

Healing Our Relationship with Nature

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Nature is one of those words that we take for granted. It can be defined as the phenomena of the material world, including the biosphere which was created and is maintained by living processes. In the Western world, where most people live in the built environment, and in urban populations everywhere totalling half of humanity, nature is seen as something external, perhaps to be admired or visited, but not really essential. Even if nature is seen as important, we more readily accept our physical dependence on nature and natural resources than any real link to our psychology, personality or spirituality. This has not always been the case, and is not true for many other cultures. This breakdown in our relationship with nature has not only led to serious environmental problems, but is also behind psychological and even spiritual problems for many today. This paper will explore our relationship with nature from different perspectives:

- how that relationship has evolved down through history,
- the multiple levels of that relationship, and
- principles from the Baha'i writings for healing our relationship with nature.

Today we have divorced ourselves from any significant relationship with nature and seldom even mention it any more. In political and economic discourse we refer to the environment, which conveniently places nature outside of us as something marginal or optional, and as a result we are rapidly destroying the natural world. One of the planetary boundaries that we have already exceeded is the loss of biological diversity. Scientists have said that the extinction rate for species should not exceed 10 times the natural rateⁱ, but it is now 1000 times thatⁱⁱ. In addition, global warming of 2°C from climate change will cause a 20% loss of all species on the planet, and 4°C will exterminate half of all species.ⁱⁱⁱ There will soon be no natural ecosystems left^{iv}, requiring increasing human intervention to maintain some biological diversity and essential ecosystem services. We are far from prepared to take on that responsibility, essential for our physical survival, and are unconscious of what we are losing.

Our evolving relationship with nature

To put our present situation in context, it may help to define four major steps in the evolution of our relationships with nature, as it has evolved down the centuries, from primitive man to the present.

1. In indigenous cultures organized at the family or tribal level, nature is dominant and omnipresent. Man is subject to the forces of nature, which are not understood, are feared, and are given mystical/divine explanations. Nature is not questioned. There is no separation between man and nature. People live in immediate contact with nature on their farms, in their forests, savannas or deserts, when fishing, etc. There may be attempts to appease natural forces, but not to control them.

2. With the rise of larger communities, economies and trade, nature is seen as natural resources to be exploited. The vast planet is there for our benefit, constantly renewing itself without limit. The human impacts of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining seem tiny relative to the size of the Earth, and changes are so slow that they are hardly noticed. The idea of limits does not seem relevant. For the urban population, nature becomes separate, outside, rarely

experienced directly. Civilization, the human system, is what is seen as important, and nature is to be conquered.

3. As human impacts grow and the population rises, people see that natural areas are becoming scarce, and nature conservation becomes urgent. Nature is seen to be fragmented and diminishing, and we make efforts to preserve the best examples for future generations, locked up in parks and reserves. Species extinctions become a concern, but at the same time invasive species spread around the world. We no longer live in nature but in the environment - everything outside of us - which human activity has modified or entirely constructed, whether in agricultural landscapes or urban areas, and this is often damaged or polluted as well. The rapid expansion of the human population and the consumer society makes us the dominant invasive species on the planet. Protection of the environment to ensure human welfare becomes the political priority, but nature is marginalized. There is still no view at the political level of the natural world as a dynamic system of which we are a part.

4. Today, the loss of nature is imminent. Scientists declare that we are in a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, when planetary human impacts dominate natural transformations on a geological time scale. Humans are causing the sixth great mass extinction of species, with 4°C of global warming estimated to exterminate half of all species. Natural systems in their undisturbed form no longer exist, and humans unwittingly take on the responsibility for the maintenance or restoration of the planetary life support systems and renewable natural resources that nature originally created and maintained. A systems view becomes essential for our own survival. Denial is rife, and the political system has yet to catch up.

Human realities and relationships with nature

There can be said to be three levels of our relationship with nature corresponding to three human realities:

- our physical or biological reality, with needs like other animals for food, water, shelter, security, a healthy environment, basic social relationships and emotional drives;
- our intellectual reality, the realm of reason and science; and
- our spiritual reality, rising above the material reality and escaping from it.

Physical reality

Our physical, biological or material reality is quite evident, and is all some people pay attention to. We have a body like all animals with physical, social and emotional needs, with a cycle of birth, reproduction and death to ensure the sustainability of the species. As a social species, we form human communities which in turn are part of the larger ecological systems of the biosphere. Our physical health depends on good nutrition, clean water, exercise, freedom from pollutants and protection from physical risks, which in turn depend in large part on functioning natural systems. At this level, knowledge of our material reality is available to everyone through direct experience and observation.

Intellectual reality

What first distinguishes us from all other animals is our intellectual reality, which is intangible but easily demonstrated. We accumulate knowledge and science beyond single lifetimes, record and codify it, and pass it on through education. Science allows us to do research and perform experiments, leading to the discovery of the realities of nature at higher levels of generalization and abstraction, and finally to an understanding of complex systems and processes, and the story of the universe, our planet and our own history. As knowledge accumulates, information technology becomes dominant to provide tools to store, organize and share knowledge. Science has identified multiple realities as we experience it directly, and at the chemical, quantum, mathematical and pure information levels. It is easier to break down knowledge into ever smaller pieces than to synthesize it into an understanding of complex evolving systems.

At this intellectual level, humanity masters and overcomes nature, using it for human purposes and building civilizations. We escape from the limitations that nature placed on the human body. Nature also serves as a model for the design of human systems, just as natural chemistry is a model for synthetic chemistry. Nature also serves as an inspiration in art, architecture, and engineering. Many fields of design are increasingly turning to organic forms where evolution and natural selection have already solved many design challenges.

Nature is also the object or an important component of many hobbies and forms of recreation, such as gardening, birding, hiking, fishing, skiing, golfing, sailing, rafting, kayaking, diving, etc. Many tourism destinations include natural features as an important attraction. We even capture and recreate nature in zoos, aquariums and gardens. The traditional Japanese garden tries to express the essence of nature raised to a high art.

Spiritual reality

The spiritual reality is perhaps the most controversial, since it is marginalized in secular societies and actively denied in some atheist circles. Yet the vast majority of humanity takes it as given that humankind has a spiritual nature and purpose. It is at this level that we find the best expression of the ethical and moral principles associated with our relationship to nature, and some of the most relevant knowledge on how to reestablish a better balance with nature. It is therefore worth considering in more detail this dimension of reality and source of knowledge. The tools of rationality can shed light on the roles and functions of spirituality even if they cannot "prove" its origin and ultimate purpose. Spiritual knowledge complements but in no way contradicts scientific knowledge.

One significant source of knowledge at the spiritual level is in religious scriptures and texts (see [Annex](#)). These include exhortations about respect for nature, moderation in its use, and a prohibition on waste. Nature is given a spiritual significance, with the qualities of God (or absolute perfection) being reflected in nature. Contemplating nature is therefore a path to spiritual understanding. The wisdom in the revealed religions about nature has a special advantage, since it is reinforced for believers by the power of Divine authority. Christianity is perhaps the tradition with the least reference to nature, leaning more on Old Testament sources, while the Baha'i Faith has the most detailed references. This is captured succinctly in the statement 'The country is the world of the soul, the city is the world of bodies.'^v "We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions."^{vi}

Beyond any particular religious or philosophical context, there are more general spiritual dimensions to our reaction to nature. The greatness, grandeur, beauty, power, and wonders of nature can invoke in us a sense of humility. This is very healthy in our struggle with our ego, and can help to draw us out of ourselves. For those who are open to it, nature can produce a deep resonance with our spirit or soul. The great spiritual teachers (Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Baha'u'llah) retreated into the wilderness to prepare for their mission. People in search, and in many traditional cultures, seek mystical experiences in nature, or find their deeper self or direction in life through being in nature, sometimes as part of coming of age rites on reaching maturity.

If humans have a spiritual reality, then they also have a spiritual purpose, to acquire virtues and attributes of what it is to be really human: love, compassion, forgiveness, trustworthiness, justice, humility, etc. While these are best expressed in human interactions, many can also be fostered by contact with animals and more generally with nature. Respect for all living beings is deeply rooted in most spiritual traditions.

This knowledge of nature from spiritual sources is an important complement to scientific

sources of knowledge. It is in no way contradictory, but while science tells us what to do with nature, and how to do it to preserve it, the spiritual knowledge tells us why. It provides moral underpinning to the effort to bring nature back into the politics of the environment.

Indigenous knowledge and spirituality

It can help to understand these dimensions of human reality in relation to nature by comparison with cultures that make no distinction between these dimensions, drawing on my own experience in the Pacific Islands. Most indigenous peoples traditionally have had a deep spirituality linked to nature, and see themselves as part of nature, often tracing their ancestry back to some totem or part of nature. Nature sends them signs to guide them. They may perform sacrifices or rites to please or appease nature. This traditional knowledge from the ancestors contains much that is scientifically valid, based on generations of observations and confirmations.^{vii} It includes both a detailed understanding of natural systems and processes, and practices that ensure the sustainability of natural resources.

For example, in New Caledonia, the scope of traditional Kanak knowledge of nature and the environment was very large.^{viii} There were names for and a classification of every significant species of plant and animal. Periodic events like the movements of celestial bodies, the flowering and fruiting of trees, and the migrations of birds and fish were observed and incorporated into their system of knowledge and sense of time.

While the process of the observation of natural phenomena in Kanak society was similar to that of modern science, the intellectual context within which the observations were interpreted was very different. The Kanak did not identify himself as separate from the world around him; on the contrary, he was part of the world and perceived himself by analogy with objects in nature such as the yam, whose cycle symbolized the cycle of life. The ancestors were born from trees, and the body was identified with the vegetable kingdom. The different plants had symbolic meanings that were used as a kind of language. The land was the spiritual as well as material source of life. The habitat was worshipped, and there was no distinction between magic or myth and the natural world. The doctors and healers had their special knowledge of sicknesses, medicines and other treatments. A knowledge or skill was intimately related to the myth or magic with which it was inherited. One missionary describes a skilled sculptor and surgeon whose confidence rested in the gift from his deified ancestors; when he became a Christian, this confidence was destroyed and his skill was lost.

The family of the first occupants of a village provided the master of the land who distributed the land and maintained the cadastral system. There was often a master of yams or dry crops, and a master of wet or female crops (taro, bananas, sugar cane) who were the agricultural technicians and decided the timing of gardening operations. The master of a crop frequently had a small sacred garden in which he first practiced the different acts in the cultivation of the crops. These ritual gardens served as micro-experimental gardens and meteorological stations permitting the master to adapt his decisions to the variable climate. A resource might be managed through a taboo or prohibition. A taboo might be placed on a garden to protect the crop before the harvest, or an area of tall grass might be protected because it was needed to repair the thatch on the huts in the village. Fishing knowledge and magic was held by the families responsible for supplying fish to the chief. The head of a family on the island of Lifou had a magic allowing him to climb up on a promontory and to ask the relations of his god in another locality to send fish to his brothers-in-law; although the rite is no longer followed, when the wind blows from the other locality it still washes fish up on the sand, just as it did the day after the rite. The magic was thus related to a natural phenomenon, and the skill of the magician may have come from knowing when to perform the rite. A clan might be foresters or carpenters, with a knowledge of the forest trees, the qualities of each wood, the techniques for cutting and hauling a tree to the building site, and the construction of huts or the making of canoes. Families might own magic to control the sun, the rain, cyclones, or the land breeze to chase away bad weather.^{ix}

Another personal example comes from the Solomon Islands. In 1975, the Government of the Solomon Islands asked me to investigate a fisheries management problem in the Lau Lagoon on the island of Malaita. The fishermen lived in villages on artificial islands in the lagoon, where the local traditional money consisted of strings of white, black and orange disks cut and ground from different shells. Only one kind of shell had a band of orange, and these were most highly prized, and subject to overfishing. They were becoming hard to find. Strings of the money were used for traditional exchanges such as to buy pigs or wives. The same custom group included Bougainville island in Papua New Guinea, which had at the time the world's largest copper and gold mine. The mine workers with good salaries could buy more strings of money for traditional exchanges, producing a shortage. The fishermen of the Lau Lagoon could not keep up with the demand.

The shell fishery was traditionally managed by the old pagan priests, and a few were still alive, living in the taboo sacred area on the artificial island. The priest explained to me that he controlled the shell fishery by placing taboos on different parts of the lagoon. When he received enough pigs to sacrifice, he would perform the traditional ceremonies and then lift the taboo on one section of the lagoon so that the shells could be collected to make the shell money. Then he would put the taboo on again until enough pigs were given for the ceremony, when he would lift the taboo on another section of the lagoon. Normally, he would keep the taboo on any area for 4-5 years, just the time for the shells to reach a harvestable size, an excellent fisheries management technique. However, since World War II, most of the villagers had become Christian or Baha'i and were no longer giving pigs to sacrifice, so he had kept the taboo on for 30 years. The system had broken down and the taboo was no longer respected. I met with the fishermen and explained the wisdom behind the traditional taboo system. If they no longer followed the old pagan religion, they could at least designate some wise old fishermen that they all respected, and ask them to close and open parts of the lagoon to shell collecting in the same way, to maintain the productivity of the resource. There was also an economic wisdom to the old system, as it maintained the value of the shell money in terms of the number of pigs sacrificed, as pigs were very valuable. The pig standard worked much like the gold standard for currencies.

The taboo houses were in a separate walled area of the island, and mostly in disrepair. There were also some piles of skulls. In the house I visited, there were shelves along the back wall with baskets, each containing a skull. The priest explained that these were his ancestors in the priestly line, and he needed to recite their names during the ceremony. They were there to remind him. There were holes in the thatched roof, and I asked why he did not repair it. He said that was difficult. In order to rebuild a taboo house, you had to dig a large hole, place a man in the bottom of the hole, and place the center post (a tree trunk) on top of the man. Since WWII, it was no longer possible to find a man to put in the hole. Obviously it is not desirable to retain all parts of the traditional religion, so the local people must decide what to reject and what to retain.

Human purpose

Accepting these multiple dimensions of human reality leads us to acknowledge a higher human purpose. "How... can we resolve the paralyzing contradiction that, on the one hand, we desire a world of peace and prosperity, while, on the other, much of economic and psychological theory depicts human beings as slaves to self-interest? The faculties needed to construct a more just and sustainable social order—moderation, justice, love, reason, sacrifice and service to the common good—have too often been dismissed as naïve ideals. Yet, it is these, and related qualities that must be harnessed to overcome the traits of ego, greed, apathy and violence, which are often rewarded by the market and political forces driving current patterns of unsustainable consumption and production." ^x Our real purpose can be found in developing the endless potential in human consciousness, and a relationship with nature can contribute to this.

Healing our relationship with nature

A first step in correcting our disconnect with nature is to acknowledge that all natural processes are part of an integrated system of which we are also a part. It then follows that we should not destroy the natural systems on which we depend for our physical survival and well-being. This requires that we detach ourselves from the consumer society and adopt simpler lifestyles. We can then open ourselves to nature and appreciate what it can contribute to our spiritual development. Each of these steps is well illustrated in the Baha'i writings and statements.

Nature as an integrated system

The science of complex systems has its roots in the natural sciences^x[xi](#) but is now being extended to other fields including economics^{xii}[xii](#) and history^{xiii}[xiii](#). Long before, however, the basic principles of integrated natural systems are explained in the Baha'i writings from a century ago.

"This nature is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and to a finished design, from which it will never depart - to such a degree, indeed, that if you look carefully and with keen sight, from the smallest invisible atom up to such large bodies of the world of existence as the globe of the sun or the other great stars and luminous spheres, whether you regard their arrangement, their composition, their form or their movement, you will find that all are in the highest degree of organization and are under one law from which they will never depart."^{xiv}[xiv](#)

"By nature is meant those inherent properties and necessary relations derived from the realities of things. And these realities of things, though in the utmost diversity, are yet intimately connected one with the other."^{xv}[xv](#)

"All these endless beings which inhabit the world, whether man, animal, vegetable, mineral - whatever they may be - are surely, each one of them, composed of elements. There is no doubt that this perfection which is in all beings, is caused by the creation of God from the composing elements, by their appropriate mingling and proportionate quantities, the mode of their composition, and the influence of other beings. For all beings are connected together like a chain, and reciprocal help, assistance, and influence belonging to the properties of things, are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings."^{xvi}[xvi](#)

The analogy is made with the complex system that is the human body.

"...the temple of the world hath been fashioned after the image and likeness of the human body. In fact each mirroreth forth the image of the other... By this is meant that even as the human body in this world, which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent entity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together.

"...the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and... co-operation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly.

"Consider for instance how one group of created things constituteth the vegetable kingdom, and another the animal kingdom. Each of these two maketh use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential for the life of the other. In other words, the growth and development of the vegetable world is impossible without the existence of the animal kingdom, and the maintenance of animal life is inconceivable without the

co-operation of the vegetable kingdom. Of like kind are the relationships that exist among all created things. Hence it was stated that co-operation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness.

"In surveying the vast range of creation thou shalt perceive that the higher a kingdom of created things is on the arc of ascent, the more conspicuous are the signs and evidences of the truth that co-operation and reciprocity at the level of a higher order are greater than those that exist at the level of a lower order. For example, the evident signs of this fundamental reality are more discernible in the vegetable kingdom than in the mineral, and still more manifest in the animal world than in the vegetable."[xvii](#)

Healing our physical relationship with nature

In a talk on science and religion at Stanford University in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Baha warned us about the destruction of nature. "The elements and lower organisms are synchronized in the great plan of life. Shall man, infinitely above them in degree, be antagonistic and a destroyer of that perfection?"[xviii](#) The damage has gone very far, with climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, soil degradation, over-fishing and ocean acidification seriously reducing the natural capacity of the planet that will seriously handicap our immediate future and that of our children and grandchildren. To make the transition to sustainability, we need a new emphasis on agriculture and on preserving the ecological balance of the world.[xix](#)

The Baha'i International Community has summarized the steps required.

"Bahá'í Scriptures describe nature as a reflection of the sacred. They teach that nature should be valued and respected, but not worshipped; rather, it should serve humanity's efforts to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. However, in light of the interdependence of all parts of nature, and the importance of evolution and diversity 'to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole,' every effort should be made to preserve as much as possible the earth's bio-diversity and natural order.

"As trustees, or stewards, of the planet's vast resources and biological diversity, humanity must learn to make use of the earth's natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, in a manner that ensures sustainability and equity into the distant reaches of time. This attitude of stewardship will require full consideration of the potential environmental consequences of all development activities. It will compel humanity to temper its actions with moderation and humility, realizing that the true value of nature cannot be expressed in economic terms. It will also require a deep understanding of the natural world and its role in humanity's collective development - both material and spiritual. Therefore, sustainable environmental management must come to be seen not as a discretionary commitment mankind can weigh against other competing interests, but rather as a fundamental responsibility that must be shouldered - a pre-requisite for spiritual development as well as the individual's physical survival."[xx](#)

A more sustainable lifestyle

The only way to give the natural world an opportunity to recover is to reduce human pressure on it, and that means abandoning our addiction to growth and to the consumer society and focusing instead on progress in the social, cultural, scientific and spiritual dimensions of life. Again, the Baha'i writings provide clear guidance in this direction. As Baha'u'llah put it, "...be content with little, and be freed from all inordinate desire."[xxi](#) And again: "Take from this world only to the measure of your needs, and forego that which exceedeth them."[xxii](#) While in America in 1913, 'Abdu'l-Baha also commented: "How complex is the life of the present age and how

much more complex we are making it daily! The needs of humanity seem never to come to an end. The more men accumulate the more they want. There is only one way of freedom and that is by shutting one's eyes and heart to all these things which distract the mind."[xxiii](#) We are all challenged to detach ourselves from the excesses of the material society around us and to adopt more sustainable lifestyles which can both bring us closer to nature and foster our social and spiritual development.

Nature, psychology and health

Since it is only recently that we have cut ourselves off from nature, we have little understanding of what we have lost in terms of our physical and psychological health. There is good but still limited evidence that health and healing is improved through contact with nature. People in cities who live next to parks are healthier than those who live some distance away. Whether the effect is psychological or due to the beneficial effects of exposure to natural microbes has yet to be determined.[xxiv](#) In one experiment, hospital patients with a view of a tree through the window healed faster than those with other kinds of views, or even those with a video representation of the same tree the same size as the window. There will certainly be further discoveries in the future of the benefits to health and well-being through contact with nature.

At a psychological level, the relationship with nature is also important.[xxv](#) As Bahá'u'lláh has put it: "Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory...."[xxvi](#)

Contact with nature should be an essential part of education from an early age, as it contributes to a essential set of life skills. Animals are also frequently used in therapy for conditions such as autism. It can be easier for some people to first develop empathy and compassion for animals. "Briefly, it is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature.... The feelings are one and the same, whether ye inflict pain on man or on beast. Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let the children try to heal it, if it be hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests."[xxvii](#) Research has shown that most adults active in environmentalism had experiences in nature as children[xxviii](#) while others may be motivated more by the human impacts of the destruction of nature.[xxix](#)

Nature and spirituality

The Baha'i writings make it clear that nature can serve as a means to achieve spiritual understanding by demonstrating the qualities and attributes of God. "Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world."[xxx](#)

"...whatever I behold I readily discover that it maketh Thee known unto me, and it remindeth me of Thy signs, and of Thy tokens, and of Thy testimonies. By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine omnipotence.

"...I can hear from the whisper of the winds the sound of Thy glorification and praise, and can recognize in the murmur of the waters the voice that proclaimeth Thy virtues

and Thine attributes, and can apprehend from the rustling of the leaves the mysteries that have been irrevocably ordained by Thee in Thy realm." [xxxix](#)

"When... thou dost contemplate the innermost essence of all things, and the individuality of each, thou wilt behold the signs of thy Lord's mercy in every created thing, and see the spreading rays of His Names and Attributes throughout all the realm of being.... Then wilt thou observe that the universe is a scroll that discloseth His hidden secrets, which are preserved in the well-guarded Tablet. And not an atom of all the atoms in existence, not a creature from amongst the creatures but speaketh His praise and telleth of His attributes and names, revealeth the glory of His might and guideth to His oneness and His mercy....

"And whensoever thou dost gaze upon creation all entire, and dost observe the very atoms thereof, thou wilt note that the rays of the Sun of Truth are shed upon all things and shining within them, and telling of that Day-Star's splendours, Its mysteries, and the spreading of Its lights. Look thou upon the trees, upon the blossoms and fruits, even upon the stones. Here too wilt thou behold the Sun's rays shed upon them, clearly visible within them, and manifested by them." [xxxix](#)

The way ahead

Today we need to reverse the steps in our evolving role in nature, in a sense completing the circle to bring wholeness to our approach. Today's materialists still see their priority as making money by exploiting nature, or what might crudely be called rape and profit. The more highly evolved people of today have become respecters of nature, acknowledging the importance of natural resources and our dependence on them, and admiring the beauties and wonders of nature, but they still have an environmental perspective with nature as something outside of themselves. Only if we can combine a scientific understanding of the complex systems of which we are a part, with an awareness of the significance of our relationship to nature as something integral to our being and essential to our spiritual development, will we finally overcome the damaging misunderstanding of our separation from nature and accept our wholeness which can also become holiness.

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ANNEX - TEXTS ABOUT NATURE FROM DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

HINDUISM - BHAGAVAD GITA

All actions take place in time by the interweaving of the forces of Nature; but the man lost in selfish delusion thinks that he himself is the actor. (*Bhagavad Gita* 3:27)

But the man who knows the relation between the forces of Nature and actions, sees how some forces of Nature work on other forces of Nature, and becomes not their slave.

Those who are under the delusion of the forces of Nature bind themselves to the work of these forces. Let not the wise man who sees the All disturb the unwise who sees not the All. (3:27-29)

JUDAISM

Job 12:7-10

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.

Psalms 8:3-9

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalms 104:10-30

You [God] make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.

The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. In them the birds build their nests; the stork has its home in the fir trees. The high mountains are for the wild goats; the rocks are a refuge for the coney. You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting.

You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening.

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great.

There go the ships, and the Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

These all look to you to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

Isaiah 24:5-8

The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.

Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left.

The wine dries up, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh.

The mirth of the timbrels is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased...

BUDDHISM

Metta Sutta, "Loving-kindness"

This is what should be done
By those who are skilled in goodness,
And who know the path of peace:
Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech,
Humble and not conceited,
Contented and easily satisfied,
Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways,
Peaceful and calm, wise and skillful,
Not proud and demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
That the wise would later reprove.
Wishing: in gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.
Whatever living beings there may be,
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born to-be-born--
May all beings be at ease!
Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life

Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings,
Radiating kindness over the entire world,
Spreading upward to the skies,
And downward to the depths,
Outward and unbounded.
Freed from hatred and ill-will,
Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down,
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.

CHRISTIANITY

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (*John 1:1-5*)

"Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than birds!" (*Luke 12:24*)

"Notice how the flowers grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?" (*Luke 12:27-28*)

And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow." And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirty fold. (*Matthew 13:3-8*)

He went up on the mountain by himself to pray. (*Matthew 14:23*)

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him. (*Mark 1:12-13*)

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (*Rom 8:19-23*)

...for "the earth and its fullness are the Lord's." (*1 Corinthians 11:26*)

The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for the dead to be judged, and to recompense your servants, the prophets, and the holy ones and those who fear your name, the

small and the great alike, and to destroy those who destroy the earth. (*Rev 11:18*)

ISLAM

6:141 Al-An'am - Cattle

It is He who produceth
Gardens, with trellises
And without, and dates,
And tilth with produce
Of all kinds, and olives
And pomegranates,
Similar (in kind)
And different (in variety):
Eat of their fruit
In their season, but render
The dues that are proper
On the day that the harvest
Is gathered. But waste not
By excess: for God
Loveth not the wasters.

6:38 Al-An'am - Cattle

There is not an animal
(That lives) on the earth,
Nor a being that flies
On its wings, but (forms
Part of) communities like you.
Nothing have we omitted
From the Book, and they (all)
Shall be gathered to their Lord
In the end.

62:1 Al-Jumu'ah - The Assembly (Friday) Prayer

Whatever is
In the heavens and
On earth, doth declare
The Praises and Glory
Of God, - the Sovereign,
The Holy One, the Exalted
In Mighty, the Wise.

2:164 Al-Baqarah - The Cow

Behold! In the creation
Of the heavens and the earth;
In the alternation
Of the Night and the Day;
In the sailing of the ships
Through the ocean
For the profit of mankind;
In the rain which God
Sends down from the skies,
And the life which He gives therewith
To an earth that is dead;
In the beasts of all kinds
That He scatters
Through the earth;

In the change of the winds
And the clouds which they
Trail like their slaves
Between the sky and the earth; –
(Here) indeed are Signs
For a people that are wise.

55:1-13 Rahman - (God) Most Gracious

God, Most Gracious!
It is He Who has
Taught the Qur'an.
He has created man:
He has taught him speech (and intelligence).
The sun and the moon
Follow courses (exactly) computed;
And the herbs and the trees -
Both (alike) bow in adoration.
And the Firmament has He
Raised high, and He has set up
The Balance (of Justice),
In order that ye may
Not transgress (due) balance.
So establish weight with justice
And fall not short
In the balance.
It is He Who has
Spread out the earth
For (His) creatures:
Therein is fruit
And date palms, producing
Spathes (enclosing dates);
Also corn, with (its)
Leaves and stalk for fodder,
And sweet-smelling plants.
Then which of the favours
Of your Lord will ye deny?

15:19 Al-Hijr - The Rocky Tract

And the earth We have spread out
(Like a carpet); set thereon
Mountains firm and immovable;
And produced therein all kinds
Of things in due balance.

2:204-207 Al-Baqarah - The Cow

There is the type of man
Whose speech
About this world's life
May dazzle thee,
And he calls God to witness
About what is in his heart;
Yet is he the most contentious
Of enemies.
When he turns his back,
His aim everywhere
Is to spread mischief

Through the earth and destroy
Crops and cattle
But God loveth not mischief.
When it is said to him,
"Fear God,"
He is led by arrogance
To (more) crime.
Enough for him is Hell; –
An evil bed indeed
(To lie on)!
And there is the type of man
Who gives his life
To earn the pleasure of God;
And God is full of kindness
To (His) devotees.



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