves are there because we feel driven and controlled by the economic, political and hierarchical structures that frame our daily experience. Global citizens in many walks of life and situations generally feel powerless as they succumb to a daily round of fear based survival. There is very little semblance of Truth or Transparency in a world that appears so structured, controlled and socially engineered. Yet all of this is a manifestation of ignorance, and a denial of who each one of us truly is. Fear corrupts — both those who perpetuate it and those who are terrorized by it — and furthermore, fear buries our spiritual nature under a morass of ignorance from which there seems to be no escape. Yet the moment we touch the seeds of spirituality within, and experience the dynamic interconnection between our true nature and daily existence, then the

terror and corruption of fear decreases. The alternative to this is to remain in denial and ignorance about the ecology of our very existence.

The journey of meditation is a personal pilgrimage into our true nature. It takes us out of chaos and fear. Without it we fail to realize that seeing the balance between Mother Earth and the Creator as it is, between the planet and the universe as it is, requires that human beings choose to maintain a spiritual connection both to the Earth and to the Universe. The global pollution crisis is not so much about the industrial excesses and corporate greed of our civilization; it is much deeper than that. It is about the absence of the sacred in our personal lives. It is about our lack of inner strength. This is the first level to consider – the Soft Edge about consciousness changing.

To put it bluntly, there is an external environmental pollution crisis because there is an internal pollution crisis in humankind. We have produced so much external and internal garbage in the twentieth century. In addition to the waste from industrial pollution there is the suffering from wars, atrocities, dehumanizing discriminations, our greed and neglect of everything around and within us. The industrial waste and pollution is readily visible, yet the suffering that rests deep in our consciousness is much more intractable and dangerous. No one has taken care to transform the garbage of our collective anger and hatreds so that it may become the compost for the garden of the twenty-first century. Yet, there are constant wake up calls, such as children shooting children in schools. This is a manifestation of the collective hatreds, neglect and anger. There is a remedy. We must come to a STOP, see deeply into our suffering and garbage, then get out of it by transforming ourselves through meditation, so we can create a new mind to deal with the far reaching changes anticipated for the 21st century.

The remedy is not to be found only in North-South pacts, agreements on sustainable development or in international conferences on the environment. The remedy has also to be deeply rooted in a consciousness that deals directly with internal pollution, a mindfulness that is imbued in meditative practice. The task is to transcend, and move on from, the internal garbage bags we carry around in our field of awareness. This pile of garbage has been placed there by our judgments, greed, fears, hatreds and confusions. All of it derived from the

ideology and social structures within which we act. It colors all that we think, do and feel, and has a colossal impact on the internal and external environments that we then create. It is really not surprising that we live in an age of environmental crisis, of global pollution, for our internal garbage bags are dumped onto the world with our thoughts and attitudes. The necessary clarity to deal with the global environmental crises will emerge, once our thoughts, values and attitudes shift and no longer sustain and feed our internal pollution. This recognition of our internal garbage bags and the manner in which they are dumped out on friends, family, loved ones and the planet is a first step and a supreme responsibility.

It means we must see through and discard the collective myth and value system of the “American Dream,” a colossal process of greed, materialism and waste which has been exported to, and consolidated, in most parts of the globe. The underlying values of this myth have to be replaced. The emerging Gaia myth that derives from James Lovelock, along with aboriginal and Buddhist philosophies of how to relate mindfully to ourselves, the planet and the universe, represents the shift in values that is absolutely necessary if human life is to continue on planet Earth. We are destroying our planet and ourselves because we do not know how to behave with respect to ourselves, to others and to the planet. Thay Nhat Hanh (1998) talks about the Five Wonderful Precepts of the Buddha as a code of ethics and morality that can address the malaise of our society and environment. I refer to his teachings in “Guidelines To Recreate Our World”, Chapter Four of this book.

These issues of personal transformation, attitude and value shift and the significance of the spiritual dimension take me to a particular strategy for change. First of all, it is clear that we have to examine, then change, our models of self and society and transcend all the stubborn mental sets associated with the old models. In other words we must stop being ignorant about our true selves. Secondly, to set about doing this involves an inner journey, through meditation and self-healing practices, so that a universal nature beyond our individual bag of bones, organs and flesh is experienced. The current perspective of our selves and of our location on the planet and in the cosmos has to be challenged and rethought. The many alarming crises of our times can be viewed as a T-junction, one fork leading to breakdown in all domains, the other directing us to a breakthrough to a new evolutionary level of

consciousness as a species. This “new” level has nothing to do with further physical evolution of the human frame but lies in a quantum leap of consciousness. This quantum leap in consciousness may also be somewhat familiar to us, for our deep spiritual nature has in some way spoken to us — through dreams, momentary silences or unexplainable insights. Our spiritual essence is simply buried under layers of ignorance and suffering, yet it is always there. Personal liberation is ours to reclaim once the layers of ignorance and illusion are peeled away. That is why I meditate.

Interconnectedness and the Hard Edge

There is an additional consideration to come to grips with – the Hard Edge argument for changing consciousness. I remember David Brower, the noted American environmentalist, telling a macabre joke that is an apt metaphor both for the environmental crises of our times and the response of national, international and corporate interests to these same crises. He tells of the first night of a Broadway musical. The concert hall is packed, and just before the curtain goes up a fire breaks out. This produces pandemonium as people rush to the exits. Then the piano player steps in front of the curtain, tells everyone to stay calm and return to their seats, that everything is under control and there is nothing to worry about. He starts to play the piano. Everybody calms down and returns to their seats. And they all burn to death! I feel the heat of that fire and often feel very helpless to douse it.

I am in close touch with the work of a group of American and Russian scientists who have been carefully monitoring earth changes over the past decade. They are examining, among other things, the consequences of energy shifts in our solar system, the change in location of the magnetic poles on the planet, the rapid melting of polar ice concentrations, and the unprecedented volcanic activity in conjunction with large scale climate change (Millennium Group 1998). They conclude that a dramatic transformation in the earth’s geophysical environment is already underway, and call for a major transformation in thinking so that appropriate and decisive action may be taken (Dmitriev 1997). In short, the earth changes that are being experienced in exponential fashion are not reversible. All we have thought about human adaptation and the environment is too limited, and an initial priority is

that it is absolutely essential that a new and responsible leadership be cultivated to anticipate the impending crises. The only human response that now makes sense is to rapidly change consciousness. Not so we can somehow magically roll back the continuing earth and climatic changes; but so that we can aspire to the wisdom and collective responsibility necessary to adapt to a stage of environmental crisis that is at present unimaginable.

The Native American medicine people that I work closely with are very attuned to the rhythms and energies of the earth. They have all been through specific ceremonies, in the past decades, to adjust their own energies to correspond to the changing vibrations of the planet. They are completely aware that radical and irreversible shifts have occurred within Mother Earth, and one of the ways they are preparing for this is to share their knowledge with non-natives in an unprecedented manner. They have experienced the Hard Edge argument as a reality within their bodies and consciousness. In the fall of 1998 NASA brought together several hundred elders for a climate change conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Scientific predictions and mapping of the global climate were proving to be unreliable, and NASA sought input from a different source of life science observation of the natural world. The elders spoke with one voice when they referred to the lack of spiritual connection to the Earth, and called upon the people of the world to hold their leaders accountable. Native traditions understood very clearly that the Earth and Universe have a cosmic intelligence that responds to human intentions. They also stipulated that the lack of such a spiritual connection inevitably leads to the contamination of Mother Earth, so that earth energies can no longer remain in harmony with human endeavors. As one elder pointed out “There is no post environment economy!”

They also know that there is no longer the time scale for long-term remedies. That is an unaffordable luxury. The efforts and strategies of dedicated environmentalists to provide solutions for the earth’s problems over the past three decades have largely fallen on deaf ears. So much so, that the highly touted Rio Conference in 1992 on the environment was a failure. In a sense this failure simplifies matters, as it enables a booming clarity to emerge. With irreversible changes in the planetary web of life, and the dramatic and catastrophic

environmental changes that are ensuing, it appears that there is now only one strategy and solution that will work:

Change the collective human consciousness.

Why? So that clarity, understanding, and compassion provide the bedrock for human response to the impending crises. We can no longer continue to blame everything on El Nino, and cheerfully remain in ignorance. We must change our thinking and consciousness. This was actually the appropriate solution before, yet the promise of various environmental strategies obscured the significance of this solution. While certain environmental endeavors and measures were realized during the forty years since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, the rabid nature of our global industrial civilization, spearheaded by corporate greed, continued unabatedly to further the deterioration of the planet and its biosphere.

That, in conjunction with the changing energy patterns in our solar system have initiated and compounded dramatic earth changes that now leave us with no alternative. Our planet is part of an evolving solar system, which moves through and interconnects with expanding and changing interstellar space. All of this, together with the energy exchanges within the solar system, has unpredictable consequences for our "Third Rock from the Sun" in terms of major effects on the planet's biosphere and electromagnetic field.

Of particular and immediate alarm is the rapid melting of polar ice concentrations in Antarctica, which have reduced the Larsen B ice shelf to a remnant of its former self. It is inevitable that sea levels will rise (Crockett 1997). That factor alone in conjunction with increased volcanic activity constitutes an equation for devastating changes to the planet and its populations as we presently map them. As a species, energetically interconnected with all that is taking place in our solar system and planet, we are already in the birth canal of changes to our web of life. Only by transforming our ignorance into knowledge and compassion will we have the adaptive capacity to deal with a world that cannot yet be anticipated; another stellar reason for the imperative of consciousness raising. This is the Hard Edge argument for changing consciousness.

Our current model of reality, our existing paradigm, is drawn from the Cartesian revolution and the onset of industrial capitalism. It has evolved to a cybernetic lunacy of

discarding flexibility, and maximizing the variable of corporate profit mongering to the exclusion of everything else. This provides a paradigm for extinction, as the interconnecting loops of a sustainable global ecosystem are progressively destroyed. An organism that destroys its environment destroys itself. Over the past thirty years the rapacious effects of this trend are now self-evident. This paradigm is of a relatively short duration and it no longer works. The centralized focus zeros in on the ego's self-interest, and it is now absolutely essential to shift individual consciousness to a universal focus. Such a change is now an evolutionary imperative.

The necessary shift I am referring to is encompassed in how meditation works for me. Meditation is a pilgrimage from the “I” of ego-attachment to the “I” of our true nature — that boundless consciousness that harbors no separation. The attachment and clinging to ego is the root of separation from our true nature, and the basic cause of all suffering. The journey for me has been (and still is) a scrutiny and observation of my drives of ego-attachment and self-identities. As I become aware of each attachment and false identification, one more layer of illusion is peeled away and I can then change how I act, think and speak. When my mind turns inwards in this adventure of self-detection and rediscovery, I find more and more that I merge into my heart. This portal of consciousness begins to dissolve all that I have hitherto thought about ego. My ego is still there, I suppose, but in a different reality that sees and experiences interconnectedness as a natural and spontaneous expression of who I really am. This interconnectedness takes me right into the heart of Gaia and everything upon it, and bit by bit the ego dissolves into a non-definable consciousness that includes everything, creating a totally different sense of “I” that I cannot put into words.

From my own experience, I know that as a species we must learn to meditate, or at least a critical mass of us must — otherwise the ethical imperative to shift to a new consciousness of our interconnectedness with everything will not happen. Without this shift in consciousness, we eliminate one by one all of our life support systems, and we will become totally alienated not just from ourselves, but from the earth we live on. I used to think that there was nobody listening to the fundamental simplicity of this assertion, yet as a meditation teacher and educator I am increasingly encouraged by how people are grasping this essential

truth. I know that our evolution and cognition are intricately interconnected with all that takes place within the wider ecosphere of our planet. Our consciousness is not separate from it, and we have to recognize this. We do this by moving to a radically different perspective, first towards ourselves and secondly to the incredibly beautiful planet we live on, and realize that the planet is changing. We have to realize that we are part of a changing web of life, and are not the masters of the earth. We need to relate to ourselves and to the earth with a sense of wonder and humility - in a spiritual manner rather than an exploitative one. In this way our knowledge will fuel wisdom rather than create structures of dominance and control. Yet our attitudes, concepts and values must radically change before that prognosis has the possibility of becoming a reality.

Interconnectedness is gaining credibility in scientific and political circles. International and government agencies of the world's richest economies have been bombarded, in the last decade, with reports that demonstrate there is a single ecosystem on the planet, and that discrete political and cultural systems, whatever their relative strength and power, are mere subsystems within a single ecosystem. If the ecosphere collapses, then so will the dependant subsystems. It may be the wealthier nations that will have the greatest difficulty in adapting and surviving, because poorer nations, closer to the margins of subsistence, are better equipped to survive a larger ecosphere collapse.

All of this places a responsibility on me to clean up my inner ecology. Then I can begin to take responsibility for the external ecology in a better way. I take initial responsibility through meditating — stopping, then seeing deeply my own interconnectedness in the web of life, and from a place of my own deep silence I then act, and in particular teach meditation. I teach it to children, teenagers, university students and adults. A major component of every course is for participants to be in continuous meditative silence with nature. The location of the meditation retreats I organize is carefully chosen for wilderness and silence. I guide all participants to go to whatever draws them — a deep silent pool, a whispering aspen, rocks, a deer trail — to talk from within themselves to nature and listen to whatever is communicated back. I am always moved by what ensues. Meditators communicated how much they felt totally interconnected, as just one facet of Gaia, when they

talked about their connection with butterflies, leaves, insects, whispers of wind, clouds saying “hello”, deer tracks and so much more. I found this delightful, partly because it made me realize that my “Dr. Dolittle” proclivities were much more commonplace than I had thought. (For readers who do not watch old movies, “Dr. Dolittle” was an eccentric gentleman who talked and listened to all creatures. This movie was recently updated with a new release featuring Eddie Murphy in the title role.) I have always talked to birds, animals, trees, rocks, the earth and rarely revealed it for fear of being mocked or laughed at. My talks with nature provided me with an awesome and humbling sense of interconnectedness. I am relieved to discover that such a choice is more common than I was aware of. A medicine woman from the Shuswap Nation in British Columbia provided extensive shamanic training for me in the 80's and 90's, and our meetings were inevitably punctuated by a gathering of eagles. She would tell me they were there to speak with me, and with her guidance I learned to communicate with them.

Children’s meditation courses are much easier, as young children naturally talk to the earth and all upon it, and take guarded pains to shield their communications from an adult world they distrust and increasingly doubt. It becomes a delightfully shared secret when the children share their experiences of communicating with nature after meditation. It is in hushed voices, often whispers, as though they are sharing something precious with their best friends. Frequently they move me to tears as both witness and participant in their innocent knowledge of the fundamental truth of things.

I never presumed to politicize the meditative experience of Gaia, for I have discovered that meditators, with such awareness, are always led to act. First there is the awareness of being still and silent with the planet, then automatically an active expression of that experience ensues. I bring meditators to an awareness of the critical earth changes we face, and that consciousness changing and responsible leadership are essential tools. I teach meditation, mindfulness and interconnectedness, all of which directly influences environmental activism. The latter appears as a hidden agenda in that meditators are inevitably drawn to actively engage with environmental issues. Compassion is not passive, it is active. My part is to extend the consciousness of responsibility about the environment to others. I refer participants

to different books and causes they may choose to embrace. Yet I often get stuck and alarmed about what to do. Then I take refuge in the Buddha's "Diamond Sutra", and Thay Nhat Hanh's teachings on Interbeing, to renew my sense of interconnectedness with nature. That if I take care of my consciousness, then I am able to take care of the ecosystem. If I take care of the ecosystem, that becomes part of my consciousness. I also turn to mythology for guidance.

Tree of Life Myths

I have always had a deep love for mythology and an intuitive sense that myths carry the wisdom of the ages, and in them I will find solace, courage and guidance.

My experience of mythology is that its symbolic sequences activate deep unconscious structures within me, by bringing my attention to unresolved issues inside myself. I view the world's mythologies as proto-histories of religion. They are highly complex narrative forms that have kept alive the realities of creation and the manner in which light and life came to humankind. They also provide graphic insights into the way light and life can be lost. In a highly coded way these cultural accounts document the placement of humankind within the universe and on the planet. The accounts are coded and multi-leveled so that directions for the integration of awareness with the unconscious slip through the barriers imposed on the individual. The aboriginal shamans and seers I have worked with, believe they are myth-keepers, and have been called upon to be intermediaries between the earth and the universe. Their task is to maintain a balance between the multi-dimensional levels of reality known to them, by ensuring that these levels can be experienced and honored. The rich field of effective ritual through which this is done operates with precision. It includes particular ceremonies to effect and alter the physical and spiritual conditions of those who seek healing, so they can feel one with Gaia.

All myths are rich in symbolic metaphors. Particular symbolic sequences are woven into the narrative to take the adventurer, one step at a time, into further self-knowledge. The encounters and battles with strange entities, demons and energies spotlight the debris placed by our selves in our own lives. By recognizing the significance of these encounters and being

willing to come through with new awareness, our patterns of violence, insensitivity, shame, and ignorance can be abandoned. Mythology provides fertile ground for this drama. It prepares the field of insight to take us into a new dimension of knowing. At the same time, it deflects the awesome power of archetypal experiences. Conscious awareness could be damaged and overwhelmed by a direct encounter with archetypes. Mythology filters them, so that they can be progressively integrated with conscious awareness. In other words, the symbolic structures in a mythological narrative are created from the deepest structure of the unconscious — the archetypal — yet at the same time they are placed in a metaphoric form which mediates the potentially devastating effect of archetypal material on conscious awareness.

In culture after culture, the constancy with which these sacred stories narrate the lessons of being, creation and transformation, provides overwhelming evidence that the distinctive style of these accounts is no haphazard accident. These narratives lie outside of time and space, providing symbolic guidelines for an inner journey of personal transformation, and in doing so provide insights about the inter-penetration of levels. I maintain that if one understands the myths from the inside and can discern the guidelines for the inner journey, one then knows what steps to take. (Prattis 1991,1995)

There is a body of myths worldwide that deals directly with environmental issues. I refer to the Tree of Life myths that connect the planet, the universe and human beings in a template that is repeated with astonishing similarity in culture after culture. There are no accidents in these sacred narratives. The Jewish mystics, the Kabbalists, have the sefirotic Tree of Life central to their conceptions about creation, and the Divine Tree is the intermediary between the world of human beings and God. This same inexhaustible metaphor appears in the Norse myth of the Universal Tree - *Yggdrasil*. The mighty ash - *Yggdrasil* - is centered as the *axis mundi* and connects the planet, humans and the universe, as long as human beings, represented as Gods, choose to locate at the center within themselves. Otherwise chaos and destruction ensue. All the cycles of existence are played out and orchestrated within *Yggdrasil's* domain. For the Lakota Sioux, the central pole of the Sun Dance lodge is known as the sacred tree, the center of everything, the connector, the Great

Spirit. This kind of symbolism is found in *every* myth about the Tree of Life. What is it telling us?

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on the Tree of Life, placed at the center of the world and the universe. The four directions of the cross connect the earth, humankind and the universe in the most powerful symbol of our times. On this Tree of Life Christ provided human beings with an example of boundless consciousness that speaks to every human heart, irrespective of particular religious tradition. Moyra Caldecott collected these and many other myths in her remarkable book - *Myths of the Sacred Tree* - yet the one that catches my attention more than any other is her account of Siddhartha Gautama and the Bodhi Tree:

At Bodh-Gaya he sat under a tree and did not move from there for forty-nine days. Time passed and did not pass. He could feel the great tree drawing nourishment and energy from the earth. He could feel it drawing nourishment and energy from the air and sun. He began to feel the same energy pumping in his heart. He began to feel there was no distinction between the tree and himself. He was the tree. The tree was him. The earth and sky were also part of the tree and hence of him. When his companions came that way again they found him so shining and radiant they could hardly look at him directly... He could have said, "There is no distinction. There is no suffering once one experiences the wholeness of things. There is only suffering if we think in terms of separation: I and Thou, this and that, before and after, here and there. There is only suffering if we desire what we think is outside ourselves, not realizing that we have everything because everything is contained within the "I"..... He took a leaf from the tree and looked at it. In it was the whole essence of the universe. He held it out to his disciples. They saw it glowing with the same radiance that he saw.

The Tree of Life in mythology is constantly referred to as a sacred, symbolic vehicle of communication representing the Cosmic Axis, the center of the Universe. The esoteric traditions of the East use the Tree of Life to describe the *sushumna*, the central energy channel in the human body, the experience of which takes the devotee to higher levels of consciousness. It is the metaphor through which human beings connect to all worlds and dimensions, natural and supernatural, universal and planetary. The underlying motif views humankind as being physically grounded within the synchronistic heart beat of Mother Earth, for it is through this planetary vascular system that humankind connects to the experiences of life-sustaining forces: seasons, renewal, nurturing and creativity. On their own, each of these

qualities remains unfulfilled. It is the conjunction between metaphysical Father: the Universe; with the planet: Mother Earth: that permits the harvesting of fruit on the sacred Tree of Life.

Our common ancestral heritage permits both a vertical and a horizontal axis of communication between different dimensions of reality. The vertical axis is the *axis mundi*, the central spine of connection of human beings to the Universe. The horizontal axis provides the deeply rooted connecting links between all humans. Herein dwells the foundation of the Collective Consciousness of our species. It is from the place of Truth and the conscious recognition of self-liberation that one automatically links up with others who choose the same location and process. It is as though these interconnected people enter into the experience of a similar "house" of consciousness. To allow one's soul to speak freely is the vertical axis of connection to multiple dimensions. At this juncture Mother Earth meets Metaphysical Father through the human choice to locate at the center of consciousness.

Trees in their majesty and beauty are metaphors for this state of being. The Tree of Life is inside, grounded through the legs into the earth from the heart, and through the heart pours the energy of the Universe, giving Love and Truth to all. The conjunction between the Universe and the planet is made through men and women who feel the metaphor of the Tree of Life within them as real and rooted. The Tree of Life motif is ever present in a simple message that the world's mythologies and religions have delivered over and over again. It is the human choice and commitment to be in Truth, Love and at the center of one's being that conjoins Mother Earth with the Metaphysical Father. The Tree of Life myths also graphically represent the alternatives - chaos, destruction and breakdown - yet they always hold out the possibility of re-creation given the same human choice to locate at the center of being.

Herein lies the transformation potential of the individual and the species. As each one of us takes responsibility to be open to the expression of one's true nature, there is an exponential bursting out of energy that is akin to the superconductor principle. The deeply embedded horizontal connection of Collective Consciousness produces a resistance free connection between human beings who choose to locate in Truth. This connected system of parts then slides up the vertical ladder of consciousness as one, because they share the experience of a common consciousness. As one recognizes the interconnectedness of ALL

as the Tree of Life within, then one's journey, the River of Life, flows swiftly up the vertical axis of consciousness. Here, the Cosmic Axis releases one from limitations and leaves one open to the realization that the center is everywhere. One simply has to recognize that this is all within. At this juncture the River of Life, one's individual journey, asks of one to trust and follow inner direction. For just as the River flows endlessly from its source, so too will our evolution as we listen within. It is at this juncture of balance that the individual integrates with the Creator, self meets God and part meets Whole. That is the message of the myths, to locate at the center of being and retain a spiritual connection both to the Universe and to the planet; otherwise disorder and chaos will ensue. Meditation facilitates such a spiritual connection.

Karma, Genetics and Conditioning - Inner Ecology

What is it that keeps our self-destructive attitudes, values and activities intact? I would argue that our negative patterns of inner ecology — our garbage from negative karma, genetics and conditioning obscure a clear vision of who we basically are, and cause us to be ignorant of the very clear lessons that are right before our eyes. The lessons and directives of the Tree of Life myths are clear, yet the patterns of our inner ecology prevent this collective wisdom from being implemented in human lives. Of the three sources of denial, none is as significant as karma.

Negative karma — the residual imprint in our psyche from actions in previous time/space frames — has precision. Its imprint prescribes for human experience a conditioning from genetic predisposition to select genes that then attract a corresponding conditioning from social and cultural existence. This interconnecting spiral creates a mind full of afflictions and ignorance of our true nature, and reinforces the separation frequencies set in motion by karma. I believe that negative karma establishes the design in the cell for genetic selection and cultural conditioning to respond to. The common and necessary experience of being human is to know separation. This experience in a sense defines the species; and all life, history and personal evolution is the story of how that initial separation is either compounded or transcended. It is how one journeys through separation, to the wholeness that is one's own to reclaim, that define the different paths of self-awareness.

We have to realize that we have become internally polluted with negative patterns from social and cultural conditioning, genetics and karma. Meditation provides the methodology to uproot negative patterns entrenched in our mental formations, which can be surfaced and cleared through the deep, dynamic rest provided by meditative silence. This arena allows the traumas of negative patterns to unravel from our body and unconscious minds. It is those patterns that support negative karma and all its consequences that are endangered in meditation. The most difficult pattern of inner ecology to dig out is negative karma, and we must learn to step beyond karma's cyclic embrace so that we may experience liberation. The Tree of Life myths and the teachings of the Great Masters take us to this point and provide a very specific direction: to locate ourselves at the center of our being.

In my experience of Eastern mysticism and aboriginal symbolic thought, negative karma is a known and recognized force that functions at different vibrational levels throughout the energy spectrum. In these symbolic systems negative karma is conceived of as patterns that pollute. I actually felt the pollution inside myself - physically, emotionally and spiritually. These patterns are activated by thoughts, words and actions that derive from afflictive emotions such as fear, attachment, anger, hatred, greed, desire and jealousy. The answer to negative karma is to see deeply, and to deal directly with patterns such as these, in order that they are taken care of through awareness, robbed of their energy and ultimately transcended. For me this meant inner work and scrutiny of my being, so that I continually surfaced, cleared and released negative patterns that kept me in ignorance of the true nature of my inner consciousness. If I chose to fill myself with love, compassion and wisdom, and actively took steps in this direction, there was simply less room for fear, ignorance, anger and reactive emotion to take root. I believe that moving beyond negative karma is an essential step for the continued presence of humans on this planet, and it must be done now. There is no longer the time scale to consider long therapeutic remedies for global environmental ills and the fate of the species. The Hard Edge argument about consciousness raising is very clear and direct about this. One must rapidly step beyond karma to indicate that one is finished with the associated patterns of a maladaptive inner ecology. Karma's embrace is rooted in the tendrils of ego-attachment and false identifications within us. The methodology for this radical

pruning of ego-attachment is meditation.

Meditation

The discussion of myth and karma provides an entrée for the last sequence of dance steps in the personal choreography I am weaving. I have referred to meditation without being very specific. My intent was to construct an argument through my own experience as an environmentalist, the Gaia hypothesis of the planet as a living interconnected organism, mythology and karma, so that a foundation is established for meditation and consciousness changing as the new paradigm for our civilization. My discussion was at two levels – the Soft Edge argument, and the Hard Edge imperative for meditation and consciousness raising. Both arguments support the same conclusion – Change The Collective Human Consciousness. We may see that the problems of pollution, environmental degradation and critical earth changes have a location that resides in our state of awareness. One implication is that commitment to inner cleansing and self-healing, through meditation, has major effects on the individual, their immediate household, community, nation and on the local and planetary environment. That same commitment enables a foundation of understanding, clarity and compassion to be brought to bear on the crises of earth changes.

We have to return to what is missing from the human-environment equation. We need to step back inside and acknowledge the necessity of changing our individual consciousness by removing the negative patterns of inner ecology. In dealing with inner ecology, by surfacing and clearing our old “stuff”, by taking care of our distress through self-awareness, we build a climate of understanding, clarity and responsibility. From this foundation we can eventually respond to the crises of the external environment because the internal environment has been properly cared for. In other words, as consciousness changes, negative patterns of inner ecology dissipate and we see things more clearly and holistically. Furthermore, we recognize that our minds, bodies and souls are interconnected components of a vast consciousness that includes the entire web of planetary life. This kind of vision is denied until we clean up internal patterns. This process is a pre-requisite for the emergence of a new consciousness that will provide the foundation for compassion and wisdom to be established.

It is from this foundation that solutions will emerge to deal with global pollution and planetary changes.

The key to all this is conscious breath and symbolic focus in meditation. The practice of different methodologies of meditation, at some point, makes me aware that the energy in my mind and body is the same as the energy that pervades the planet and the entire Universe. Breath in the body: Breath in the cosmos: Breath in the planet - meditation brings them together. Furthermore, meditation does not withdraw me from society, rather it facilitates my deeper involvement with it. Society is part of me, so when I meditate I do not leave it behind. My meditations are not just for myself, they are for everything I am connected to. There is no secret to meditation. It simply takes commitment, discipline and courage, and is based on the desire to transcend one's current level of consciousness. However, factors of social and cultural conditioning, genetic heritage and negative karma have so influenced my ego and personality that blockages emerge to create an inner ecology; which can prevent my awareness moving beyond present consciousness.

Part of the journey of meditation is to seek out these blockages, patterns and habits and transcend them so that my thoughts, words and deeds become more consistent with higher levels of inner consciousness. Congruence between thought, speech and action begins to evolve. There are many meditation techniques that can facilitate this. It matters only that breath, light and stillness are brought into the body with special reverence. Meditation provides an initial process of guidance, to adjust one's awareness and mind to be in tune with one's body. Ultimately there is a progression to the point where the heightened sense of stillness and awareness experienced in meditation is taken out into each moment of life.

The first step is the choice to take responsibility for your state of being and level of conscious awareness. Teachers, gurus, and sacred teachings are there to provide guidelines and signposts only. It is the individual, choosing to be self-aware, who does all the work. This choice calls on each of us to take full responsibility for our place on the planet, so that both the individual and the species may evolve to a higher order of consciousness. Secondly, self-liberation involves reaching deep within one's stillness and accessing a higher order of Universal knowledge and seeing the interconnected and changing web of life just as it is.

What is important is that steps are taken to conjoin all that remains separated — physically and metaphysically — to put back together what the Cartesian revolution tore asunder. The result is that one may rediscover what many ancient and tribal cultures knew, that being fully human is simply being in harmony with your inner strength, with others, and with the cosmos. Meditation also brings you to an integral connection with the planet and all upon it. Not only do you feel the universe as part of your body, you feel the planet in a similar way. Just as the Buddha felt no separation between himself, the Bodhi tree and the earth, so meditation puts us in touch with the same sense of interconnectedness, the same unitary energy of inner consciousness.

Reference to the unitary force as Godself, Universal Energy, Krishna Consciousness, Buddha Nature, Christ Consciousness or to other cultural metaphors denotes an internal state of Divinity that is universal, and therefore present within all men and women. As steps are taken to increase awareness of the Divinity within, further movement into higher consciousness may be mutually shared with individuals from all cultures, creeds and religions. The metaphors of reference are many and varied yet all reflect a unitary process. Across the planet there are local, regional and national expressions of this unitary process. Yet the important point to establish is that these various expressions of Divinity all lead to the same direction - to the oneness and wholeness that is already there, both within yourself and all humankind. Meditation brings us to this personal experience of oneness and interconnectedness. Steps up the ladder of consciousness, the removal of impediments to spiritual and physical evolution, the unitary force within humankind, all come from the place of stillness that meditation brings.

Parting Thoughts

This brief overview of meditation is to provide a flavor for what it has been like for me to step back inside to deal with the negative patterns and garbage bags of my inner ecology. It is necessary to examine both the Soft Edge and the Hard Edge reasons for changing our consciousness. Stepping out in one way or another on the environmental stage is only one part of the dance. It cannot be fully effective until the internal choreography is in

place. I choose to address global issues of environmental pollution and degradation through the discipline of meditation. I consider that as my initial responsibility. This brings me to the key spiritual qualities of responsiveness grounded in responsibility that imbued Rachel Carson's work on environmental issues, and which I follow as closely as I am able. The personal sense of responsibility for what we create and what we are part of was Carson's main hope for the future. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* was particularly explicit about this:

Now there were some terrible seeds on the planet that was the home of the little prince; and these were the seeds of the baobab. The soil of that planet was infested with them. A baobab is something you will never, never be able to get rid of if you attend to it too late, it spreads over the entire planet. It bores clear through it with its roots. And if the planet is too small, and the baobabs are too many they split it into pieces... "It is a question of discipline," the little prince said to me later on. "When you've finished your own toilet in the morning, then it is time to attend to the toilet of your planet, just so, with the greatest care. You must see to it that you pull up regularly all the baobabs, at the very first moment when they can be distinguished from the rose-bushes which they resemble so closely in their earliest youth. It is very tedious work," the little prince added "but very easy!"

We deal with our internal toilet and pull up regularly all the "baobabs" and garbage of our inner ecology through meditation and self healing; then attending to the toilet of the planet will be very easy.

Our goal is to heal, and to transform our selves, communities and planet. In this regard meditation works for me. Meditation is a progressive movement towards wholeness and integration, and requires that we look deeply into the environment we are located in, and the environment we create with our thoughts, attitudes and values. In the process of meditation we liberate ourselves from internal blockages created by maladaptive patterns of inner ecology, and are then able to enter a state of clarity and compassion. Thus we transform by personally experiencing different cognitive and perceptual levels that enable us to transcend our internal "baobabs". This inward step to raise consciousness enables us to create solutions from a foundation of wisdom and confidence in our clarity. Yet it is clear that changing our consciousness comes first, then out of this, solutions can be created. His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama expressed this very succinctly in an interview with James Thornton

(1993). He said to Thornton:

As an environmentalist you already have the right view. What you need to do is to become confident and positive, and help other environmentalists to become confident and positive. The long-term solutions we need for our global problems can only arise from the confident and positive mind. They can never arise from the mind of anger and despair.

Our afflictive emotions and negative patterns of inner ecology do shape our experience and reality, by creating structures of thought and practice, society and ideology that are maladaptive. That is, until we move to a level of consciousness where these patterns can be transcended. At the same time we must acknowledge the value of these same patterns. The ecological decline of the planet caused by our industrial practices *has* galvanized many people to actively take steps to transform themselves. We now, more than ever before, recognize how interdependent we all are, as our resources in the air, water, and on the land become mutually poisoned through neglect and greed. We are learning very quickly about impermanence, the illusion of separateness and the necessity of changing our perceptual mind states. We know that business as usual will not work. Although the odds may appear to be stacked against us, it is an exciting time to be alive. When you take a steady look at ecodoom, it leads to an abandonment of the trivial, and a choice to step onto the razor's edge of putting our consciousness and intentions to the test. That is where we are right now, on a razor's edge. It would be wise to wake up before we are sliced and dismembered by the consequences of our present attitudes, values, structures and state of ignorance.

I think and talk about compassion, love, interconnectedness, trust and transformation - yet, as Joanna Macy asks (1993:51)- are we brave enough to practice it? I agree with her in that I feel we are. It does take great commitment, and I am drawn to a wonderful quote by Goethe:

There is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans; that the moment one definitely commits, then Providence comes too..... A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.

The commitment is to see deeply into the changing web of life, of which we are a part. Then develop the attributes of understanding, wisdom and compassion to guide our responses to the dramatic earth changes we are faced with. Both the Soft Edge and the Hard Edge arguments about changing consciousness through meditation arrive at this conclusion, making consciousness changing an axiomatic component of the human process of being. Without such a step we cannot move to a new form of behavior that is inspired by ethics and responsible leadership. This is the arena from which solutions will emerge to regulate and change the institutions that presently bring devastation and cruelty to the planet. This is the new cultural process to revolutionize the 21st century.

So right now is the time to be bold and confident — internally and externally. I have chosen to do so, and life's lessons have helped to liberate me from some of the prisons of my own making. It is not easy to face the inner hiding places, but I personally would not have it any other way. My commitment is to be at the forefront of change within myself, from there I can be of service to Gaia and all upon it.

I do believe that the present turmoil, disasters and inhumanities will bring forth inspired individuals who truly know who they are, who will take a stand to redress matters. They bring a different sense of leadership and responsibility to the fore. It does require an inner journey to know fully who each one of us is. I am committed to that. It is my real job — to deal with the maladaptive patterns derived from my own inner ecology. Thus, I have internal work to do, and continue to do it as I step out on the environmental stage. But first I stop, silence myself and accept the reality of the world just as it is, to see the changing web of planetary life just as it is. Not to condone what exists or even to condemn it, but to see it clearly so that I may come from a consciousness of understanding, of clarity, and of heart. Not from a consciousness that draws on anger, despair or panic. It is not always easy. When I get myself tied into knots, I meditate, so that my ensuing activism comes from a calm and heartfelt place of leadership and responsibility.

I spend most mornings in silence, meditating and becoming clear, as I believe that as I am, so is the world. If I am frenetic and anguished then I add to the further deterioration of the world. If I am clear and heartfelt then my energy and subsequent actions can alleviate the

present state of the world. When I meditate each morning, I light a stick of incense and think of my teachers and spiritual ancestors. I think of Guruji Rishi Prabhaker who initiated me into the Vedic tradition of teaching, Thay Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen Buddhist master, who provided me with a foundation in Buddhism, and White Eagle Woman who trained me in shamanism. I also think of Jesus Christ as a friend and guide. When I think deeply of one of them, I feel connected to all the incredible men and women who have brought teachings of love, compassion and interconnectedness to us.

I also think of my physical ancestors — my mother, my great-uncle Jim or my aunt Ruby — all deceased; and of my children and grandchildren who are very much alive. And I feel that I am simply one part of a vast flow of experience that includes the cosmos, all my ancestors and all my descendants, even to those not yet born. I feel it here and now dear reader, for you are also part of this same stream of life that I experience and write about. I think of Gaia and everything on the earth and do not feel separate from any of it — the land forms, evening skies, the rising oceans, disappearing forests, peoples and other species, their disasters and joys. When I meditate in this way, I often feel no sense of personal boundary, just part of a vast, interconnected web of life that extends from the present into the past and into the future. Then I think of all those who love and support me in what I do. When I sit to meditate, there is a smile on my lips and often a tear of joy in the corner of my eye.

I am fully aware of the issues of eco-doom and planetary changes. I am also aware that there are good people everywhere who honor the earth, their spiritual and physical ancestors and descendants in a similar way. My self appointed job as meditation teacher, educator, and global citizen is to add as many people to this constituency as I possibly can. The Soft Edge is about my own personal awareness, and I view meditation techniques as methodologies to go inwards to the Heart. The Hard Edge is about putting that awareness to good use. I work with scientists, mystics and medicine people to monitor earth changes that are measured by different kinds of knowledge, and my job is to bring as many people as I can to a higher frequency of conscious awareness.

I have a calm urgency about things, and combine the Soft and Hard Edges of awareness within myself. This is my meditation for Gaia; part of my purpose of being here

on the planet. I do remain confident and optimistic. As the Dalai Lama says “What is the alternative?” It has taken time, crises and many false starts for me to be convinced of this path, and I see that my career as a professional anthropologist has been part of the learning experience. Being an anthropologist is also an excellent cover for what is really important — making the world a better place environmentally, through shifts in human consciousness which encourage people to embrace their true spiritual nature.

So be bold and confident; take care of the environment you inhabit and the environment you create. Begin it now.

Autumn Sunset in the Forest

Let me share it -

*This symphony of autumn color,
cascading melody from a sky
pastel grey and fiery red.
Descant to the dancing tones of
a painted forest
cooled by lush evergreens.
Sensual beauty,
rhapsody of forest and sunset sky
fused as a golden sheen.
Caught in a still lake
waiting with patience
Beyond time and space,
Waiting
to reflect this moment of
splendor –*

Interbeing.

Let me share it.

Acknowledgment

I received valuable feedback in the sculpting of this work. Friends I had accompanied partway on a cross Canada canoe trip kept me faithful to our common experiences of wonder in the Canadian wilderness. My thanks to Keith Crowe, Dave McNicol and Janice Dowling. Much appreciated critical appraisals from the meditation community came from Kimberly Brayman, Gilbert McElroy, Carolyn Hill, Tom and Bev Clarke. Feedback from colleagues and students brought the attention of Derek Blair and Bruce Dunn to my reflections on Gaia. Carolyn Hill retyped the many versions of this work, and I appreciate her patience and support.

I wrote and rewrote the many drafts of this work in a village café in the middle of Gatineau National Park, in Quebec, across the river from Ottawa. I sat at a corner table by a window with papers strewn over the tabletop and nearby chairs. Other customers invariably asked what I was doing. On learning the nature of my writing they would sit awhile, chat, and offer suggestions and observations. I do not know their names, but speaking with them helped clarify my intent. I would leave my table, pen and papers to walk in the park along favorite trails, sit on a rock by a waterfall, and feel summer's warmth change to autumn's prelude to winter. I felt Gaia very deeply in this cycle of work, which included the beauty of first snowfall. As winter drew on, I was with the starkness of skeletal and dead trees, the silence of the forest, and the gathering of garbage in the village drainage ditches. I felt it all, and it was not so much that I was writing about the environment, rather, I was moved to express myself within Gaia's embrace. I completed the major part of this work on Christmas Eve 1997, added the Soft and Hard Edge considerations while in the Arizona desert in the spring of 1998, and included global warming and health issues to anticipate later chapters. I thank all the elements that flowed through me in its creation.

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