



INTRODUCTION

by Santoshan (Stephen Wollaston)

I do not think the measure of a civilization is how tall its buildings of concrete are, but rather how well its people have learned to relate to their environment and fellow human beings.

~ Sun Bear of the Chippewa Tribe¹

The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong.

~ Thomas Berry²

It amazes me how much the idea of globalization is talked about these days and how the notion of plundering Earth's natural resources and making, selling and buying more stuff is still held up as an ultimate for progress, economic stability and growth. Not only is it short-sighted, as the Earth is obviously not some kind of magical store cupboard that will miraculously keep filling itself up, but it overlooks the rights of the more-than-human queendoms and kingdoms, as well as the rights of indigenous people inhabiting regions of the world where profits can be made by a privileged few. There is a clear breakdown in acknowledging how all species and people are our brothers and sisters. And just as we would naturally care about and for our closest blood family members, there is an essential spiritual need to care about our wider global family.

Like other GreenSpirit publications, this book highlights this important message and reminds us about acknowledging and embracing our more-than-human relations. GreenSpirit magazine, from which all the chapters of this book have been compiled, has from its humble beginnings continually aimed to raise awareness of the interrelatedness we have with all people and life. The magazine started out three decades ago under the name 'Interchange', which had a simple format of news items, poems and articles with line drawings for images, produced by the Centre for Creation Spirituality at St James's Church, Piccadilly.³ It then became known by its current title in 1999 and gradually took on the appearance of a more traditional triannual magazine.

The articles and interviews selected for this book share personal stories, engage thoughtfully with green topics, and provide insightful teachings about the interconnectedness we have with the natural world. The book is divided into four parts: (1) Interactions with Nature, (2) Balance and Healing, (3) Implementing Green Wisdom, and (4) Nature's Powers and Wonders. The stories and teaching in the chapters frequently seek to motivate us to interact skilfully with life, live compassionately and face the challenges of Earth-centred living with deep awareness.

The articles and interviews, which Ian Mowll and I have selected, span a recent period of 11 years. The chapters themselves are not planned to be read linearly from front to back. You as the reader may wish to start at any place that draws your attention. I personally feel there are insights here for everyone – for the more academically minded to newcomers to the fields of eco-spirituality and green wisdom – covering a wide range of major subjects such as green burials, veganism, raising green awareness in the Amazon, elephant protection, ecopsychology, personal encounters with animal friends, and how Nature can heal us.

For me, the contents of this book represent some of the most thoughtful pieces that have appeared in GreenSpirit magazine though I'm sure other members of GreenSpirit and readers of the magazine will think of alternatives that could also have been included. The insights within the following pages often encourage us to embrace an inclusive and caring spirituality – one that encompasses living the whole of our lives as wisely as we can and manifests qualities that lead us to recognising profound levels of life and Nature, of which we are all wondrously interwoven and a part, and the essential obligations this brings for responsible Gaia-centred living.

These days green educationists, Earth-centred spiritual seekers and eco-activists are only too aware that we humans currently stand at a crucial position of deciding whether to become jointly involved or not in respecting the rights of all species, preserving Nature's essential balance and the making of a new Earth community. A compassion for Earth and all her species is called for – to recognise all as a sacred whole with profound meaning and purpose. As it is through awakening to Nature's sacredness and importance that we begin to care for the diversity of life that Mother Earth has sought to celebrate.

Overall, the fourteen articles and two interviews in this book left me with a sense of hope for what we can awaken to and collectively achieve and embody in our lives. I can only trust that others will find the following pages equally encouraging and beneficial in their quests for an Earth-centred consciousness and the enrichment of life it can potentially bring for all.

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References

1. Sun Bear of the Chippewa Tribe. In Wayne Teasdale's *The Mystic Hour: A Day Book of Interspiritual Wisdom and Devotion*, New World Library, 2004.
2. Berry, Thomas. *Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Club Books, 1990.
3. Griffiths, Petra. *The Creation Spirituality Movement in the UK: The Early Years*, GreenSpirit magazine, Winter 2006, 8:3.