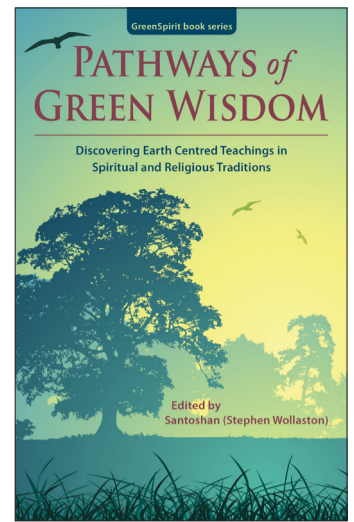


INTRODUCTION

One reason for compiling this book was to highlight what is already there in various wisdom and mystical traditions, though sometimes it takes more than a superficial scratching of the surface to uncover. Contemporary problems of climate change, threatened ecosystems and the demise of various species were not things that teachers such as the Buddha, Prophet Muhammad and Jesus faced in their physical lives. Yet what is found can be seen as 'a Yoga', 'a Way' or 'a Path' that not only honours and lovingly cares for Nature at its core but also joyously celebrates Earth life. As something like over three-quarters of people in the world hold some form of religious and/or spiritual belief, and all widely recognised religions have teachings about the natural world, our interrelationship with Nature and cultivating compassionate and nonviolent actions, it seems only logical to gather some of their profoundest insights for a title in GreenSpirit's Book Series.



Similar to *GreenSpirit* magazine, from which the majority of the material for this book was drawn, articles/chapters are of different length and not planned to be read lineally from front to back. You as the reader may start at any place. As the editor I sought for variety and writers who could not only write skilfully but also display a rich understanding of green wisdom within specific traditions. In all, each contributor offers a place for eco-spiritual readers to draw some nourishment, a place where we can all *hopefully* meet and appreciate numerous Earth centred teachings found in various influential traditions.

The material presented here is for sharing a deeper understanding of different paths and enriching dimensions of green spirituality. You might notice that each writer and/or tradition covered often have their own unique perspectives on how we can unpack, sometimes reinterpret teachings, and implement Earth focused wisdom and practices. The contents of each chapter may not always sing from the exact same song book of Nature as another's, but now is not the time to be side-tracked by unhelpful hair-splitting, I feel, about differences that lead us away from the important unity required for bringing about a new consciousness and healthy transformations in the ways we interact with each other and the natural world.

If we are to move forward in harmony, we need to embrace others, be open minded, practical, realistic, inclusive and accepting of the different living religious and spiritual traditions that have emerged in human history. It is no longer a case of thinking in terms of whether we and religious and spiritual communities should be getting *jointly* involved in becoming architects of a largely forgotten Earth centred spirituality or not, but about realising that humankind won't be effective enough in bringing about necessary changes if we don't.

Like other GreenSpirit publications this book covers beneficial material and insights with the intention of building bridges between people – without overly simplistic claims that everyone is teaching the exact same thing – and reinforcing the interconnections between us and Nature, of which we are all wondrously interwoven. It could instead have become bogged down with drawn-out arguments about how human centred, instead of Earth centred, one tradition might be over another, and how Abrahamic religions have seen humans in special roles – which some have considered as harmful – over Nature. One contributor, Vivienne Cato, in fact, sensitively addresses this with beneficial reflections on key passages in Genesis in a razor sharp article on Judaism and Deep Ecology. For nothing is ever straightforward. The idea of stewardship, found in the early heartlands of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Karen Armstrong informs us in her insightful book *In the Beginning*, is not about exploiting the natural world and ransacking its treasures, as some suggest, but about treating Earth with respect. Similarly, Islamic writer Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz pithily points out in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Nature* that, "To deface, defile or destroy nature would be an impious or even blasphemous act. Though man [or woman] is accorded the right to use natural resources, he [or she] is not permitted to abuse it with impunity".

Religious believers seeking to draw their principal teachings from central texts are obviously not going to discard completely what their scriptures say, although they will often understand how more than one perspective can be extracted from them and how ancient sacred writings are limited by disparate cultural times to our own. This doesn't then imply people are happy about holy scriptures being interpreted without acknowledgment of this or the rape of the natural world and the mass genocide of numerous species. I am only too pleased to see people in all walks of life and all traditions (and none) waking up and earnestly seeking for compassionate, wholesome, skilful and unitive ways ahead. Thankfully, Nature centred spiritualities have never been completely forgotten and are these days starting to become centre stage once again, as now, more than ever, there is a growing paramount need to revive and strengthen our kinship with Earth and to act justly, responsibly and wisely for our times.

With these thoughts in mind, I trust you will enjoy drawing from the deep springs of green spiritual wisdom shared in these pages and find numerous joyful and creative ways to engage with them in your everyday life.

~ Santoshan (Stephen Wollaston)

* * *

References

Armstrong, Karen, *In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis*, Vintage Books, London 2011.
Parvaiz, Mohammad Aslam, *Islam on Man and Nature*, in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Nature: Vol 1* (edited by Bron Taylor), Continuum, New York 2008.