

## **Introduction: An Earthen Spirituality**

*“The World is the Mirror of your attitude towards it”*

Vadim Zeland

Many of us are great seekers of certainty. We press our spiritual and religious leaders for universal truth, always yearning for the definitive answer. Yet all around us we find ourselves immersed in a world where change seems to be everlasting and the only real constant. Unsatisfied and frustrated, we thrust this way and that for answers to life's mysteries as if not knowing was a huge problem. For all who seek, there will always be a few ready answers and there has never been a shortage of spiritual guides. The history of human culture reveals volumes of parchments, scrolls, carvings and cave wall drawings which, taken together, indicate a continuum of change. Over the past five thousand years people have worshipped an endless variety of animals and spirits, all of them projections of cultural ideals. In the last two thousand years, Middle Eastern culture has produced two major sky gods whose followers have engaged in nearly constant warfare with each other over land, property, dogma and religious allegiance.

In the West, our cultural foundations are built around incidents and myths that solidified for over two and perhaps even five thousand years. But now, the dragons appear to have died out and the Earth has become round instead of flat. Today every human may go to heaven instead of only the pharaohs, kings and queens (though the admissibility of other animals remains in doubt). These days, many priests who offer the sacramental wine of Holy Communion admit that it is a symbolic representation of the blood of Christ rather than a literal transubstantiation. A few hundred years ago the church reluctantly relinquished its stranglehold on scientific truth and educated people could then be taught, rightfully, that our planet was not the center of the universe. The firmament (that solid,

‘inverted bowl’ in which the stars were once thought to be fixed) could not be seen above and the exact location of heaven was acknowledged to be unknown.

Unfortunately, the battle lines between church and spirit on the one hand and science and mind on the other were drawn rather too permanently by Descartes et al who left spirit to the church and glorified the function of human thought. Identifying firmly with that thinking function, they simplified science by just leaving out spiritual matters, hoping perhaps that ruling out spirit would greatly reduce arguments and simplify the game. Descartes' followers developed rites of logical analysis and a scientific method that effectively ignored spirit as if it had ceased to exist. Besides, spirit did not respond appropriately to the approved measuring instruments of the time—and still doesn't. How much love can a liter jug hold? Actually, a being without spirit is as incomprehensible as a computer without main memory. Killing a living being in order to learn about how it ‘works’ should have been suspect from the very beginning. But alas, there we are.

### **What Drives My Concern?**

The motivation and deep personal concern that informs this writing is coupled with perplexity and disappointment. Yes, I grieve like many for the beings of a thousand shapes who perish during this season of ecocide. I worry about tipping points as I continue to learn and better understand Gaia's behavior. I am uneasy and even fearful as to how Gaia will cope with the loss of the millions of trees and millions of hectares of grasslands that have always played such a vital role in managing the fluctuations in her climate. My question is why, when we know what must be done, do we deflect and argue and doubt and contend?

My disappointment is that seemingly we just don't care enough about Gaia to band together and force our industrial giants to change their cancerous form of capitalism. Is it that we really do care but are in hock to the company store? Are we afraid we shall lose our jobs if we speak out too loudly? Perhaps, but I think the block is hooked into a lower level of subconscious where culturally derived belief systems lie deeply rooted in our psyche.

This book is born out of a desire to answer a question at the end of a chain of thoughts. In the beginning there is the question ‘why?’. Why do people participate in the rampant ecocide all around them? Of course, there is the inherently self-destructive foundation of capitalism, an economic cancer demanding growth or death. There is greed and the ‘never enough’ desire to have more and more. Taking the question to a deeper level, however, reveals to me a lack of love for the planet. Why don’t people love the Earth? After years of pondering this question, I came to the conclusion that it is simply because people have not been taught that Gaia is lovable.

## **A Lovable Planet**

If we loved the Earth, we wouldn’t act as we do and, moreover, we wouldn’t sit back and allow our corporate entities to destroy the health of our environment for the sake of profit. Would we not actively protect our parents and grandparents, our children and friends? Why not earthworms, bees, birds, the air we breathe, and the water we drink?

Continuing along a chain of questions: why have we not been taught that Gaia is lovable? Isn’t it simply because we have been taught that we live upon this machine-like mass of solidified molten lava? Most of us and our children today are still taught the mechanistic paradigm that states:

- the Earth is a mechanical structure obeying the laws of Nature known through physics, chemistry and biology
- the Earth is a structure, a thing without consciousness or intelligence; a blob of wheeling bits of matter stuck together by gravity and governed by laws, both known and yet to be discovered.
- armed with knowledge of these universal laws all shall come under our control and Nature will conform to human desires

Moreover, we have also been taught that, contrary to our genetic structural makeup, we are specially deposited here somewhat miraculously by the Creator. Thus with great authority, we have reserved intelligence, soul, spirit, and legal rights strictly for humans.

In the chapters to follow, I will suggest an alternative viewpoint, a viewpoint that is informed by a cooperative venture with Gaia Theory and spirituality. A lot of writing about eco-spirituality and especially ‘green’ issues comes under the heading of what I call ‘you really oughta wanna’. These books tell us where we went wrong and how we should think. I have tried to resist falling into that rut. As I am sure you are aware, hardly a day goes by that someone doesn’t publish another article or book illuminating another facet of the breakdown of our culture and the destruction of our environment. Most of these are thick with problems but thin indeed with solutions. Most of the solutions are about what the government or somebody else ought to do.

## **Our Cultural Worldview is Outdated**

Most of us are accepting enough to live in harmony with people of varying beliefs. We see humans as free to believe what they want as long as they don’t impinge on others or cause harm. But I suggest that our cultural worldview is deeply destructive, physically, culturally, and psychically. Nobody wants to drink polluted water, breathe polluted air or ingest poisons in our food, so how do we justify our apparent apathy towards the environmental degradation that faces us daily? Why do we seem to just accept the situation as inevitable? Because we hold limiting and sometimes destructive basic beliefs. In this book I call for an examination and re-evaluation of some of these basic beliefs and suggest that they are based on questionable information and lead not only to alienation from our roots in Nature but ultimately to the destruction of our species and a great many other species around us. Once these toxic beliefs are exposed and examined, I set out in historical

perspective how our Western culture's worldview has changed over the last 2000 years. It is important to know that a belief in a living, en-spirited Earth is not a new idea. Nature was at one time seen as a loving and nurturing en-spirited being to be respected and adored. In fact, going back 6,000 years the latest paleontological findings reveal the remains of an advanced culture based on a Goddess religion where the Earth was filled with spirit, life and love. Riane Eisler writes beautifully in her book, *The Chalice and the Blade*, about recent discoveries that can be pieced together to give us some insight into how those ancient people in the Middle East and Western Europe lived. She points out that their social foundation was one of the partnership of male and female; of a socially equalitarian character rather than one of male domination. However, in succeeding years a wave of Aryan invasions brought a radically different way of life which almost completely replaced this much more peaceful culture. The new paradigm, which Eisler calls the 'dominator' model, brought in the following cultural aspects:

- Male dominance and the oppression of women
- Male violence: killing, plunder and slavery
- Generally hierarchic and authoritarian social structure
- Acquisition of wealth by destruction
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Of course, their Gods were male.

Steve Taylor, who has also done detailed research on Neolithic cultural beliefs, has the following to say in his book *The Fall*.

I suggested that our modern-day environmental problems stem from our domineering attitude to nature, our assumption that the earth was put there for our own use and so we are entitled to abuse it and exploit it. More precisely, though, I believe that this attitude itself can be traced back to a more fundamental problem, which is our lack of a sense of alive-ness of natural phenomena. To most of us, natural phenomena like trees, rocks, mountains and streams are inanimate objects; we don't see them as beings, with a soul or inner life of their own. However, primal peoples have a completely different relationship to nature. To them all natural things *are* alive, with their own kind of consciousness or inner life.

(Taylor, 2005, p. 95)

Taylor speaks to the heart of the situation that I address in the following chapters. "Primal peoples therefore respect nature because they see it as the manifestation of spirit. And since they see themselves as manifestations of spirit too, they feel a sense of kinship and connection with nature, a sense of sharing identity with it, which contrasts with the sense of 'otherness' to the natural world which we normally experience." (Ibid, p. 96)

## **Science and Spirituality are Compatible**

Can recent scientific research and advancements help with the formulation of an Earth-based spirituality? My answer is yes and I shall give some examples of why I think so.

So along with basic beliefs, we shall be taking a closer look at just what spirituality is and identifying the features of Earth-based spirituality.

Might it be possible, for example, that those spiritual aspects of our lives which the Abrahamic religions teach us to connect with some distant god in some distant heaven are actually spiritual aspects of the Earth itself? Could our felt sense of soul in fact be our tuning in to the soul qualities of Gaia, and are the guardian angels our dim perception of the Earth's unconditional and loving containment of all its creatures?

In the final chapter of the book I shall explain how a new worldview founded on the principle of a living and loving Earth is as valid as the one we have now. Hopefully, I can suggest alternative stories that have as much sense and meaning as those we have been taught, stories that we can honor as our own, rather than tales of ancient ancestors who killed witches and warded off vampires

with the sign of the cross. I am encouraged by the following words written by the late Karl Popper, one of the greatest philosophers of science of the twentieth century. "... bold ideas, unjustified anticipations and speculative thought are our only means for interpreting Nature: our only *organon*, our only instrument for grasping her." (1980, p. 280)

My aim is to assist the reader to reach the full potential of a life of radical aliveness and, having shed unworkable basic beliefs, to feel the intense joy from a deep feeling of connectedness and sacred awareness of our Mother Earth. Let me make it quite clear, at the outset, this is not a book about God. This is a book about spirit, specifically the spirit of Gaia. My claim is that Gaia mediates creative energy into a form that we can know, are at one with, and can love. It is an Earthen Spirituality. Why an Earthen Spirituality? Because, as earthlings, we just don't have receptors to commune with the creator of stars and galaxies. Cosmic consciousness leaves some of us cold and unconnected, but sometimes, in quiet precious moments, when totally awash with the wondrous life and beauty around me and overflowing with awe and reverence, I can feel myself immersed in a mutual sharing of the love of Gaia.