

### **#3 Appreciation of the Earth**

Recently I have found myself wanting to capitalize the word “Earth” as a sign of respect. How we treat the Earth is a measure of our virtues. I believe that everything we learn about being virtuous translates into being a better inhabitant of the Earth. A balance of self-interest and respect is necessary. Inner harmony is directly related to the harmony around us. One goal is to live in a way that is equally good for ourselves and good for the Earth. A strong will to live has to include the will to support those systems that support our life.

#### **Celebrate your kinship with the Earth.**

People tend to ignore their relationship to the Earth. If we treated our friends with such neglect, we wouldn't have any. Some people act childish, expecting the Earth to take care of them. Others behave more like rebellious teenagers, with an “I don't need you” attitude. Yet, if these people had no water for a day, they would develop a heightened sense of the precious nature of water and their relationship to it.

The Earth is constantly giving. Since friendship, by definition, is mutual, our responsibility is to complete the cycle by being mature in this relationship, including gratitude and appreciation.

Every action we take has a negative or positive affect on our planet. We may have a great relationship with ourselves, our mates and kids, but if the life support systems of our Earth are cruelly disregarded, we will have nothing.

#### **Our Home in Space**

This blue and white globe floating in the dark night of space is alive! The concentration and diversity of life make Earth a rare entity in the universe. I think of the Earth as a huge, self-contained, living being, a bubble that supports life in the hostile environment of space. I feel that I am a small cell of the life form Earth. I display a photograph of the Earth as seen from space as a constant reminder that I am privileged to live in this paradise.

I honor plants which absorb energy in the form of light from our sun, 93 million miles away. I marvel at plants' ability to capture photons of energy traveling at the speed of light. I appreciate a plant's capacity to extract energy from inorganic material.

We breathe Earth's miraculous atmosphere thousands of times a day. Notice, for just one minute, your breath. Each breath is a prayer of thanks for the trees, meadows, ocean and plants and the oxygen they create. Make a pledge of loyalty and devotion to the Earth. Every day is a holy day. Each day as you rise, ask how you may be of service to the Earth.

#### **Balancing Belongings and Belonging**

The following interview with Pat is typical of the struggle to break free from being owned by possessions:

*“Several years ago, my life seemed empty. I tried to satisfy my hunger with belongings but I was a bottomless pit. Things had become more important than my relationships. I was starving for a feeling of community while my house was full of possessions. I needed a new definition of success and searched for it. I began by examining the time I spent just working to earn money. Then I looked at the time and energy it took to buy and maintain my possessions. I realized that I was spending my life on material things when I actually needed very few of them to survive. If everyone consumed as much as I did, there wouldn’t be enough to go around. It would destroy the planet.*

*Now, I define success not by how much money I make but rather by how well I attend to my life. I realize that I have the power to change the world by how I earn and spend money. I cast my ballot each day for how I want the world to be.*

*Because of the changes I’ve made, I feel like a multi-billionaire with a diverse portfolio of friends. I have invested wisely in relationships.*

*Sometimes the return on my investment is instantly rewarding. Other friendships require more time and energy. I have learned to cut my losses when the relationship becomes a drain on my resources.*

*I have accumulated necessary material things, but not more than that. I am focusing the rest of my life on being in service to the Earth. A livable Earth is the best inheritance I can give to my kids. The more love I exchange, the fewer belongings I need.”*

Wealth without health and happiness is worthless.

### **Millions of Miracles**

For our ten-year wedding anniversary, Maggie and I treated ourselves to a trip to the Bahamas. We discovered an educational facility that offered swimming with dolphins in a large bay. We were able to play with them for almost an hour! It is easy to feel a kinship with these advanced beings. That evening in our hotel room, we happened to turn on the TV. The movie Cocoon was playing. Amazingly, it featured the same dolphins we had just been in the water with that very day!

I treasure those times when I see an animal in the wild for the first time. I can imagine the setting where I spotted my first bobcat, wolf, buffalo, baby bear, moose, porcupine or a new bird. Just as friendship takes time, so does having the bond with nature.

**Every living being is a miracle!**

Each day, find one new way to realize your connection with the Earth. Practice seeing the beauty around you. It can be as simple as a leaf suspended from a spider's web, slowly twirling in the morning breeze. Discover the many gifts from the Earth. Be intimate with the Earth by knowing its beauty.

## **The Farm**

As a child, I would spend a week during the summer on my grandparents' farm. I loved going there because I was warmly welcomed. I would soon scamper outside to explore the buildings, fields and animals. I returned when the big dinner bell rang.

Looking back on these memories, breakfast time stands out. While my grandma cooked, I helped my grandpa feed and care for the animals. The kitchen was warmed by a big wood-fired cook stove. I liked splitting the wood into small pieces for my grandma. When the chores were finished, I pumped the water and scrubbed up with homemade soap.

By the time we finally ate, I was ravenous. "Hunger is the best spice," my grandma used to say. Most of the food on the table was from the farm. I'd gathered the fresh, warm eggs from under the chickens. The bacon came from the pig I'd helped to butcher the previous year. The flour for the corn bread grew in the fields plowed by a team of twin workhorses. I can still feel their rippling muscles as I rode on their backs. The butter was hand-churned from fresh cow's milk; I never could get the milking action right. The applesauce came from the trees I had climbed, shaking the branches until the ripe ones dropped to the ground. Peeling and canning were hard work. Hash browns were once the potatoes that I'd helped dig out from the garden.

We worked hard and the land produced much. No one ever went hungry. This experience instilled in me a lasting appreciation for the land and cycles of life. It is amazing how many people never raise one calorie of food though consume tons. I like to honor the land by using the energy from my food to serve it.

## **Honey**

One morning, while drizzling honey onto my cereal, I imagined the process that occurred just to get the honey to my table. I once installed a beehive at my retreat center. I read that bees are responsible for as much as 50 percent of our food, so effective are they at pollination. Living next to an orchard showed me how true this was. The retreat center's apple trees used to produce only a small crop, but the next year, when the bees were present, the branches nearly broke from the bounty.

The hive, an intelligent community, awakens at first light. A scout bee returns to communicate the finding of flowering nectar. He dances around, wagging his tail to indicate the distance and direction to the source. The bees watch the dancer carefully and hum with excitement. The vibration of their wings stirs the air.

The bees see the vibrations of energy that each blossom radiates, with their special compound eyes. Bees are a kind of sexual go-between for the blossoms. They gather the nectar and pollen and transport it to the hive. There the nectar is processed into honey. The worker bees build wax combs to store the honey. The queen deposits her eggs in the combs. The bees work hard and have a short lifespan. The survival of the hive depends upon producing enough bees to replace those who die.

The enormous effort of all these bees sweetens my life. Thousands of flights are needed to bring this honey to me. Just as the bees collect, transport, process and store the honey, the same steps are repeated again by humans before the honey arrives at my table.

The fragrance of honey is a delicate echo of the aroma of the fields. I love watching the slow flow of golden honey as I pour it on my cereal. It tastes divine. The spirit of the Earth and sun is in the honey, spirit which feeds my body. The bees are my kindred spirits.

I would like to see “Made by the Earth” stamped on all products, above the manufacturer’s name.

## **Spiritual Ecology**

Spiritual ecology explores the relationship between the human spirit and the Earth. Spirituality is a seamless communion between self and nature. Our planet is an integrated system, thus what affects one has consequences for the whole.

When we nourish our spirits there is a positive ripple effect which radiates outward. When we change our inner world, the outer world will follow. When we nurture our spirits, we nurture nature.

Our bodies came from the Earth. We were born into a world inherited in good faith from our ancestors and have been given a short time to be above ground before we give our bodies back. Our responsibility is to create a world that we would be proud to pass on to future generations. We need to evolve until protecting the environment is a daily, spiritual practice.

Our quality of life is dependent on our ability to love the Earth. Our spirituality needs to be grounded as well as connected to the heavens. Raising individual and collective consciousness is a critical practice.

Do your best to live a conscious life. Develop a passionate love for your friend the Earth. Make your relationship to the Earth an integral part of your spiritual path. Work hard for the planet’s well-being. Our spiritual responsibility is to take a stand with our lives. Become kindred spirits with the Earth.

How will you show your love and appreciation for the Earth?

What are you giving back to this Earth from which you came?