

# Learning to Love the World

## By John Scull

*We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will. Show a loving consideration for all creatures, and seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the world. Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life. Rejoice in the splendour of God's continuing creation.*

– *Advices and Queries, Britain Yearly Meeting*

Advices and Queries asks us to show “loving consideration” for the non-human world and to “rejoice” in the creation. Can we, in fact, simply choose to love or rejoice? We can decide to act responsibly, but

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powerful emotions such as love and rejoicing depend on more than just a rational decision. Nature meditation is a process for entering into a loving and rejoicing relationship with the natural world. It has many parallels to Quaker worship but diverges in some important respects. Methods enabling us to connect with nature have been explored by the emerging field of ecopsychology, sometimes called ecospirituality, nature connecting, or nature mysticism. Theologian Marcus Borg has suggested the phrase “eyes-open mysticism,” as a synonym.

Ecopsychologists propose a three-stage process for psychological and spiritual communing with nature:

Preparation. This can take other forms: imagery, queries, discussion, or ritual. The purpose of preparation is to temporarily silence the inner dialogue, leave some parts of our cultural and social selves behind, and open ourselves to the teachings of nature. We show respect by asking natural beings for permission to be with them and learn from them.

Silent time in communion with nature. The contact is framed by the intentions expressed in the preparation phase. At the end of communion with nature we express our gratitude to the beings which have helped us learn and love.

Bringing the experience into our human, cultural, and social consciousness. This is most easily done by sharing our experiences in small groups but it can take other forms: a written journal, artistic creation, music, poetry, sharing with another individual, or even communicating with others by e-mail.

When we follow this process repeatedly, spiritual and psychological changes ensue. As we open ourselves to directly experiencing nature and then integrating these experiences into our lives, we discover many specific insights about interdependence, impermanence and change, diversity, complexity,

cycles, non-verbal communication, the limitation of our linguistic way of being, the importance of our senses, and other lessons. Continued practice can lead to transformational feelings at the deepest level that we share our existence with the entire universe; that we are part of something much larger than ourselves.

This understanding can transform our lives and our environmental activism. Nature is not a mirror for our thoughts or a metaphor for our lives; it is the medium in which we are immersed. As we open ourselves we come to live in ways more in tune with the natural systems of which we are a part. Just as silence in community has traditionally led Quakers to relate ethically to other human beings, silent awareness of the more-than-human community can lead to “consideration for all creatures” effortlessly arising from the love and understanding that grows from direct experience.

Nature mysticism is central to Animism, Taoism and Wicca. Similar ideas can be found in transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau, the Deep Ecology of Arne Naess, the Jungian psychology of James Hillman, and the ethical ecology of Aldo Leopold. The Koran teaches that the Creation is God's first revelation. Buddhism tells us that understanding and love arise together and can only come from direct experience.

Connection to the natural world has not been central to Christianity, but it has not been completely absent, either. St. Francis, Thomas Berry,

Sallie McFague, Matthew Fox, Marcus Borg, and others have brought an ecological perspective into the Christian tradition.

Gathering in silence can help us experience the light within ourselves and other members of our community. In the same way, going into nature in a mindful and feelingful way can open us to the presence of the holy (whole) in every being and in the universe. As in Meeting for Worship, we need to silence the inner cacophony and open ourselves to that which nature reveals. Sharing our experiences with others enhances the experience, helps build a community of common understanding, and leads us to action on behalf of the natural world.

For resources about eco-psychology, visit: <http://www.ecopsychology.org>. ↻

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The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the twenty-first century.

— *Earth Charter*

## Poem for the Flicker in the Ash

By Cornelia Hoogland

The neighbour chops down  
the eighty-year-old Chinese chestnut,  
two firs half its age and the quince  
the lady came by in the pouring rain  
to band against coddling moth

a day ago. Apples budding and all week  
tanks spray dusty clouds over the orchards.  
How long can she hold her breath?  
Even the neighbour's grass is eerily green —  
the kind of lawn you see pool-side,  
wrapped tight as cellophane  
around creosote beams that gird  
the manufactured oh-so-level terraces.  
She can almost smell the bbqs and beer  
her neighbour's hoping for except  
it's chemicals that soak the air.

His kids? (don't play on the lawn boys  
you'll wreck it shouts the father) —  
too bad for them she thinks.  
Her fear is for the birds, the Flicker  
who two weeks straight  
belts a song so lusty  
it bores a hole in the sky no female fills.

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