

## INTRODUCTION

*If we learn to love the earth, we will find labyrinths, gardens, fountains, and precious jewels! A whole new world will open itself to us. We will discover what it means to be truly alive.*

~ Teresa of Avila.

In *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, the opening line mentions how, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness". Although written some 150 years ago, these words seem to ring just as true for our current era. With the touch of a button we have the world's past and present scientific knowledge and spiritual insights at our finger tips. Never before has there been a time when we have been so informed about global issues and ways in which we are linked to the creativity of the universe and all life on Earth. Yet with all this knowledge there is a lack of wisdom regarding the welfare of Earth. Damage is being done by us humans on a grand scale that it is affecting Nature's biodiversity and ecological balance.

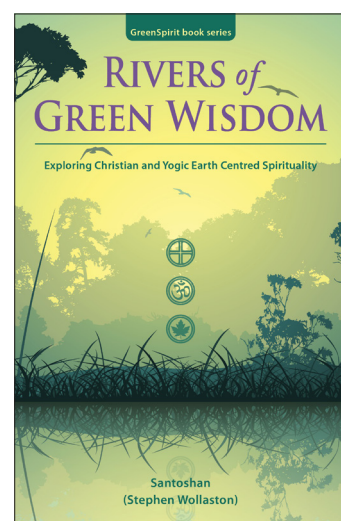
Yet there is hope, and there are influential voices of our age that are having and have had an impact on current thinking and how to move healthily forward. Many of those mentioned in this book have achieved more unitive paths and encouraged a more responsible spirituality relevant for our times and is why I have included them. Although people especially picked-out in this book are mainly from Christian and Yogic traditions, there are in fact prophets to be found in all disciplines and spiritual paths. The first draft of the Earth Charter for instance, a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful world, was compiled by people from various backgrounds in 1997. Germany has recently made great inroads in replacing fossil burning fuels for energy to more environmentally friendly alternatives. In Madagascar the government and local groups have started to show transient farmers how to grow crops in productive but environmentally safe ways in areas where overcrowding had caused serious deforestation.

Collectively, the essential call of contemporary prophets is for a just and sustainable Earth community, for us to reassess our values and actions and discover simpler and more responsible living that treads lightly upon our beautiful planet. In place of violent acts against Nature and trying to prove that any one tradition is superior to another, as the Anglo-Saxon missionary Boniface did when he cut down the sacred oak of the Germanic pagans, there is a need for us to accept our differences and work together for a greater good.

The seas are gradually turning for an environmentally conscious age, not only on the edges of religious traditions, but also within the depths of them. Pope John Paul II called for a new ecological awareness in 1990. Pope Francis deliberately chose the name of the patron saint of animals, and has become a major advocate of environmental protection and important green issues. Some American evangelical Christians have even become ecological converts. Many progressive green conscious Christians have also revived and reintegrated Celtic and other Earth centred traditions within their daily lives. Within such changes there is joy to be found in the wisdom and practices people are discovering and embracing. Traditional artistic routes involve dancing, singing, painting, sculpting, writing, drumming and storytelling, as found and practised in various cultures. Whether we are artist, shamans, carpenters, students, nurses, teachers, labourers, yoginis, activists, priests or healers, there are numerous profound ways of making our daily actions a dedication to skilful, wholesome, compassionate, fair and just living that encompasses the protection and welfare of all that exists on, with, and as an amazing part of Earth. "[E]ach tree is known by its own fruit", Jesus reminds us in Luke's Gospel (6:44).

In chapter 10 of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna teaches Prince Arjuna about his all-pervasive nature permeating the flowing rivers of the Ganges, the beginning and end of creation, the wind, the fish and the banyan tree. The great rishis of the ancient Upanishads saw *Brahman*/divinity in all. The Rig Veda, which contains the oldest teachings of the Hindu tradition, highlights a belief in a natural order operating within the universe, termed *rita* in Sanskrit, which early brahmin priests sought to help maintain and be in communion with through rituals and prayers. Also connected with India's spiritual past were the people of the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation, who discovered creative ways of farming and irrigation that were in balance with Nature. Now more than ever we need to recognise, preserve, cherish and respect the sacredness of life surrounding us and once again understand and live in harmony with Gaia's ways, take joy in her beauty and the diversity of life and species she has sought to celebrate.

When we awaken to these nourishing fields of awareness, we come to realise the same spiritual insights as the prophets and mystics of both the past and present, such as the late Thomas Berry (who preferred to call himself a *geologist* rather than a *theologist*) who profoundly recognised that, "To wantonly destroy another species is to silence a divine voice forever".



~ Santoshan (Stephen Wollaston)