Haeckel, Ernst (1834–1919)

A physician, zoologist, and evolutionary biologist known during his lifetime as “the German Darwin,” Ernst Haeckel was born on 16 February 1834 in Potsdam, Prussia, and died in Jena, Germany, on 9 August 1919. Haeckel died in his beloved home, Villa Medusa, after having lived in Jena for the last 58 years of his life. For most of that time he was Professor of Zoology at the University of Jena. His scientific perspective on the origins and development of organisms was based on an uneasy syncretism of the archetypal Romantic biology of Goethe and the evolutionary theories of Lamarck and Darwin. Haeckel was one of the earliest proponents of Darwinian theory in Germany. The two men met three times during their lives and corresponded. Haeckel is credited for being the first explicitly to respond. Haeckel introduced the idea – now considered incorrect – for which he is most famous, the “Biogenetic Law”: ontogeny (biological development of the individual following conception) recapitulates phylogeny (the evolution of species and lineages from the first appearance of life on Earth). His famous illustrations of a developing human embryo replicating the analogous sequence of stages of the evolution of life on Earth still appear in college textbooks (although there is a lingering controversy over whether they were falsified by Haeckel). Haeckel is also the first, in 1874, to use the drawing of the “phylogenetic tree” visually to represent the Darwinian view of advanced forms of life emerging from more primitive species. As an accomplished visual artist who celebrated the truth and beauty of nature in drawings, watercolors and oil paintings, Haeckel reproduced his throbbing, almost psychedelic, vision of sea microorganisms as eccentrically observed through his microscope in an influential volume of illustrations, Kunstformen der Natur (Art Forms in Nature, 1899). The spiny, mandala-like images in his book were borrowed by many Art Nouveau (Jugendstil) artists, including the Parisian architect Rene Binet (1826–1911), who used the form of one of these microbes as the inspiration for a pavilion built for the 1900 Universal Exhibition in Paris. The “Barefoot Dancer” Isadora Duncan (1877–1927) was an ardent admirer of Haeckel, and during her tour of Germany in 1903–1904 she based some variations of her “dance of the future” on Haeckel’s evolutionary ideals. In science, art, and culture, Haeckel was unquestionably one of the most famous and influential men of the nineteenth century.

By 1904, the year of his seventieth birthday, Haeckel had achieved enormous international acclaim as a popularizer of science, rivaled, perhaps, only by recent scientists such as Carl Sagan and E.O. Wilson. His rapid rise to fame followed the publication in Germany in 1899 of Die Weltraetsel and its English translation in 1900 as The Riddle of the Universe. Within five years of publication each of those editions had sold more than 100,000 copies. The unprecedented success of this book was due to its vivid and apparently convincing philosophy of life based on Haeckel’s concept of Monism, “the connecting link between religion and science.” Although Haeckel had first proposed his scientific religion of Monism in a lecture he gave in Altenburg, Germany, on 9 October 1892, other than Roman Catholic priests enraged by his anti-Christian (and especially anti-papist) polemics, these ideas did not catch fire in the general public. The Riddle of the Universe changed all that. Monism was to replace dualisms in science (vitalism, a form of materialistic dualism) and religion (distinctions between psyche and body, natural and supernatural, nature and God). More importantly, an explicitly pantheistic and atheistic “Monistic Religion” based on “the good, the true, and the beautiful” in nature would replace Christianity. There would be no chapels or cathedrals in this new science-based faith, for nature itself would be worshipped through a new aesthetic vision in science. All scientists would develop the skills and sensitivities of artists, and artists would sing, paint and dance the eternal flame of life as reflected through the prismatic truth of evolution.

Due to the overwhelming popularity of Monism among “free-thinkers,” artists, scientists, and pantheists – particularly those in the German youth movement who were already practicing sun worship, nudism, vegetarianism and Aryan mysticism – in January 1906 disciples of Haeckel in Jena formed an organization to promote the scientific religion of Monism. The German Monistenbund, as it was called, grew by 1915 to 6000 members in 45 cities. Membership fell during the First World War and again after Haeckel’s death in 1919. As they did with many other competing organizations and political parties, the Nazis banned the Monistenbund in 1933.
Perhaps Haeckel’s most detailed statement of his pantheism and his contempt for Christianity can be found in his short 1914 book, *Gott-Natur (Theophysics): Studien ueber monistische Religion (God-Nature [Theophysics]: Studies in Monistic Religion).* In it, he proposed his universal God be named the “All-God” (*Allgott*), “Pantheos,” or “Deus intramundanus” (God Within-the World). The revered prophets of the new Monistic religion are to be Giordano Bruno, Spinoza and Goethe instead of Jehovah, Christ and Allah. According to the seven principles of Theophysics: 1) God is nature itself, eternal and imperishable; 2) God is the laws of nature itself, impersonal, unconscious, unyielding; 3) God possesses no free will; 4) God does not perform supernatural miracles or wonders; 5) God as a universal substance is a Trinity of Attributes (Mater, Energy, and the Psychom – a word Haeckel coined for the unity of psyche and body); 6) God is blind fate; 7) God is no judge and knows no difference between good and evil.

Haeckel’s last major work was *Kristallseelen: Studien ueber des anorganischen Leben (The Souls of Crystals: Studies of Inorganic Life, 1917).* In it Haeckel argued that life sprang from non-life, and the fact that crystals grow, move, transform, and have a symmetric internal structure like biological beings suggests that they, too, have a soul or psyche and are probably the inorganic source of life on this planet. This was an extension of an idea Haeckel had proposed as early as 1877 about living cells and microbes known as protozoa, that each cell or protozoa had its own psyche and that the totality of organic matter was “ensouled” (*beseelt*). Haeckel may have been prescient when he speculated about the origins of life from non-life, for current scientific speculation also points to crystals as the form of inorganic matter from which life sprang almost four billion years ago.

*Richard Noll*

**Further Reading**


See also: Conservation Biology; Darwin, Charles; Fascism; Holism; Nietzsche, Friedrich; Pantheism; Philosophy of Nature; Restoration Ecology and Ritual; Sagan Carl; Wilson, Edward O.

**Hardy, Thomas (1840–1928)**

Thomas Hardy, an English novelist and poet, was a major Victorian novelist of rural life, hugely influential upon nature writing and the rural novel to this day. He was one of the famous Victorian cases of loss of religious faith, but his relationship with Christianity remained ambivalent. From his mid-twenties onwards his attitude was a mixture of rationalist disbelief in the existence of an external God, anger at the cruelty perpetrated by Christian morality taken in the letter rather than the spirit, and a lingering and sometimes wistful sympathy with Christian rituals and aspirations.

Nature, in his writing, is a surface on which these different attitudes meet each other. There is occasion for hope, or revived hope, as in the chapters of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* where Tess begins work at Talbothays dairy, or the section of *The Return of the Native* (1878) in which Clym Yeobright begins working as a furze-cutter on Egdon Heath. In both of these cases a character who has been wounded finds a rebirth of innocence through absorption in primitive rural labour in a pastoral setting. To identify nature as Eden entails the idea of a coming Fall, however, and this registers its presence almost from the outset. Clym finds his unexpected peace working on the heath after damaged eyesight has forced him to give up his studies. To the external observer, traveller or reader, Clym becomes “a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more” (Hardy 1975a: 262). He discovers nature as a paradise temporarily and inadvertently regained: a release from self-consciousness and alienation. The perspective afforded by reading, which he has lost, is tacitly compared to the knowledge Adam and Eve gained from the forbidden fruit. Renouncing it, Clym gains an unfallen world where the animals no longer fear him. Yet Hardy is insistent about the cost of this return to innocence. Closeness to nature means vulnerability (as a brown spot on the heath he is as defenceless as an insect) and loss of vision – loss, for example, of the longer scientific perspectives so new and troublesome to the Victorians. Edenic optimism in Hardy’s nature writing repeatedly reasserts itself, to be crushed by circumstances suggestive of a Darwinist or Malthusian view of nature, yet to come springing up again in its season. None of these positions stabilizes as the belief system of the writing. In *The Woodlanders* (1887), a tragically inflected Darwinism informs the nature writing. The “lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling” (Hardy 1975c: 82). Yet even in this drama of thwarted purpose and “Unfulfilled Intention” the idea of nature as symbol of persistent hope and vitality remains.
Early in The Return of the Native is Hardy’s famous description of the music made by the wind blowing through the tiny dry heather-bells of Egdon Heath. In this mournfully elegiac reworking of the Romantic trope of the Eolian harp, he evokes not only “the ruins of human song” but the delicate ghost of an omniscient God, able to see and touch each tiny thing but only faintly and purposelessly. The heather-bells are reminiscent of Dante-esque lost souls and of the innumerable perishing individuals and species revealed by Darwin’s vision of evolution: “One inwardly saw the infinity of those combined multitudes; and perceived that each of the tiny trumpets was seized on, entered, scoured and emerged from by the wind as thoroughly as if it were as vast as a crater” (Hardy 1975a: 78).

Hardy sometimes argued sardonically that the evolution of sensibility and intelligence in human beings had done little more than increase their capacity to suffer: “This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences” (in Florence Hardy 1975: 218). Prolonged contentedness, in his fiction, tends to be attributed to characters of stolid or subdued intelligence. Later he developed, as part of his philosophy of “evolutionary meliorism,” the fanciful hope that what he called the Immanent Will – the unconscious drive and causality of life – might one day evolve a form of consciousness. Another hope was that there might be an alliance between religion and rationality, “by means of the interfusing effect of poetry” (1976: 562).

Richard Kerridge

Further Reading


See also: Memoir and Nature Writing.

Harjo, Joy (1951–)

Joy Harjo, a member of the Muscogee (Creek) nation of Oklahoma in the central United States, has always seen the world in multifaceted ways. Beginning her college studies in painting, she has made a name for herself as a poet, and later took up the saxophone and combined music and poetry into performance art. She has also written film scripts, and in her most recent book, A Map to the Next World, has mixed together poems and “tales.” Her interest in the multisensory dimensions of art reflects her stated perception that human beings possess far more than five senses and that if we were to open ourselves to these additional senses they would allow us to experience not only the material aspects of the world more tangibly but also the supernatural aspects as well. Perhaps that perspective helps to explain the genres found in a book she recently co-edited, Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writing of North America, which contains, as she notes, “poetry, fiction, personal narrative, prayer, and testimonials.” The titles of some of her books, such as A Map to the Next World and The Woman Who Fell From the Sky reflect the centrality of Native American spirituality in her understanding of the world that is repeatedly expressed in her writing through attention to the need of all people, and the attempts particularly of native people, to live in balance with the rest of the world in the face of “the destruction” wrought by modern civilization. This vision is perhaps nowhere more strongly expressed than in the series of prose poems she has written to accompany Stephen Strom’s photographs of Navajo country in Secrets from the Center of the World. Adjacent to one photo she writes of an “old man” who “has already been outside to pray, recognized the morning star and his relationship to it, as he stands at the center of miracles” (1989: 14).

Harjo’s efforts to promote readers’ recognition of such relationship can be found in her first two poetry collections, The Last Song and What Moon Drove Me to This? In the former she introduces a recurring motif of native people trying to “find a way back” from the current crisis of culture–nature separation, while in the latter she introduces ritual into her poems, as with the opening one, “Early Morning Woman,” where she notes that “the sun / the child / are the moving circle / beginning with the woman / in the early morning” (1979: 3). Over twenty years later, she opens A Map with “Songline of Dawn,” which begins with “We are ascending through the dawn” and ends with “We are closer to the gods than we ever thought possible” (2000: 13). The accompanying prose tale, “The Psychology of Earth and Sky,” clarifies these lines emphasizing the need for community and ceremony in order to build a world that is “more than a contract between buyer and seller” (2000: 15). Harjo’s work, then, from first book to current writing, reflects a belief in a spiritual ecology that can heal the world through community-building rituals that both grieve over the destruction that has occurred and celebrate the beauty and balance that can yet be achieved.

Patrick D. Murphy
Further Reading
See also: Memoir and Nature Writing.

Harmonic Convergence

If not one of the largest, as its organizers claimed, the Harmonic Convergence was probably one of the most widely dispersed religious (or spiritual) events of recent decades. Organized primarily through word of mouth and through New Age, holistic-health, art, and alternative media channels, this coordinated day of prayer, meditation, and ritual was instigated by art historian and New Age philosopher José Argüelles. According to his calendrical calculations and idiosyncratic decodings of ancient texts, the dates 16–17 August 1987 marked the synchronous occurrence of several significant events: the beginning of the final 26-year period of the Mayan calendar’s 5200-year Great Cycle, the return of Quetzal-coatl, the Mayan god of peace, and the culmination of the Aztec calendar; the “dancing awake” of 144,000 Sun Dance enlightened teachers (according to the Rainbow People of the Intertribal Medicine Societies); the return of the Hopi Indians’ lost white brother Poha’na; a Grand Trine in the astrological fire signs and the first time since the early 1940s that the seven planets have been so closely aligned; an anchoring of divine energy into the power points of the planet for their subsequent transmission through the “planetary grid system,” and a “calibration point in a galactic and planetary harmonic scale.”

To mark this convergence, Argüelles called for 144,000 people to meditate, pray, chant and visualize at sacred sites and power spots throughout the world in order to create a “complete field of trust” by “surrendering to the planet and to the higher galactic intelligences which guide and monitor” it. Humanity would thereby launch the final 25-year transition into a new age of peace, harmony, solar energy, spiritual enlightenment, and galactic convergence with other civilizations, all to begin in the year 2012. Argüelles’ vision combines a Gaian ecological sensibility with a cosmic New Age eschatology: humanity’s role as planetary stewards – a role we have allegedly abdicated through the misguided application of technology and inaccurate sciences (to which Argüelles counterposes new ones) – is subsumed within a larger community of benevolent overseeing galactic intelligences.

According to media reports, by 17 August 1987, some 6000 people had gathered at Mount Shasta, California, more than 1500 came together at a site in New York’s Central Park, and analogous numbers converged at sites including Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, the Cahokia Mounds outside St. Louis, England’s Glastonbury and Stonehenge, Machu Picchu in Peru, the Great Pyramid in Egypt, and Mount Olympus in Greece. New Age celebrities, including Shirley Maclaine, John Denver, and Timothy Leary, were among the convergers, and the mainstream media took note, albeit with a gentle sense of humor. Though total numbers only reached a fraction of Argüelles’ projected 144,000, the event was generally proclaimed a success within New Age media. Actual numbers, of course, are impossible to know, since participation could have included simply meditating or linking thoughts in the privacy of one’s home or backyard.

A second Harmonic Convergence was organized in August 1992, with minor follow-up attempts since then, but these have only managed to rally much smaller numbers of participants. In recent years Argüelles has been vigorously advocating that global institutions (such as the United Nations) replace the current Gregorian calendar with a 13-moon, 28-day calendar. “The religion of truth is the religion of the Earth,” he has argued, and the latter requires, as a moral imperative, to be based on a “natural” and galactically calibrated method of measuring time. Though Argüelles’ ideas have not galvanized the mass movement he has hoped for, any final judgment regarding the success of the 1987 convergence remains premature until the 25-year transition period comes to its prophesied end.

Adrian Ivakhiv

Further Reading
See also: Celestine Prophecy; Earth Mysteries; Harmonic Convergence and the Spiritualization of the Biosphere; Maya Religion (Central America); Maya Spirituality (Guatemala Highlands).

Harmonic Convergence and the Spiritualization of the Biosphere

The Harmonic Convergence Global Peace Meditation occurred on the dates 16–17 August 1987. Widely publicized in the world media, especially in the United States, the event called for a massing of a minimum of 144,000 people at dawn of August 16. An emphasis was placed on
Tony Shearer (1926–2002), Hells. This prophecy was first popularized in a book by the roots of the Harmonic Convergence lay in an ancient
create the New Age as a popular cultural phenomenon,
vergence heralded the New Age and it certainly helped
was the largest pan-spiritual event in history.
never before did people from so many different cultures
at this prophecy in which he saw circles of people gathered at

Some of those who were also aware of the prophetic nature
first of the Thirteen 52-year Heaven cycles of decreasing
Nine Hell cycles of increasing doom spanned the time
between Good Friday, 1519 and 16 August 1987, with the
final cycle beginning in 1935. The prophecy itself was

Late in 1983, Argüelles had a vision of the end-date of
this prophecy in which he saw circles of people gathered at
sacred sites around the world, reestablishing a connection
with the natural order of reality. Then in 1984, Argüelles
coined the term for the event, the Harmonic Convergence.
As he began to announce the event, he encountered several
others who were also aware of the prophetic nature of the
1987 dates, including musician Jim Berenholtz and Native American medicine man, Harley Swiffldeer. By late
spring 1987, with the publication of Argüelles’ book The
Mayan Factor, the Harmonic Convergence attracted major
media attention, including the breaking story on the front
page of the Wall Street Journal, 23 June 1987. As such,
the Harmonic Convergence exemplified a popular par-
ticipatory eschatology where one’s very actions make a
difference to the planet’s future.

Through all of the mass media attention, the actual
meaning of the event was generally overlooked. While
signaling the end of the Thirteen Heaven and Nine Hell
prophecy cycle, the Harmonic Convergence actually initi-
ated the final 25-year countdown to the conclusion of the
Mayan calendar Great Cycle. This defines a cycle of 5125
years between 13 August 3113 B.C.E. and 21 December
2012. Consisting of thirteen sub-cycles called baktuns,
of 144,000 days each, the entire cycle spans the history
of civilization from Uruk and the First Dynasty of Egypt,
ca. 3100 B.C.E., to the present moment. For this reason,
what the ending of the Great Cycle portends is the ending
of history itself and the beginning of a genuine post-
history. To successfully conclude the cycle in 2012,
according to the Harmonic Convergence prophecy, the
human race must return to living again in the natural
cycles of the universe, and abandon the materialist
civilization that dominates the present era. If the human
race cannot transcend or go beyond the materialism of
the present world order by 2012, then it can only expect
the worst – the collapse of civilization or even worse, the
collapse of the biosphere.

At the heart of this prophecy is a recognition of the
human deviation from nature and its effects on the
environment, or properly speaking, the biosphere. In this
regard the Harmonic Convergence prophecy coincides
with the theory of the biosphere-noosphere transition.
The biosphere is defined as the region on the surface
of the Earth for the transformation of cosmic energies.
By definition, the biosphere includes all of life as a single
unity inclusive of its support system, solar and cosmic
energy, the soil, hydrospheric cycles, and the convection
currents of the atmosphere. As a fragile membrane
ecompassing the Earth’s surface, the biosphere is
dependent upon the pressure that the different species
evert upon each other to maintain the balance of its laws,
principles and cycles that govern. As Vladimir Vernadsky
(1864–1945) saw it, humanity, through its extension,
the machine, was upsetting the balance of the biosphere.
Vernadsky himself was uncertain as to whether humans
were crippling or destroying the biosphere.

In the theory of the biosphere as presented by Vernad-
sky and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), the bios-
phere is an evolutive whole which is tending toward a
major culminating transmutation known as the noo-
sphere, Earth’s mental envelope, discontinuous with and
above the biosphere, a planetary thinking network of con-
sciousness and information. For Teilhard de Chardin the
noosphere is like a new organ of consciousness, analogous
on a planetary level to the evolution of the cerebral cortex
in humans. Teilhard de Chardin spoke of the moment
of noospheric mutation as the Omega point, and of the con-
vergence of the person with the Omega point as defining
a new hyper-spiritualized state not only of the human but of
the Earth itself. Similarly, Vernadsky (with whom Teilhard
de Chardin coined the term noosphere in 1925) saw that
following a peak crisis of the biosphere heralding the bio-
sphere–noosphere transition, a new geological era would
appear, the psychozoic era. This new era dominated by the
noosphere would represent a spiritualization of life, the meaning of the word, psychozoic.

What neither Teilhard de Chardin nor Vernadsky foresaw was the intermediate stage between the biosphere and the noosphere, and that is the technosphere. The present stage of human civilization is defined as the technosphere: the sum of technology and the civilization which maintains it as an artificial envelope coextensive but discontinuous with the biosphere, affecting all of its aspects and functions. In this regard, the technosphere represents a singular but necessary deviation from the natural order. As the agent effecting the disruption of the biosphere while alienating the human species from nature, the technosphere is the mechanism allowing both for the global communication system to hook up the species as a single organism, and for the release of free energy into the biosphere accounting for global warming, ozone depletion, species extinction and the general crisis of the biosphere as a whole. Seen from the perspective of the biosphere–noosphere transition, the technosphere is like the cocoon of the new emergent evolutionary stage, the noosphere. Since the technosphere is dependent on the very biosphere which it is disrupting, it must inevitably either destroy itself and the biosphere or transform into its opposite condition, the noosphere, a purely non-technological spiritual state.

As the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Thirteen Heavens and the Nine Hells, Harmonic Convergence actually defines and describes the entire 25-year period between 1987 and 2012. From the Harmonic Convergence viewpoint, the great Cycle end-point, winter solstice 2012 corresponds to Teilhard de Chardin’s Omega point, while the entire 25-year period defines the biosphere–noosphere transition. The crisis of the biosphere is seen as the direct result of the technospheric civilization, while the technosphere itself is defined as a function of operating on timing cycles that are artificial and mechanistic. The call of the Harmonic Convergence to return to living in the natural cycles of the universe represents an evolutionary signal to the species that its dependence on artificial civilization and mechanistic time must be abandoned if it is to survive. The real meaning of the Harmonic Convergence is the capacity of the human species to respond to this signal and to harmoniously synchronize itself with the natural order by 2012, thus attaining to Teilhard de Chardin’s Omega point.

As the focal event of the *Mayan Factor*, the Harmonic Convergence must be understood within the context of the meaning of the Mayan calendar system. The *Mayan Factor* is the overlooked factor in any analysis or consideration of human history. What is overlooked is the Mayan contribution to human thought and culture, and that is the correct understanding of time. The complex and rich system of thought embodied in the Mayan calendar system is based on a radical perception of time that is not a linear construct as the Western paradigm has it, but is a frequency. As a frequency, time is the universal factor of synchronization which, in turn, defines a whole other domain of reality, the synchronic order. The nature and purpose of time is to synchronize, and therefore, the purpose of human timekeeping should be evaluated on the degree to which it promotes synchronization with the universe. The Harmonic Convergence prophecy worked because the Mayan prophecies are synchronized to the universal timing frequency. Since the Harmonic Convergence prophecy proved to be so effective, then one must anticipate that there is something to the prophecy regarding the end of the cycle in 2012. If history is meant to be concluded by that point in time, how can the transition of the human race from mechanistic to natural synchronic time be attained? That is the question left open by the Harmonic Convergence.

Obviously, if the technosphere is a function of artificial and mechanistic time, then the release from the technosphere must be by a replacement of artificial and mechanistic timing standards with naturally synchronic timing standards. The fulfillment of the Harmonic Convergence prophecy can then be realized as the change in the time of civilization. The technosphere, the final stage of civilization, is governed by two timing standards, the Gregorian calendar and the mechanical clock. The irregular measure of the Gregorian calendar combined with the mechanization of time produced by the clock are the direct causes of the alienated and fast-paced mental condition of modern humans. To change the time by replacing the current calendar with one that is genuinely synchronic would be an apocalyptic act, for it would portend the removal of the macro-organizing basis of the present world order, thus altering the operating basis of society altogether.

In this way the Harmonic Convergence is a supreme eschatology representing a grand convergence of prophecy. For to replace the standard by which civilization has governed itself for over 2000 years with a perpetual and harmonic standard in which there is no irregularity whatsoever would be to remove the very foundation of history and the technosphere as a deviation from nature. The most harmonic standard conceivable is a solar-lunar calendar of 13 months of 28 days each, 52 perfect weeks a year, with one extra day for the forgiveness of debts. In history as it has devolved there is no harmony. In harmony there is no history. Accepting a perfectly harmonic standard, therefore, would be to enter into post-history.

According to the Harmonic Convergence prophecy, the biosphere can only be spiritualized if man is synchronized with the cycles of nature. The only way to achieve this goal is through the rejection of the irregular timing standard and the adoption of a harmonic one. Only by operating in a harmonic timing standard will the human species be able to return to living in the natural cycles of the universe.
This would augur the fulfillment of the Harmonic Convergence. But to attain to this condition by 2012 means that a calendar change must be enacted. This is the purpose of the Great Calendar Change of 2004, the natural sequel to the Harmonic Convergence Global Peace Meditation of 1987. Should such an eventuality succeed, it would also signal the successful conclusion of the biosphere–noosphere transition and the imminent advent of the psychozoic era, the era of the spiritualization of the biosphere.

Jose Argüelles

Further Reading


See also: Celestine Prophecy; Earth Mysteries; Maya Religion (Central America); Maya Spirituality (Guatemala Highlands); New Age; Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre.

SP Harmony in Native North American Spiritual Traditions

Few who witnessed the first Earth Day in 1971 have forgotten its most memorable symbolic moment: a television commercial in which an American Indian warrior paddled his canoe to the bank of a river and walked to a nearby highway, congested with traffic. As he watched this desecration, a single tear rolled down his cheek and the voice-over narration intoned: “People start pollution; people can stop it.” While this public service ad – recently named one of the top fifty commercials of all time – communicated an admirable message, it also disseminated a stereotype of American Indians as romantic ecologists or, according to some scholars, “ecologically noble savages” (Redford 1991: 46–8). This positive stereotype has generated endless discussion about whether indigenous peoples have actually lived in harmony with nature or whether they, too, have irresponsibly destroyed their own environments. Framing the debate in these terms perpetuates an insidiously false dichotomy, however: either American Indians must embrace “harmony,” which connotes a mystical bond with nature and the absence of conflict, or they fall prey to an extractive colonialism similar to that practiced by Euro-Americans. What this binary opposition erases is how American Indians themselves have perceived their relationship to the land, and how it has been articulated in native intellectual and spiritual traditions.

Many stories in these traditions suggest that the complex act of treaty-making more accurately portrays the connection of American Indians to the Earth. Legally, a treaty conjures such synonyms as “covenant,” “contract,” as well as “commitment.” It denotes an agreement that two or more parties enter into entailing mutual responsibilities and obligations. A construct for understanding the relationship between American Indians and the land, the treaty describes a process undertaken by native peoples to understand our ethical and ceremonial commitments to the world in which we live. Precisely what these commitments are and how they have been broken will become clearer in the light of oral traditions about them. If, as Tlingit scholar Nora Marks Dauenhauer has observed, origin stories are by nature theoretical, then stories about the origins of covenant provide a starting point for elucidating this concept.

An old Cherokee story, for example, tells of the time when animals, fishes, insects, plants and humans lived with each other in peace and friendship. The human population increased beyond sustainable numbers, however, and they began to crowd and crush their other-than-human partners out of carelessness and contempt. Even worse, humans invented weapons such as the blowgun and the spear that allowed them to kill animals indiscriminately. In response, every species of animal called a council of their own kind and each decided that they would invent a disease inflicting pain and death upon their victimizers. The deer sent rheumatism to every hunter who killed one of them unless he respectfully asked forgiveness for this offense. The fish sent humans nightmares about eating decayed food. Eventually, the animals and insects devised so many new afflictions that if their inventiveness had not faltered, not one human would have survived. When the plants, who were friendly to humans, heard what had happened they determined to help by furnishing a cure for each human disease. Although this story concerns the origins of Cherokee medicine, it also thematizes the struggle to achieve a precarious balance (one might even say “harmony”) among many forms of life with diverse needs. It addresses the responsibilities that we all must assume toward each other, and presents the complicated negotiations of covenant as a model for
the relationship between humans and the rest of creation. It is a story about harmony that is filled with conflict.

Or consider a tale from the other side of the continent: that of Moldy Head, a young Tlingit boy, who rejects the dried salmon his mother gives him because it is moldy. This behavior offends the salmon people, who capture him one day when he drowns in the Kluksu River. During the time that he spends in their watery world, the young boy learns about salmon culture and even participates in their annual spawning migration – presented in more than one version as “going to break that war house – that’s people’s fishtrap” (Kitty Smith in Cruikshank 1990: 209). His mother recognizes a necklace worn by one of the migrating salmon as the one belonging to her son, and she has “Moldy Head” restored to human form. Because of his learned empathy with the salmon, the boy becomes a medicine person specializing in maintaining a respectful relationship between his people and the salmon. As Tlingit elder Mrs. Angela Sidney notes: “That’s how they know about fish. That’s why kids are told not to insult fish” (Sidney in Cruikshank 1990: 78). Once again, the term harmony seems a reductive way of talking about the multifaceted and often agonistic forging of respectful relationships between humans and other forms of life. The story of Moldy Head teaches listeners that learning to see life from other angles – as well as making mistakes – constitutes a crucial component of living in harmony with nature.

Narratives whose theme is the intermarriage between humans and animals also bear directly upon what constitutes a proper “marriage” or covenant between American Indians and Mother Earth. In the Anishnabe story of “Clothed-in-Fur,” a human by the same name sits in the wigwam of his beaver wife and fantasizes about eating his sister-in-law. His father-in-law, Old Beaver, allows him to eat her. When the man disposes of her remains in a proper family. Some other humans who desire to hunt and “eat” offer the beaver a pipe through the door of their wigwam. They smoke it and then return it to the humans. In the morning, the people came to hunt “and all [the beavers] gave themselves up to be killed ... And in the evening they all returned alive” (Overholt and Callicott 1982: 71). Yet another would-be hunter boasts about his capacity to take beaver without any help – a human arrogance that deeply angers Old Beaver. Not surprisingly, this hunter’s quest fails. The Anishnabe story of Clothed-in-Fur depicts further elements of the covenant between humans, animals and the Earth. In exchange for humans fulfilling their obligations toward their furred companions, the beavers willingly sacrifice themselves for the good of humans. Respectful attitudes and reciprocal obligations not only exist as necessary conditions of this covenant, but also embody a sustainable ethics allowing both beavers and humans to “return alive,” that is, to survive.

Generalizations about the diverse native cultures inhabiting North America should always be made with caution. However, these Cherokee, Tlingit and Anishnabe stories articulate an insight central to most native spiritual traditions: the connection between humans and Mother Earth resembles the protracted and often contentious negotiations of treaty-making rather than the static symbiosis of harmony. Perhaps in this sense, transforming harmony into harmonizing would more accurately represent the teachings of our stories. According to Santa Clara Pueblo scholar Gregory Cajete, harmonizing involves the integration of mind, body, and spirit through a dynamic and complex set of activities. For Native people, living in harmonious and sustainable relationship with the land was a sacred responsibility, tempered with the realization that the neglect of this responsibility would bring dire results and retribution from the Earth ... These people considered ahead of time the possibility that resources might fail and worked out practical and spiritual ways to ensure life (Cajete in Overholt and Callicott 1982: 212–13).

If humans and all our relations are to meet the environmental challenges facing the twenty-first century, we must develop more nurturing models for maintaining the bond among all life forms and the Earth. Native storytelling traditions distill experience gained over hundreds, if not thousands, of years and offer crucial perspectives on this process. They tell us that “harmony” is fragile and can only be achieved by making a daily commitment on its behalf. They tell us that, unless we honor the treaties among humans, animals, and the land, no environmental or spiritual transformation of our world is possible. They tell us that unless we manifest the proper respect and an ethic of reciprocity in all aspects of our lives, it will be Mother Earth – and not the first warrior of Earth Day – who weeps.

Laura E. Donaldson

Further Reading
Mooney, James. Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees: From 19th and 7th Annual
Harnar, Michael – and the Foundation for Shamanic Studies

Michael (James) Harner is among the most prominent authorities in the neo-shamanic field. He became involved in the debate about the authenticity of the works of his friend, Carlos Castaneda. In 1963, Harner earned his Ph.D. in anthropology (University of California, Berkeley) and worked as professor at Columbia, Yale, Berkeley, and at the New School for Social Research in New York. In 1959, he led a research project on behalf of the American Museum of Natural History to study the Conibo Indians of the Peruvian Amazon basin. During this – and later – fieldwork, Harner was introduced to shamanic rituals involving the “entheogenic” vine ayahuasca. These experiences changed his attitude toward shamanism. According to his account, Harner was not only an academic authority, but also succeeded in being considered a prospective “master shaman” by native specialists.

After extensive research both “in the field” and through literature, Harner elaborated what he felt to be the cross-cultural common denominators of shamanism. These he referred to as core shamanism, which he describes as a spiritual technique instead of a religious concept. Employing rhythmic instruments – mostly a large frame drum or rattle – a slightly altered state of consciousness is induced (not necessarily a “trance”), which allows the practitioner to focus his or her attention to non-ordinary realities. In this state the shaman journeys into the lower or upper worlds in order to meet spiritual entities like power animals and spirit helpers. Submitting as an apprentice to the spirits, the shaman can then ask for help or advice in order to heal herself/himself, other people, animals, plants, or places. The relationship between shaman and spirits is further strengthened by ritual activities like dancing and singing, or through power objects that bring immaterial power into visible form.

In 1979 a kind of social formation took place when Harner and others founded the “Center for Shamanic Studies.” Having resigned his professorship, Harner renamed this non-profit organization in 1987 as the “Foundation for Shamanic Studies.” Subsequently, a global network was established in order to secure the quality of the core shamanism techniques, to facilitate grassroots networking, and to distribute literature, music, and shamanic paraphernalia. The constitutional aims of the “Foundation” are threefold: preservation of shamanic cultures and wisdom around the world; study of the original shamanic peoples and their traditions; and teaching shamanic knowledge for the benefit of our planet. This last objective has been especially controversial because the Foundation offers scholarships to natives to regain their own shamanic heritage (“Urgent Tribal Assistance”). Critics regard this as a sincere act of colonial suppression, whereas natives who work as certified “counselors” for the “Harner method” – like the Lakota Carol Proudfoot Edgar – embrace the Foundation’s techniques as a crosscultural shamanic tradition.

With branches on most continents, the “Foundation for Shamanic Studies” can be described as an institutionalization of the Harner method. Several other groups have adopted it as a model. The foundation organizes workshops, and it also encourages participants to gather into drumming groups, where the skills learned through the workshops are practiced and shared. With the growth of Harner’s workshops – seventy participants or more is not exceptional – fierce debates arose concerning the commercial aspect of his work. Critics from outside charge Harner with having appropriated native traditions for personal profit, while participants frequently express their disappointment about the workshops’ sterile or impersonal atmosphere. This might have to do with Harner’s description of shamanism as a mere “technique”; others (particularly Harner’s former colleague Jonathan Horwitz) stress the animistic aspect and talk of shamanism as “sacred work.”

There are two kinds of courses. In the basic courses (mostly three days), participants learn the fundamental techniques of shamanism, especially shamanic journeying and how to contact spiritual helpers and power animals for problem-solving advice. The entities found are then blown into the client’s chest or forehead. Although these basic techniques are essential for any kind of shamanic work, training in their application and the chance to increase one’s own spiritual abilities are only possible in the various advanced courses. Here, participants learn to retrieve soul-parts that are considered to have been lost through trauma, etc. (in fact, those techniques closely resemble certain psychotherapies [e.g., working with the “Inner Child”]). On other occasions bodily, mental, or spiritual illnesses are “sucked out” of the client.

The accompaniment of dying persons before and after death (i.e., helping the soul traveling into the realm of the dead and communicating with the departed) also is an important field of neo-shamanic practice. In addition, affinities with deep ecology have been increasingly drawn since the early 1990s. This work, which is often called...
“spiritual ecology,” not only includes communication with plants, stones, or other entities that the animistic worldview considers to be alive, but also involves healing work for energetically disturbed places or even the whole planet. Furthermore, some groups practice Native American traditions like the vision quest; others – especially in Europe – integrate or (re)construct Celtic or Nordic elements, like the seidr tradition.

The neo-shamanic scene shares a lot with neo-pagan and environmental groups ritualizing their relationship to nature. Both the soul retrieval and the spiritual ecology workshops are grounded in an esoteric concept of wholeness and sacredness. In an interview, Sandra Ingerman said that mankind has reached a crucial point in the history of the planet, having the ability to destroy life as we know it. Consequently, we are in need of as many “whole” people to appear on the planet as quickly as possible, and if a weekend workshop can foster people’s abilities to heal themselves and experience the sacredness of nature, that will help us to save the planet.

Michael Harner’s influence has led to a standardization of shamanic practice in the modern world. This has entailed processes of inclusion and exclusion, as well as questions of legitimization and valuing. At the same time, an inevitable counteraction has questioned Harner’s authority in matters shamanic. One recent example of this is seen in Harner’s devaluation of the “middle world” of visible, material nature. Whereas Harner strongly warns his participants not to perform “middle world” journeys (e.g., to walk through a wood in a state of shamanic consciousness) others argue that this is a precarious disregard of nature’s material power and a flight into “other-worldly” realms. Annette Høst from the “Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies” even describes this doctrine as a prolongation of the Christian attitude that depicts nature and its spirits as bad, dangerous, and impure.

Kocku von Stuckrad

Further Reading
See also: Anthropology as a Source of Nature Religion; Ayahuasca; Breathwork; Castaneda, Carlos; Entheogens; Indigenous Religions and Cultural Borrowing; Shamanism – Neo (Eastern Europe); Snyder, Gary.

Harris, Marvin (1927–2001)

In the 1960s, the conventional anthropological view of religion, established by figures such as Frazer, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, began to be challenged by a small number of scholars in the United States. Many taught or were trained at the Columbia University Department of Anthropology, where a materialist and evolutionary anthropology was established in the years after the Second World War. By the early 1970s, this was being elaborated at several academic centers – chiefly Columbia and the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor) – by practitioners of the interrelated paradigms of cultural or human ecology and cultural materialism. The latter was principally identified with Marvin Harris, who received his Ph.D. from Columbia in 1953 and taught there until 1981, when he moved to the University of Florida (Gainesville). Harris’ perspective was characterized by a critical departure from the synchronic functionalism to which cultural ecology, with a greater resistance to comparative generalizations, remained attached, as in Roy Rappaport’s classic work on religious ritual cycles in the New Guinea highlands.

While sharing with Rappaport the explicit aim of illuminating the functional role of religious practices in concrete settings, with emphasis on their role in the management of environmental resources, Harris’ approach to religious phenomena was more notable for its evolutionary and comparative perspective, which was as much interested in patterns of causality as of function. Where scholars such as Rappaport, who emphasized the “self-regulating” function of human ecological systems, in time drifted toward an increasing preoccupation with symbolic meaning (Rappaport 1979), Harris’ interest continued to explore how, beyond their apparent ideological unity, such systems were composed of contradictory material interests. Hence, his analytical strategy had far greater political implications. For that reason, Harris’ materialist approach to religious beliefs and practices was intended to demonstrate the merits of his more general analytical framework – cultural materialism – which accorded priority to the influence of material relations, especially those between the environment and human economy, over symbolic structures.

Harris’ perspective, in regard to religion, can be summed up in his own words:

Beliefs and rituals that appear to the nonanthropological observer as wholly irrational, whimsical, and even maladaptive have been shown to possess important positive functions and to be the dependent variable of recurrent adaptive processes (1971: 556).
Although he had not abandoned the tendency of anthropology to emphasize the functional interrelationships between religious practices and beliefs, it was also of prime importance to Harris to comprehend such phenomena as processes that did not have an independent existence in people’s minds or depend on a set of a priori cultural or symbolic norms, which was the prevailing anthropological view. On the contrary, for Harris they reflected and, even more, were part of, a community’s overall mode of production, emerging out of the practical experience of people challenged to secure their livelihoods within a particular set of environmental conditions. As such, they could be shown to play an important role in organizing or reinforcing behavior patterns that were crucial, often counterintuitively, to the ongoing dynamic of a given social formation. But, to that extent, religious phenomena, in Harris’ overall research strategy, were really treated no differently than any other cultural traits that initially seemed to have an in comprehensible relationship to the way people met basic needs.

Harris first elaborated this position in two papers on the “cultural ecology” of the sacred cattle of India (1966), in which he forcefully argued that the apparently counterproductive Hindu taboos on cow slaughter and beef consumption were intelligible if examined both in terms of other material advantages – such as the use of cow dung for fuel and fertilizer and of oxen for traction – for individual poor farmers and, in the aggregate, in terms of their cumulative positive effects for the carrying capacity of the Indian ecosystem.

Over time, Harris elaborated his arguments to meet the views of his many critics, while his general method of analysis was extended by some of his students and colleagues to other cases. Collectively, they have made a powerful argument that patterns of religious meaning and practice need to be seen within wider patterns of survival and livelihood strategies of individuals, communities and societies.

Harris’ work is not beyond criticism. There is a tendency in his approach, especially where he has examined religious beliefs related to dietary practices (including not only the cow in India, but the pork taboo in ancient Israel and cannibalism among the Aztecs) to place inordinate emphasis on endogenous variables such as population pressure and to minimize the influence of political-economic structures and processes, especially those of a global nature. In his accounts of the emergence of the India cow taboo, for example, Harris’ environmental history of the sub-continent makes virtually no reference to British colonialism. While this does not negate the merit of a materialist analysis of religion, it does raise theoretical questions about Harris’ work that will engage future scholars for years to come.

Eric B. Ross

Further Reading
See also: Anthropologists; Anthropology as a Source of Nature Religion; Domestication; Ecological Anthropology; Ecology and Religion; Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship; Goshala’s (Home for Aged Cattle); Hunting and the Origins of Religion; Magic; Rappaport, Roy A. (“Skip”); Religio-Ecological Perspective on Religion and Nature.

Hasidism and Nature Mysticism

Hasidism is a mystical revival movement within Judaism that began in southeastern Poland in the last decades of the eighteenth century. It spread quickly through the areas of Jewish population in Eastern Europe and was a major force in Jewish religious life until the Holocaust. In the post-war era, Hasidism has reestablished itself in Israel, North America, and Western Europe.

Hasidism originates in a call for spiritual renewal, one that did not shy away from radical and daring forms of expression. These include a challenge to Judaism’s typically bookish, intellectualized form of religiosity and a call to seek out the radiance of divine presence to be found throughout the created world. “The power of the Maker is in the made,” proclaimed many a Hasidic author, and therefore (quoting the biblical prophet Isaiah [6:3]) “the whole Earth is filled with God’s glory.”

The discovery of God’s presence within the created world was often couched in the language of a quest for “sparks” and their “uplifting.” This religious discourse was derived from the sixteenth-century Lurianic Kabbalah, named for its originator, Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed.

A ritual task of the Jew, taught the Hasidic masters, was to find these sparks even in the most unlikely places, recognize their divine origin, and thus restore them to God. This quest often took masters and disciples to the fields and forests surrounding the shtetls or towns in which they lived. It was there that the true devotee could best celebrate the pure joy of living in God’s presence.

“Nature” is a concept not found in the ancient sources of Judaism. Indeed the Hebrew term for nature, teva, is a coinage created for the translation of Greco-Arabic
scientific works into Hebrew during the Middle Ages. Hasidism follows a school of Jewish thought that insists on the absolutely supernatural character of all events; “nature” is but a cloak that hides the constant stream of divine energy that ever flows into the world, sustaining it anew in each moment as an assertion of willful divine grace. An acceptance of the “naturalness” of such events as the daily sunrise or even the continuation of one’s life from one moment to the next is seen in the Hasidic perspective as implying a lack of true faith. Here the natural is identified with the ordinary, that which is not divine. An acceptance of the “naturalness” of such events is but a cloak that hides the constant stream of divine energy that ever flows into the world, sustaining it.

This insight that God’s presence underlies all of nature is expressed by frequent mention that the word kateva (“nature,” preceded by the definite article) is numerically equal to Elohim or “God.” Some Hasidic authors depict the creative word of God (identified with the divine “Let there be” in the first chapter of Genesis) as the true object of creation the entire natural universe serving as a mere cover for that divine essence.

The celebration of nature within Hasidism is most often associated with the movement’s first key figure, Rabbi Israel Ba’al Shem Tov (1700–1760) and his great-grandson, Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1772–1810). The legends of the Ba’al Shem Tov’s life tell that as a schoolboy he often disappeared from the classroom, only to be found later, alone in the deep forest, calling out to God. This motif of the woods as a place to find God is carried through in many tales and melodies associated with Hasidic life. Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, perhaps the greatest poet among the Hasidic masters, spoke of melodies that rise up from the “corners of the Earth,” of each field’s grasses bearing a unique note in the symphony of divine music, and of prayer as an act of gathering beautiful blossoms in a field, drawing them together to be offered as a gift to God.

Scholars have debated whether the Hasidic quest for the divine essence of being is one that truly affirms the natural world as a locus of divinity or merely seeks to cast the varied masks of nature aside in order to reach the single, undifferentiated goal of the mystic quest. While the key mystical authors within Hasidism (Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezricht and his circle) do indeed waver on this question, popular Hasidism in its early days surely glorified the natural world as a setting for the encounter with God’s glory.

In later years, especially as Hasidism moved from rural to urban settings, much of this devotion to the outdoors as a place to seek God was set aside. As Hasidism became an ever more ultra-conservative force within Jewry, the image of the early Hasidic masters came to be colored more by their devotion to tradition than by their attraction to a mystical appreciation of the natural world. This element was recovered, however, in the twentieth-century phenomenon known as Neo-Hasidism, and is prominent in the writings of such key figures as the young Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942).

Further Reading


Haudenosaunee Confederacy

The term Iroquois refers to a confederation of five Native American nations (Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk) who joined together under the Great Law of Peace. In the early eighteenth century the Tuscarora joined the Confederacy, becoming the sixth nation. Iroquois was a name assigned to this Confederacy by the French but the indigenous term for this confederation is the Haudenosaunee, which means “People of the Longhouse.”

Previous to European invasion the Longhouse was a building in which resided several, perhaps hundreds, of people related through a clan connected through the women’s lineage. The leader of the clan, called the Clan-mother, undergoes a selection process by the entire clan. Among the Clan-mother’s many duties is naming children, selecting and nominating leaders of the clan, and observing and overseeing the conduct of the leaders. All of her nominations for leaders are subject to the consensus of clan. Clan-mothers have the responsibility and authority to remove leaders who have violated their roles as clan leaders. Today the Longhouse is not a residence but continues to be the center of traditional communities organized by clans.

Offices associated with each clan are the Clan-Mother, a male clan “chief” (which in Iroquoian languages usually translates to “good mind”), a sub-chief, and a male and
female Faithkeeper. Where the Longhouse system has not been weakened by U.S. and Canadian intervention, it is also where political and economic decisions are made. The Haudenosaunee have no word for “religion” but understand Longhouse as the way one lives one’s life everyday. Ceremonial activities, as well as political and economic decisions, of the Haudenosaunee all take place in the Longhouse. The Haudenosaunee Longhouse system of governance is the last remaining traditional indigenous government that is still in charge of land in North America that is recognized by the United States Government. All other governments on Native American lands have been forced to adopt an elective style government mandated and funded through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Among the Haudenosaunee territories only Onondaga, Tuscarora, and the Seneca at Tonowanda maintain traditional Longhouse governments that are the center of ceremonial, economic and political life. Onondaga is the Central Fire where the Grand Council meets to debate matters pertaining to the entire Confederacy.

The geographical arrangement of the Haudenosaunee, depicted in the Confederacy Belt, is understood to be an enormous Longhouse that extends over upstate New York. From right to left, or East to West there are the Mohawks called the “Keepers of the Eastern Door”; the Oneida called the “Younger Brothers”; represented by a central tree are the Onondaga called the “Central Fire”; the Cayuga called the “Younger Brothers”; and at the far left are the Seneca, which are called the “Keepers of the Western Door.” Along with the Tuscarora, these groups form the Haudenosaunee. The Confederacy Belt, made of wampum shell beads, is the symbolic expression of this confederation of the original five nations. Lines extending to the East and West acknowledge that the Confederacy is unfinished and will include other people in the future.

Haudenosaunee ceremonies and life-ways originate from their relationship with the Creator. Three specific messages were received by the Haudenosaunee from the Creator at important points in their history. The first message was how the Haudenosaunee should live in a respectful manner. Their ceremonial cycle is based on the yearly cycle of seasons. Ceremonies are referred to as the Thanksgivings. At various moments throughout each year thanks are given to food, to the land, to water and to life in the Longhouse. This is not regarded as a sentimental activity but a practical one. But the intention is not to control some other-worldly power. As one elder put it, the Thanksgivings are not worship, not an attempt to manipulate the cosmos, nor are they attempts to seek salvation of some kind (and therefore not “religion” in the conventional sense). Rather they are events to fervently give thanks for gifts that have already been received. These insights highlight the difference between “religion” as it is understood in common and scholarly settings and a “way of living” for the Haudenosaunee, as well as for other indigenous people. The Thanksgiving Ceremonies are the spiritual center of the Haudenosaunee.

Another gift given by the Creator is the Thanksgiving Address. Before every significant gathering of the Haudenosaunee the Thanksgiving Address is recited. This is a formal acknowledgement of different beings and forces in the cosmos, which are intimately involved in all life and should be at the forefront of all human deliberations. There is a set form for the Thanksgiving Address. Salutations and respectful words are given to Visitors, Mother Earth, Water, Grasses, Animals, Birds, Foods, Medicinal Herbs, Trees, Sun, Moon, Ancestors, Spirit Protectors, and the Creator. Depending on the occasion the Thanksgiving Address can last between thirty minutes to a few days. The Thanksgiving Address unifies the minds of the human group so that they can make appropriate decisions on behalf of creation. The nature of the Thanksgiving Address is to engage all of creation in human decisions and to unify and align the human community in work that supports and promotes creation.

The second message to the Haudenosaunee is the Great Law of Peace. This is a system of governance that is based on what Oren Lyons has called “natural law,” which is the unchanging laws of the natural world. The Great Law of Peace is based on perpetuating a relationship to natural world powers, such as the Grandfathers of Thunder and Lightening, Elder Brother Sun, Grandmother Moon, and Mother Earth. These life-giving forces are well known to the Haudenosaunee and yet are well beyond their control. Fostering a thankful and respectful attitude toward these powerful forces results in their having a deep knowledge of the intricacies of the workings of the natural world. Haudenosaunee leaders are mandated to make decisions on behalf of seven generations into the future and take comfort in the fact that wise decisions of their ancestors made seven generations ago are why they have survived until today. The effect of being mindful of the seventh generation in the past and future on the individual is that one thinks of the long-term consequences of one’s actions. It is of practical importance to think outside of the human temporal framework and in larger cycles of time.

The third message is the Gaiwiyo, or “Code of Handsome Lake.” In a series of symbolic images the Gaiwiyo warns how accepting certain things from European Americans will erode the Haudenosaunee relationship with the Creator. Specifically the acceptance of alcohol, things of a foreign culture, gambling, and the Bible are mentioned. Even though they have undergone tremendous hardships, the promise of the Gaiwiyo is that the Haudenosaunee will remain strong as long as they hold to their relationship with creation as revealed in their three messages. Without the Gaiwiyo the Haudenosaunee traditions would not have survived until the present day. Of urgent contemporary interest are the Gaiwiyo...
warnings against gambling and the Bible. At its core gambling fosters an un-thankful attitude of insatiable need, desire and want that is directly contrary to the Haudenosaunee focus on ceremonies as Thanksgivings. Part of the Haudenosaunee resistance to categorizing their ceremonies as “religion” also has to do with the open-ended nature of their practices. Unlike other world religions, Haudenosaunee laws, rituals, and decisions are based in a tradition but are not written or canonized, and are therefore unfinished. Revelations from the Creator are an ongoing reality and not, as with Christianity and Islam, something that happened in the past and is finished. Because creation persists there is always the possibility of new and urgent messages coming from the Creator.

The Great Law of Peace and the Thanksgiving Address have had substantial impact on American culture and the world. All Longhouse activities, whether they are ceremonies, economic meetings, or meetings of the clans, have a concern for creation at their core. Moreover their survival as the last traditional government (i.e., not having allowed the Federal Government through the Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA] on their lands) is directly attributable to the strength of the Longhouse system. Many have been interested in the history of the Haudenosaunee. In 1992 the U.S. Senate passed resolution #76, which formally acknowledged the “contribution of the Iroquois Confederacy of Nations to the development of the United States Constitution.” Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and Benjamin Franklin counciled with Haudenosaunee leaders to discuss effective governmental structure. The resolution went on to reaffirm the continuing government-to-government relationship between Indian tribes and the U.S. Additionally, the prominent role of women in the Clan system influenced the development of women’s rights in the United States and the Haudenosaunee were formally recognized at Seneca Falls, where the woman’s movement began in 1848. Today Haudenosaunee leaders like Oren Lyons and Audrey Shenandoah are bringing the concerns of indigenous people from around the world into the United Nations. Jake Swamp, who directs the Tree of Peace Society, has spread the message of the Great Law of Peace by planting trees around the world.

As a result many indigenous people and others all over the world continue to be interested in the genius of the Haudenosaunee. At the 1992 World Summit on the Environment of over 181 world leaders in Rio de Janeiro, the Secretary General of UNCED, Maurice Strong, concluded his opening remarks with a quote from the Peacemaker on the importance of making decisions on behalf of the Seventh Generation. At a meeting of Native American leaders in 1994, President Clinton likewise quoted the Peacemaker on the importance of being ever-mindful of the Seventh Generation. Both of these examples are testimony to the wisdom and strength of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

Philip P. Arnold

Further Reading
See also: Indigenous Environmental Network; Lyons, Oren.

Hawai‘i

Na Hawai‘i, the Native Hawaiian people, are descendants of the original inhabitants of the island archipelago, Hawai‘i. Oral traditions passed on through chants, legends, myths and mo‘oku‘auhau or family genealogies, trace the origins of the Native Hawaiian people to early Polynesian ancestors and beyond them to the life-forces of nature itself.

According to these genealogies, Native Hawaiians are the living descendants of Papa, the Earth mother, and Wakea, the sky father. Ancestral deities include Kane of the living freshwater sources such as streams and springs; and Lono of the winter rains and the life-force for agricultural crops; as well as Kanaloa of the deep foundation of the Earth, the ocean and its currents and winds; Ku of the thunder, war, fishing and planting; and Pele of the volcano. Thousands of deities of the forest, the ocean, the winds, the rains and other elements of nature are acknowledged as ancestors by Native Hawaiian families.

Located midway between the American and Asian land masses, the islands of Hawai‘i are the most isolated land mass in the world. They are home to diverse and unique endemic species of plant and animal life. Initial human settlement, their introduction of new animals such as the Polynesian rat and pig, and the clearing of land for the
cultivation of new edible plants resulted in ecological disruption and the extinction of certain species of birds and plants. Native Hawaiian spiritual beliefs and stewardship practices ultimately evolved to honor and protect the fragile island resources.

*Aloha 'aina* or love the land; *aloha i na akua* or love the gods; *aloha kekahi i kekahi* or love one another; express three central values which form the core of the traditional Native Hawaiian philosophy, worldview and belief system. These values prescribe that Native Hawaiians sustain supportive, nurturing and harmonious relations with the land and natural resources, the gods, and each other, particularly within their 'ohana or extended family. This philosophy of the unity and harmony of humans, nature and deities is called *lokahi*.

Native Hawaiian ancestors honored and worshipped the life-forces of nature as gods. They did not possess or own the land or its abundant resources. Instead, they maintained stewardship over it – planting and fishing according to the moon phases and the changes from rainy to dry seasons. The traditional land system evolved to provide Native Hawaiians access to the resources they would need for subsistence. It also reflected their stewardship responsibility over the land.

Following contact with the Western world in the late eighteenth century, the Hawaiian island landscapes were seriously degraded throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, progressively by sandalwood harvesting and deforestation for cash crop cultivation, ranching, and large-scale sugar and pineapple plantations. Twentieth-century economic development centered around the military, and tourism combined with exponential population growth degraded Hawai‘i’s fragile ecosystems at an unprecedented rate. By the end of the twentieth century, Hawai‘i had the largest number of extinct and endangered endemic species of flora and fauna of any place in the world.

The Native Hawaiian people, themselves, succumbed to introduced continental diseases which, due to the absence of genetic immunity, grew to epidemic proportions. Such diseases included cholera, measles, whooping cough, influenza, leprosy, and tuberculosis. From an estimated population of between 400,000 to 800,000 inhabitants in 1778, the pure Native Hawaiian population had declined to 29,800 by 1900, with another 7800 Hawaiians of mixed ancestry. Native Hawaiian cultural and spiritual beliefs, customs, and practices declined in the face of such dramatic changes, and under the pressure of Christian missionary activity, except in certain isolated rural areas and the smaller islands.

In 1959, Hawai‘i became the fiftieth state of the United States of America. Surprisingly, rather than leading to fuller assimilation into the American culture, statehood sparked a reassertion of Native Hawaiian rights and a revitalization of Native Hawaiian language, culture, and spirituality. The island of Kaho‘olawe served as the unexpected catalyst for this dynamic native rights movement.

Kaho‘olawe was traditionally honored as a sacred manifestation of the Hawaiian deity of the ocean, Kanaloa. It had served as a center for the training of navigators in celestial navigation and was home to Hawaiian farmers and fishermen. With Western contact, its natural resources, like the other islands, were degraded by ranching. At the outbreak of World War II the island was taken over by the U.S. military for live-fire training exercises. In 1976, the island became the focal point of a Native Hawaiian movement to reclaim sacred land and revive the cultural and spiritual practices of *aloha ‘aina*. This included a consciousness about the importance of protecting Hawai‘i’s unique and exquisite endemic and native flora and fauna. The movement spread throughout the islands and sparked a Native Hawaiian cultural and political renaissance to revive the Native Hawaiian language, navigational arts, cultural practices and political sovereignty. The military use of Kaho‘olawe stopped in 1990 and the island was returned to the State of Hawai‘i in 1994. The U.S. Congress appropriated $400 million to clean the island of unexploded ordnance and restore the island as a cultural reserve. Under law, the island is to be managed as a trust by the State of Hawai‘i for eventual transfer to a sovereign Native Hawaiian entity, when it is reestablished and recognized by the U.S. federal government and the State of Hawai‘i. Similar to Native American nations, such a sovereign entity would be comprised of indigenous Hawaiians.

The movement to reclaim Kaho‘olawe was initiated by Native Hawaiians from the island of Moloka‘i. Called, the “Last Hawaiian Island,” Moloka‘i was one of the rural Hawaiian communities bypassed by the mainstream of economic, political, and social development. Native Hawaiians living in these communities continued, as their ancestors before them, to practice subsistence cultivation, gathering, fishing and hunting to supplement their wage income. To be successful gatherers, fishers, or hunters, they applied traditional knowledge about the resources passed down to them from one generation to the next. This included the acknowledgement and honoring of the forces of nature as ‘*uumakua and akua and involved the practice of *aloha ‘aina* and *lokahi*.

Rural communities, such as Moloka‘i, where Hawaiians have maintained a close relationship to the land through their subsistence livelihoods, have played a crucial role in the survival of Hawaiian cultural and spiritual beliefs, customs and practices. These rural communities are at the center of contemporary efforts to protect Hawai‘i’s ecological resources.

Rural Hawaiian communities were traditional centers of spiritual power. In traditional Hawaiian chants and mythology, major *akua* (gods) and Hawaiian deities were...
associated with the areas. The districts were isolated and difficult to access over land and by sea. Due to the lack of good anchorage and harbors, early traders often bypassed these districts in favor of more accessible areas. The missionaries entered these areas and established permanent stations during a later period than in other parts of Hawai‘i. Thus, traditional Hawaiian spiritual beliefs and practices persisted there, without competition, for a longer period of time. As Christian influences entered these areas, they coexisted with traditional Native Hawaiian beliefs and practices.

The geography of these districts discouraged the widespread or long-term development of sugar plantations. Where neither plantations nor ranches were established, traditional subsistence activities continued to be pursued, side by side with smaller agricultural enterprises. In the wetland areas, taro continued to be farmed, often in conjunction with rice. In the arid areas, sweet potatoes, dryland taro, and other traditional and introduced food crops suited to the dry soil and climate were cultivated.

Thus, the natural features and resources of these districts which rendered them unsuitable for plantation agriculture played a role in the survival and eventual revitalization of Native Hawaiian cultural, spiritual, and subsistence customs and practices. Concurrently, the quality and abundance of the natural resources of these rural communities can be attributed to the persistence of Native Hawaiian cultural and spiritual values and practices in the conduct of subsistence activities. An inherent aspect of these values is the practice of conservation to ensure availability of natural resources for present and future generations. Ancestral cultural and spiritual knowledge about the land and its resource has been reinforced through continued subsistence practices. While traveling to the various ‘ili (sections) of the traditional cultural practices region, through dirt roads and trails, along spring-fed streams, and the shoreline, practitioners continuously renew their cultural knowledge and understanding of the landscape, the place names, names of the winds and the rains, traditional legends, wahi pana (sacred places), historical cultural sites, and the location of various native plants and animals. The practitioners stay alert to the condition of the landscape and the resources and their changes due to seasonal and life-cycle transformations. These lands are treated with love and respect like a kupuna or elder member of the ‘ohana.

Through the Moloka‘i families who got involved with Kaho‘olawe and the movement that they initiated, the values of aloha ʻaina and lokahi were revived and reborn into the hearts and minds of a new generation of Native Hawaiians. This is reflected in the formation and flourishing of many schools of Hawaiian language immersion education and of Hawaiian cultural practices such as Hula, chant, navigational arts and skills, lua or fighting arts and Hawaiian herbal healing arts. It is also evident in the rebuilding of traditional fishponds and the numbers of young farmers reopening ancestral taro growing lands. In addition, annual religious makahiki or harvest ceremonies in honor of the Hawaiian god of agriculture, Lono, have been revived on most of the islands.

Among the important traditional concepts that have regained preeminence is that of wahi pana or sacred place. The thoughts of the late Edward Kanahele on “Wahi Pana” or Hawaiian Sacred Places describes the renewed significance and meaning of such places to Native Hawaiians and provides an appropriate summation for this overview of religion and nature in Hawai‘i:

The sacred places of Hawai‘i, or wahi pana of Hawai‘i, were treated with great reverence and respect. These are places believed to have mana or spiritual power. For native Hawaiians, a place tells us who we are and who is our extended family. A place gives us our history . . . and the history of our ancestors . . . a place gives us a sense of well being.

A wahi pana is a place of spiritual power, which links Hawaiians to our past and our future.

Our ancestors honored the earth and life as divine gifts of the gods. In fishing and farming wahi pana were respected. Their activities never encouraged or allowed overuse of the resources of the land or the sea. To do so would dishonor the gods. “The earth must not be desecrated,” is a native Hawaiian value.

The inventory of sacred places in Hawai‘i includes the dwelling places of the gods, the dwelling places of their legendary kahuna, temples, and shrines, as well as selected observation points, cliffs, mounds, mountains, weather phenomena, forests, volcanoes, [ lava tubes, pu‘uhonua or places of refuge and burial sites] . . .

All wahi pana need our protection and our respect – not only for their historical significance, but also for their human significance (Kanahele in James 1992: ix–xiii).

Davianna Pomaika‘i McGregor

Further Reading
Heathenry – Ásatrú

Heathenry, also known as Heathenism or Ásatrú, is a polytheistic spiritual practice and theology based in the mythologies of Northern Europe. People practicing Heathenry today draw on a number of sources for both mythology and custom. These primarily include Icelandic mediaeval literature (especially the Poetic Edda, and Snorri Sturluson’s Prose Edda and Heimskringla); and other sources such as Saxo Grammaticus’ History of the Danes (Tacitus’ accounts of Germanic custom and religion), Old English poetry such as Beowulf, and folklore and folk-magic, including medieval healing charms, from Scandinavia, Britain, and Iceland, and European countries including Germany and the Netherlands. Heathens may describe their religion as a “reconstructed” North European paganism: reconstruction does not mean an attempt to duplicate earlier practices, but usually refers to creating spiritual practice for today that draws on the earlier descriptions and on archeological evidence.

Pre-Christian practices of Northern Europe varied considerably across time and place: however many groups use the Icelandic material as the basis for reconstruction because there is so much of it relative to other sources. “Ásatrú” – the Icelandic form of a word coined during the nineteenth-century romantic period – means literally “faith in the Æsir,” whereas “Heathenry” is a more general term.

Heathen beliefs and cosmology focus on the tree Yggdrasill (variously seen as an ash or a yew, on which

Seidr

“Seidr” [pronounced “say-thur” or “say-th,” with “th” as in “then”), described in the Icelandic sagas, seems to relate to practices involving altered consciousness whereby a seeress or seer works on behalf of their (human and nonhuman) communities – it is being reconstructed as such today. The Saga of Eirik the Red describes the visit of a seeress to a famine-struck Greenland farm, one thousand years ago. She wears a blue-black cloak, shoes of calf-skin, a hood of black lambskin lined with white cat-skin, and her gloves are of cat-skin, shaggy inside. Her staff, topped with a knob, is ornamented with metal and stones, and she wears a pouch containing magical or sacred items. She eats a meal of the hearts of the farm animals, and the next day a “high seat” or platform is made ready for her. Women circle around her, and one sings a special song to call the spirits. The seeress, Thordbjarðr little-völva, then speaks from the high seat, prophesying a good future for the farm and individuals present, including the woman who sang her song.
dimensions to spirit or soul and to the ways these link with physical body – thus enabling the seer to act for the human community. One such dimension, the *fylgja* or “follower,” present from birth and usually seen in animal form, may act as an animal ally during *seidr*. Other helpers include *kinfylgja* or family spirit guardian, *Disir* or ancestral women, and various others in animal or plant forms. With such allies, the seidworker negotiates between communities of human-people and spirit-people, especially ancestors (spiritual, cultural or physical), at times “faring forth” (*hamfarir*) in altered shape.

In the literature, Freyja first brought seid-magic to the Æsir, the “family” of gods of which Ódhinn, Thor, Frigg, etc. are members. As Heidr, the Bright One, she goes to houses to bring help. The magician-god Ódhinn learned *seidr* and travels through the nine worlds (including Midgard, the world of people) that have their being on the World Tree Yggdrasill, often in altered shape, in search of knowledge. Loki, Ódhinn’s blood-brother, often seen as a “trickster” god, also flies as a falcon (borrowing Freyja’s cloak) to seek what is needed. All bring change to what they touch: ecstasy, inspiration, poetry, and – often – disruption.

In the past, *seidr* appears to have been shamanistic practice specific to time, place, and community. There may have been commonalities with Sámi shamanism. (The Sámi are indigenous reindeer-herding people of the North of Scandinavia and Russia, previously called Lapps by others.) However, not everybody in Heathen society approved of *seidr*, and by “saga times,” seid-workers – particularly if male – were often distrusted for reasons that may be more to do with politics than with religion.

Today *seidr* is a process of change – for the community, the seidworker, and relations between communities of people and other wights (beings with whom we share Midgard). In transformation lies beauty, ecstasy and discovery, but the process is not easy.

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**Further Reading**


Ódhinn hanged himself in quest of wisdom and the runes, the Nine Worlds, and the deities and other spirits described in Norse and Germanic mythology. There are parallels with the World Trees of various northern Eurasian shamanisms. The Norns spin or craft Wyrd below the tree, and this wyrd applies to all beings (or “wights”) including the Æsir and Vanir (thought of as deities) together with *jotnar* or giants, *álfar* or elves, and landwights, ancestral spirits, and living people. Literary sources identify two groups of divinities, Æsir and Vanir. Today the Æsir are sometimes described as deities of culture or society, the Vanir as deities of fertility and vitality, but these distinctions are not clear. In the past, particular deities were important in different areas of Northern Europe – Freyr in Sweden, Thor in Iceland, possibly Woden in parts of Britain. The world of people, Midgard (*Míøgarðr* – from which Tolkien took the name “Middle-Earth”) is described as one of nine worlds, each with its own denizens which in Midgard include people, ancestral spirits, and wights associated with animals, plants, land and sea, etc.

Heathens relate to this cosmology in numerous ways including *seidr* (community shamanistic practice), rune-use, and formal (non-ecstatic) ritual. The main rituals of Heathenry are blót (an offering ritual, which may be simple or elaborate) and sumbl (a ritual involving toasting and honoring people, goddesses, gods or other beings, which may involve poetry or storytelling). Heathens speak about their religion and their relationships with gods, goddesses and wights in ways distinct from prevailing neo-pagan or Christian discourses. The following public narratives are indexed in the discourse of practitioners:

1. References to myths and stories of the Aesir and Vanir (e.g., to explain characteristics or personalities of the gods). Followers of Ásatrú index specific pieces of what is referred to as “the lore.” Knowledge of this material forms a backdrop to ritual and discussion. Many Heathens consider that people do experience the deities in their own ways, and personal revelations (point 4), which have become known within several communities as Unusual Personal Gnoses (UPGs), are to be checked against “the lore.”

2. A concept of polytheism (as distinct from monotheism or duotheism). Deities are spoken of as
real entities, separate and distinct, with rounded personalities and different from, for instance, Celtic or Greek or Native American beings or deities. Wights are similar but usually restricted to smaller areas, for instance associated with particular houses, trees, or stones.

3) A sense of specificity of cultural practice. Blót and Sumbel, the ritual forms of Ásatrú, are spoken of as distinct in kind from, for example, a Wiccan circle. Again, they are drawn from “the lore.”

4) The possibility of direct communication with these deities or wights, to speak with them and gain various forms of knowledge. In speaking with Heathen practitioners and theologians, this narrative of communication appears as an explanation of how they “know” about their deities and why these deities appear so “real” to them. Direct communication is a means of achieving personal gnosis (UPG).

5) The manipulation of consciousness or “reality” by deities and wights, or through magic inspired by them or in association with them: including galdr (chanted magic), runic magic, and spae-working or seidr. Not all Heathens practice seidr or attend sessions. More, probably the majority, engage in rune-divination (casting runes to gain a sense of their wyrd) or rune-magic (often making talismans including several carved runes, to effect some form of change in the natural or social worlds), often including galdr. However not all practitioners of Ásatrú engage in the performance of magic.

6) A sense that spirituality is not separate from everyday life, but informs it. Many Heathens place a high value on skills of daily living known from “lore,” archeology or later folk-practices – woodcraft, fiber-crafts, smith-crafts, brewing, etc.

7) A sense of individual merit and responsibility, combined with community worth. Some Heathens list “Nine Noble Virtues,” moral values or strictures; others talk about individual responsibility and “being true” in more general terms: people have a choice in what they do on a daily basis, and need to accept responsibility for their choice. This includes responsibility to local (Earth, plant, tree or animal) nature-spirits for their actions.

8) An elaborate concept of “soul” and “self,” which is currently being explored by some Heathen researchers, particularly workers of seidr – with reference, once again, to “the lore.” With this goes a concept of personal or family fate or orlög, and overall Wyrd, which people, and the Norns, weave.

9) The Elder Kin (deities) and other wights also are subject to the workings of Wyrd.

Therefore, Heathens see themselves, along with other beings, as bound up with the Wyrd of the worlds. This has a bearing on Heathen concepts of “nature.”

Heathens are divided on whether their religion is a “nature religion.” They do not focus on the Earth as “The Goddess.” Rather, they honor Earth, by various names such as Fjörgyn and Jörð, as “a goddess,” and celebrate Earth’s bounty when appropriate to do so. Nor do they see all goddesses as one. Some Heathens therefore consider that Heathenry is “not a Nature Religion” or “not Nature-based,” but is “deity-based,” looking first to the Æsir and Vanir. Others point out that a central concept in Heathenry is that the Earth is alive – this religion has a strong relation to animism in that rocks, plants, and trees all have their spirits. These spirits have their own agendas and purposes. Icelandic folklore replete with references to land spirits, and “Wight” is the modern English form of the Old Icelandic “vætr.” Various Heathens, including Jörnmundur Ingi Hansen, Allsherjargoði in Iceland, have commented that practices and offerings in the past would have focused more on land spirits, rather than on the deities of Æsir and Vanir. Everyday rituals would have honored local wights, whereas on special occasions the deities would have been greeted. However, because the poets of the Edda told stories of the deities, today’s reconstructions have focused first on deities. Yet, while a blót (ritual of offering) is based around honoring one or more deities, it is common to begin by asking the local land or house spirits for their permission, blessing, and assistance in conducting the rite. Two items from the old literature mentioning “Earth” are favorites for ritual use with Heathens today. One of these is based on the Old English “charm” for field-remedy or field and plough blessing (Æcerbot from an eleventh-century manuscript), a later ceremony that may hold traces of earlier heathen ritual. It makes reference to Earth as Folde, and possibly Erce, addressing her directly (hal wes thu, folde, fira modor! – be in health, Folde, mother of the people). The second is part of the Eddic poem “Sigdríframál,” where the newly awakened Sigdrifa, after greeting Day and Night, praises the deities:

Hail Æsir, Hail Ásynjur,
Hail Earth who gives to all
Goodly wit and speech grant unto us renowned pair,
And healing hands in this life (author’s translation from Sigdríframál 3–4; Icelandic in Sigurðsson 1998).

In various areas Heathens have been involved with ecological activities, including road protests and (particularly in Britain) protecting “sacred sites.” Most Heathens attempt to live their spirituality on a daily basis – talking to wights and honoring them (for instance, by picking up litter, clearing up an area) is part of everyday life.
Today, there are many different ways in which people construct their Heathenry. Some focus in general on the deities of the Æsir and Vanir, others have particular associations with one or several deities. For all, the concept of wyrd is important. Those who work shamanistically, engaging in seidr, deal with the tree Yggdrasil and with various wights, including ancestors, plant and animal spirits, land spirits, and their own fylgia (follower), a helper-spirit often seen in animal form. Most Heathens recognize some parallels between their (reconstructed) practices and those of shamanic Eurasian peoples. In particular, Heathens are coming to recognize similarities with Sámi religion.

In general, Heathen practitioners see their religion as reconstructed, and increasingly as Shamanic or shamanistic. While some practitioners make common cause with adherents of Western Pagan religions (Druidry or Wicca), others do not. For models to “fill out the gaps,” practitioners are likely to look to indigenous, particularly Sámi, religion, or to Shinto or Hinduism to indicate how Heathenry might have developed in the absence of “conversion.” The basis of practice however remains the mythological stories from the Eddas, and from these Heathens draw ways of relating to their living landscapes.

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Further Reading
See also: Druids and Druidry; Elves and Land Spirits in Pagan Norse Religion; Odinism; Saami Culture; Trees (Northern and Middle Europe).

Hebrew Bible

Scattered through the normative, narrative and wisdom texts of the Hebrew Bible are many motifs now considered “environmental.” Numerous laws refer to key categories of modern environmental concern, including protection of nature. The biblical laws should not be confused with Jewish law as it is interpreted in the rabbinic tradition. From Moses onwards, tradition believes that oral laws were passed down through the generations which accompanied and explained the written Torah. In the Jewish tradition, the written and the oral law are regarded as one, even though the latter was written down in the Mishnah early in the third century by Rabbi Judah the Prince. Since then, Jewish law has continued to develop through rabbinical interpretation.

Among these biblical laws is the prohibition against destruction of fruit trees when laying siege to a city (Deut. 20:19–20). Jewish tradition derives from this verse a prohibition against the destruction or waste of any resource. Another commandment refers to maintaining the constancy of species by forbidding the mating of two different types of animals, or sowing one’s field with two different kinds of seeds (Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9).

Several laws are concerned with animal welfare. In the Decalogue, man is commanded not to work on the seventh day; one’s ox and ass must also rest (Ex. 23:12; Deut. 5:13–14). Farmers are forbidden to plough with an ox and an ass yoked together, as this would impose hardship upon the weaker animal (Deut. 22:10).

The Jewish tradition relates a prohibition against eating a limb from a living animal to Gen. 9:4 and Deut. 12:23, which say one should not consume an animal’s life, equated with blood, with its flesh. No animal should be slaughtered on the same day as its young (Lev. 22:28). When taking eggs from a nest, one must let the mother bird go free (Deut. 22:6–7). On the other hand, animals bear responsibility: an ox that kills a human must be stoned to death (Ex. 21:28).

Other biblical commandments refer to the preservation of natural resources. These include the laws of the sabbatical year: every seven years, the land must rest and lie fallow (Ex. 23:10–11). In the Jubilee year, which marked the end of seven sabbatical cycles, the same prohibitions apply (Lev. 25:23).

The Hebrew Bible also addresses land use: the Levite cities had to be surrounded by open space on which building and growing crops was forbidden (Num. 35:2–5). Several texts deal with the prevention of nuisance and pollution. After the exodus from Egypt there had to be an area outside the camp where one could relieve oneself; one’s gear was supposed to include a spike for digging a hole and covering excrement (Deut. 23:13–14). After the priest had dealt with certain offerings in the Tabernacle, he
had to change his vestments and carry the ashes beyond the camp (Lev. 6:4).

The precautionary principle is expressed by the commandment to make a parapet on the roof of a house, to prevent people falling from it (Deut. 22:8).

These rules should be seen within the hierarchical order of a theocentric worldview. The laws show coherent concern for the environment which translates into a normative program of action. When elements of nature become objects of idolatry, however (i.e., in pagan cults) the Israelites are told to demolish them:

You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshiped their gods, whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under any luxuriant tree. Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put their Asherahs to the fire, and cut down the images of their gods, obliterating their name from that site (Deut. 12:2–3).

Some claim that the Asherah may have been a sacred grove, but it is more likely to have been a manmade wooden cultic object. This law is one of several which define aspects of the hierarchical position of nature protection in biblical law as compared to other biblical priorities.

This theocentric vision is also expressed in many ways in the Hebrew Bible’s narrative and wisdom texts. The first chapters of Genesis relate how God creates nature and humankind (Gen. 1–2). As its Creator, He is above nature and can do with it whatever He deems fit. Nature is not sacrosanct: on the one hand, it expresses divine majesty; on the other, God may use or change it in order to teach humans a lesson, punish or reward them.

In Genesis one finds several narratives recounting the destruction of ecosystems, or humans’ removal from them, as a punishment for disobedience of God’s commandments. Adam and Eve are expelled from Paradise (Gen. 3); Cain is punished for murdering his brother Abel, and becomes a permanent wanderer over the Earth (Gen. 4); almost all of humankind, birds and land animals are destroyed by the Flood (Gen. 6–7); verbal communication between the builders of the Tower of Babel becomes confused, and they are scattered over the face of the Earth (Gen. 11); and Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed by sulfur and fire because of their inhabitants’ behavior so that even ten righteous men cannot be found there (Gen. 18–19).

On the other hand, in order to be blessed and father a great nation, Abram – later Abraham – must leave his native land of Ur of the Chaldeans for the Land of Canaan (Gen. 11:31–12:6).

After the Flood, God promises that the Earth will not be destroyed again due to human misbehavior and that there will be some elements of constancy in nature (Gen. 8:21–22). The rainbow symbolizes this covenant (Gen. 9:12–17). With regard to specific situations, however, the prophet Isaiah forecasts that what happened to Sodom will happen also to Babylon: it will never be settled again (Isa. 13:19–22).

The motif of divine punishment and reward through changes in nature frequently recurs in later narratives. The Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea and the subsequent drowning of the Egyptians pursuing them are examples (Ex. 14). Another is the story of Korah and his fellow mutineers being swallowed by the Earth (Num. 16:30–33).

The narrative of the Ten Plagues is a paradigm of the relationship between God, humans and nature. It describes a series of modifications of nature as tools of punishment (Ex. 7–12). A number of disasters kill part of the Egyptian population, their slaves, animals and crops, but these plagues do not affect the Israelites living nearby in Goshen.

When the Nile waters turn into blood, there is so much pollution that the Egyptians cannot drink its water and all the fish die (Ex. 7:21). When Moses and Aaron throw handfuls of furnace soot into the air, the resultant air pollution from the fine dust causes inflammations of boils on human and beast alike (Ex. 9:10–11).

Such “environmental” punishments may take many forms. When the Israelites complain, a fire from God breaks out in the desert and ravages the outskirts of the camp (Num. 11:1). The Israelites are warned that idolatry will lead to starvation because no rain will fall and the ground will yield no produce (Deut. 11:16–17). The prophet Ahijah warns that the descendants of Israel’s King Jeroboam who die in the cities will not be buried but be devoured by dogs, and those perishing in the country will be eaten by birds (1 Kgs. 14:11). Similar prophecies are made about the Israelite Kings Baasha and Ahab (1 Kgs. 16:4; 21:24). Jeremiah forecasts that God will use nature to punish the idolatrous Israelites (Jer. 15:3). The Psalms state that He wrecks ships with the wind (Ps. 48:8).

A major example of nature’s modification for the Israelites’ benefit is the Manna narrative, with its many environmental aspects (Ex. 16:16ff.). This concerns the heavenly food which came down in the wilderness of Sinai close to the Israelite camp every morning except the Sabbath. The Hebrew Bible also ascribes spiritual characteristics to the Manna: a fixed quantity of this one food provides all the Israelites’ requirements. This embodies the antithesis of conspicuous consumption (Deut. 8:3). It is white, a color that according to Isaiah symbolizes cleanliness (Isa. 1:18). Moses tells the Israelites to collect only what they require; leftovers become infested with maggots and stink, which is likely to prevent repetition. The uncollected manna melts in the sun.

However, the Israelites become dissatisfied with their exclusive dependence on this divine food, craving the meat, fish and vegetables of Egypt. While God then
supplies them with quail, they are subsequently punished for their gluttony by a severe pestilence (Num. 11:4–6, 33–34).

The miraculous provision of water is another example of beneficial modification of nature. Upon God’s command, Moses throws a piece of wood into the bitter water at Marah, which becomes sweet (Ex. 16:23–25). Another time, Moses strikes a rock to provide water (Ex. 17:5–6). Moses later repeats this action to cause the same miracle, although he is instructed by God only to speak to the rock (Num. 20:8–11). Isaiah prophesies that God will respond to the Israelites’ demands, and make large quantities of water available in unusual places (Isa. 41:18; 43:20).

Changes in nature’s ways also occur with respect to individuals. Moses sees a bush burning in the desert, which is not consumed; there God gives him his mission to free the Israelites from Egypt (Ex. 3–4). His rod is turned into a snake, then becomes a rod again. When Moses puts his hand in his bosom and takes it out, it is encrusted with snowy scales; upon putting it back and taking it out once more, it becomes normal again. Later, Aaron’s staff is turned into a serpent before Pharaoh (Ex. 7:8–9).

The prophet Balaam rides off to curse the Israelites; when an angel blocks his ass’ path and the prophet strikes it, the animal starts speaking to him (Num. 22:23–30). Abraham sends his second wife Hagar away together with her son Ishmael. In the desert, when they are thirsty, she sees a well, because God opens her eyes (Gen. 21:19). After slaying the Philistines, Samson calls out to God for water. His prayer is granted by water’s gushing out of a hole (Judg. 15:18–19). The prophet Elisha tells Na’aman, the commander of the King of Aram’s army, to bathe seven times in the waters of the Jordan in order to be cured of his leprosy (2 Kgs. 5:10–14).

The prophet Jonah flees from God by ship, but a storm arises to prevent his flight. When the crew throws him into the water he is swallowed and saved by a huge fish (Jon. 2:1); later, near Nineveh, God saves him from discomfort by providing a rapidly growing plant to shade his head. The next day, the plant is attacked by a worm, and withers (Jon. 4:6–8).

The prescribed relation of humans to nature is one important element when analyzing the Hebrew Bible’s attitude toward the environment. Much – often misguided – attention has been given to Gen. 1:28, wherein God says that humans should multiply, master the Earth and rule the animals. In the Bible’s normative context, this rather imprecise verse is secondary to the array of specific commandments defining humans’ relationship with the environment. In another text, God tells man to “till and tend” the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15). Defining the human role toward nature only as one of stewardship based on this verse – as is frequently done – also incompletely reflects the complex role that the Bible ascribes to humans in the framework of creation.

The Bible sees an expanding population as a blessing for humankind in general (Gen. 1:28; 9:1). The blessing of multiple descendants is later also bestowed on the Patriarch Abraham (Gen. 18:18). References to this motif appear, in various forms, elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 32:12–13; 1 Kgs. 4:20; Isa. 10:22, 48:19; Jer. 29:4–6; Hos. 2:1).

Nature as a manifestation of God’s majesty is a frequently recurring theme. Humans should thank God who provides through nature (Ps. 147:7–9). The heavens are also told to praise their Creator (Ps. 148:4–5).

The Garden of Eden is described as an environmental Paradise, a lush ecosystem with abundant water and many trees. There is no need to use non-renewable resources, artifacts or tools. Apparently no fertilizers are required for food plants to grow. In the absence of production, there is no permanent pollution. Carrying out an environmental impact study would show the Garden of Eden to represent an ideal sustainable society (Gen. 2:8–17). Several prophesies foretell that elements of such a society will return in the Latter Days, when humans and animals will no longer harm each other (Isa. 11:6–8, 65:25; Hos. 2:20).

The Hebrew Bible provides many perspectives on animals and their position in society. The offering of animals as a substitute for humans is recounted in the story of Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22). Hosea forecasts that animal sacrifices will be replaced by offerings “from lips,” which the later Jewish tradition interpreted as prayer (Hos. 14:3).

Animals are also used as a tool of divine punishment. This is also the case with several of the Ten Plagues: the frogs (Ex. 8:1–10), the dust turning into lice (Ex. 8:12–13) and locusts eating the grass and the trees until no greenery remains (Ex. 10:15). It is prophesied that hornets will be instrumental in driving the Canaanites out of the Land of Israel (Ex. 23:28).

Animals can also save people; upon God’s command, ravens bring food to the prophet Elijah who is fleeing from the Israelite king Ahab (1 Kgs. 17:4–6). Animals may also have an informative role: the pagan prophet Balaam is scolded by his ass (Num. 22:30). Another example of this motif can be found in the book of Job (Job 12:7–8).

Many narratives indicate that animals are held responsible for their deeds, however, and are punished either separately or jointly with humankind. In the Paradise story, the snake tempts Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge: thereupon it is doomed to crawl on its belly and eat dirt all of its days (Gen. 3). In the days of Noah, the animals are corrupt and are punished alongside humankind (Gen. 6:12–13). The narrative of the Ten Plagues relates how humans and beasts are punished alike with vermin, boils and hail (Ex. 8:13–14; 9:10, 25). Animals can also die in order to punish humans (Ex. 9:3).

Several narratives indicate that animals should be properly treated. Abraham’s servant chooses Rebecca for
Furthermore, it is a symbol in a great variety of metaphors. The difference between humans and animals pales beside the difference between God and humans (Eccl. 3:19; Job: 25:5–6). The metaphors that relate to nature are another indication of the Hebrew Bible’s attitude toward the environment. Animals are often described in terms of human personality or vice versa (Gen. 49). Jeremiah compares the believer to an evergreen tree (Jer. 17:7–8).

Issues concerning resource policies, a core element of the modern sustainability discourse, are addressed in several instances. Joseph advises the Pharaoh to hoard surplus grain in the years of plenty (Gen. 41). Scarcity of water leads to conflicts in the days of the Patriarchs (Gen. 21:25–26, 30; 26:19–21).

The Bible indicates specifically that humans may use natural resources for their benefit. When the Israelites come into their land, they mine copper from its hills (Deut. 8:9). When Joseph’s descendants complain to Joshua upon entering Canaan that they have not been given enough land for their numbers, he tells them to clear forest land in the hill country (Josh. 17:15–18).

A few narratives recount destruction of elements of the ecosystem by biblical figures. The judge Samson considers fighting the enemy a higher priority than protection of animals and natural resources; he binds the tails of two foxes together, fixes torches between them and lets the animals loose among the Philistines’ standing grain (Judg. 15:4–5). Before the battle against the Amalekites, the prophet Samuel tells King Saul to kill not only all their people but also all their animals (1 Sam. 15:2). The prophet Elisha orders the kings of Israel, Judah and Edom in their battle with Moab to fell all good trees, stop up all wells and ruin all fertile fields with stones (2 Kgs. 3:19ff.);

When King Sennacherib of Assyria invades Judea and marches on Jerusalem, the religiously faithful King Hezekiah stops up all the springs outside the city in order to stop water supplies to the enemy (2 Chron. 32:2–4). The Bible’s wisdom texts indicate that some destruction is part of the normal cycle of life: there is a time for planting and a time for uprooting what has been planted (Eccl. 3:2ff.).

The Hebrew Bible also contains detailed perceptions on various elements of nature (e.g., water and trees). It sees in water, inter alia, a vitalizing agent of the Earth (Gen. 2:5); a natural resource most essential for the survival of living beings (Neh. 9:20); a tool of destruction (Ex. 14:27–28); having religious functions (Lev. 16:4); a tool for testing people (Gen. 24:13–14); a natural barrier (Ex. 14:29); a means of identity, particularly through the possession of wells (Gen. 26:18); and a carrier for transport (Isa. 18:2). Furthermore, it is a symbol in a great variety of metaphors.

Pollution is mentioned a number of times in the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes the ideas expressed coincide with contemporary environmental concepts, for instance, the above-mentioned example that excrement must be removed from public places. On other occasions this is not the case. After Aaron constructs the Golden Calf in the desert, this spiritually polluting artifact is destroyed by being burned and ground to dust; the gold dust is subsequently thrown into a brook (Deut. 9:21). In modern terminology, this may be considered destruction of resources but not pollution, the dust being inert matter.

The relationship between human wickedness, pollution and destruction is a familiar biblical motif. It often has religious connotations. There is no mention of decay in the story of Paradise (Gen. 2). The Israelite King Jehu tears down the temple of Baal and turns it into latrines (2 Kgs. 10:27). Isaiah speaks of Jerusalem as a sinful city in which “silver has turned to dross” (Isa. 1:22). He also speaks about the reverse process of purification and renewal, with a metaphor from the world of waste management: “God will smelt out your dross as with lye, and remove all your slag” (Isa. 1:25). Similarly, Ezekiel speaks about purifying polluted water with clean water from the Temple (Ezek. 47:8–12).

Noise pollution can play an important role in warfare. After entering Canaan, the Israelites laid siege to Jericho. The city walls collapse as a result of the Israelites’ shouting, when the horns are sounded (Josh. 6). The noise motif is also mentioned in connection with the judge Gideon (Judg. 7:15–22).

Many more motifs with environmental connotations appear in the Hebrew Bible. They must be seen in the framework of its central theme: that humans – and the Israelites, in particular – should recognize and serve God, Creator of the world, in the various ways commanded by him.

Manfred Gerstenfeld

Further Reading


See also: Animal Rights in the Jewish Tradition; Creation Myths of the Ancient World; Creation Story in the Hebrew Bible; Creation’s Fate in the New Testament; Hasidism and Nature Mysticism; Israel and Environmentalism; Jewish Environmentalism in North America; Judaism; Kabbalah and Eco-theology; Paganism and Judaism; Tikkun Olam – A Jewish Imperative; Vegetarianism and Judaism; Waskow, Rabbi Arthur.

**Hegel, G.W. Friedrich (1770–1831)**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born in Stuttgart and spent most of his academic career at Jena (1800–1808), as a headmaster in Nuremberg (1808–1816), and after two years in Heidelberg, was made Professor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin in 1818. His major works include *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), *Science of Logic* (published in two volumes in 1812 and 1816), *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (first published in 1817 and revised in 1827 and 1830), and the *Philosophy of Right* (1821). After his death in 1831 friends and former students compiled his lectures and unpublished material, the best known of which are, perhaps, his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (in 1832), and *Philosophy of History* (in 1837).

To say anything briefly about Hegel’s philosophy is as big a challenge as describing it clearly – this is particularly true when it comes to his writing about nature, his most complex and impenetrable work. Nature and religion serve dynamic, ontological processes in Hegel’s systematic treatment of existence, revelation, and knowledge. Nature fills this role as the second part of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Religion appears in a number of places in Hegel’s philosophical thought but primarily in his lectures on *The Philosophy of Religion* and in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where it fills an entire, and dense, chapter.

Nature, in Hegel’s philosophy, is the world external to human thought: epistemologically, metaphorically, and empirically. It is the source of experience and radical contingency that our understanding attempts to grasp in theory but which we grasp in practice as the unmediated and unshakeable Given of the world-immediately-before-us. While its subject matter is the external world, nature also requires a kind of knowing in which the object known is presupposed to exist as external to a knowing subject.

The content of nature thus includes everything from the most abstract concepts like Space and Time to increasingly concrete experiences like chemical reactions, pollen, mollusks, and bird’s building their nests – the subject-matter we routinely consider to exist as independent from and external to our knowledge.

In the course of dialectically unpacking these concepts, these implicit presuppositions are made explicit. So while, metaphysically and epistemologically speaking, nature is the world around us, it is more than this. It is the ground that makes our philosophical speculations possible in the first place. The knower is a product of and is implicated in the very thing she knows.

The profound philosophical implications of this statement – as a way to reconnect humans to the rest of nature, not just ethically, but ontologically (based not only on what we can know about the world, but on notions of the essential and fundamental nature of reality) – is generally missed in the flood of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scientific material included as Remarks and Additions from his lecture notes. While this additional material demonstrates the astonishing breadth of Hegel’s scientific background, it equally seems to anchor his treatment to a set of scientific observations that are now 300 years out of date.

In the context of contemporary analyses of race, gender, and class – all of which employ the originally Hegelian category of otherness as an essential tool – nature could safely be called The Big Other. It is ganz *Anderein und Äußerlichkeit*; everything posited and comprehended as external to our thought. His *Brodding-nagian* mapping of nature, *The Philosophy of Nature*, dialectically unpacks 1) this primordial externality, 2) our relation to it and 3) simultaneously, our understanding of both of these. This is the typically recursive Hegelian approach to dialectic: it takes its own activity into account by providing a recursive treatment both of its subject-matter and of itself treating its subject-matter. From a more practical point of view, it is fascinating to note that the marginalization of people on the basis of race, class, and gender is often based on the degree to which such people are associated with nature – the more they are characterized as “natural” the more likely they will be marginalized and repressed.

Nature, for Hegel, is not merely the world around us, but plays a developmental role in the larger context of Hegel’s system. There, nature mediates Logic and Spirit, the other two parts of his *Encyclopedia*.

For Hegel, nature is understood as a moment in a syllogism of Logic–Nature–Spirit. Logic, Nature, and Spirit are three parts of a trilogy that constitutes the whole of reality and makes our knowledge and participation in reality possible. Unlinked from its companion moments, nature remains the fallen detritus of Christian paradigm, the illegitimate offspring of Spirit, yet it is equally that through which Spirit enters the world. If Christianity, and therefore Western philosophy in general, reinforces the view of nature as fallen and sinful, to be abandoned for a new heaven and a new Earth (as suggested in the
Religion appears in Hegel's *Encyclopedia, Philosophy of Religion*, and *Phenomenology of Spirit* as an inadequate mode of knowledge; as the narthex to a more adequate, philosophical, understanding. It plays the developmental role in Hegel's system of a threshold to philosophy. What religion does with faith and belief, philosophy will undertake with thought.

The *Phenomenology* provides a schematic of religion cast into a hierarchy of conceptual adequacy, explicating how religion, with increasing adequacy, reveals the absolute; beginning with the least adequate forms (natural religions; Hinduism; religion in Egypt and Greece) and culminating in the revealed religion of Christianity. From here, consciousness moves dialectically beyond the inadequate kind of knowing (and subject-matter) provided in religion to culminate in knowledge of the absolute and absolute knowing. In other words, even human spiritual life can only be adequately comprehended, for Hegel, not by religion but by philosophy. Even the religious dimension of human experience is only adequately comprehended by thought.

If his interpretation of nature is suspect from the scientific point of view, his Christianity is equally suspect. Marx and Kierkegaard both found Hegel problematic. Marx because of the presence of Spirit in dialectic and Kierkegaard because of Hegel's assumptions that, finally, everything can be thought – including the infinite God which, Kierkegaard insisted, collapsed thought at the ethical stage of life and requires that famous leap of faith as the starting point of theistic relation. To Kierkegaard, Hegel's dialectic was a Tower of Babel; to Marx it was a mystic's sacristy. To us, Hegel's works should suggest the lucid, if Byzantine, insights of a philosopher with a remarkable background in both theology and empirical science at the dawn of the modern scientific era.

Mark C. E. Peterson

Further Reading


See also: Book of Nature; Descartes, René; Holism; Philosophy of Nature.

Heidegger, Martin (1889–1976)

Because the noted German philosopher Martin Heidegger offered such an influential critique of the technological domination of nature, he has been read as a forerunner of contemporary environmentalism. Despite important areas...
of agreement with environmentalism, however, Heidegger disagreed with one of its major assumptions, namely, that human beings are animals. In asserting that humans are ontologically different from animals, Heidegger continues the traditional idea that humans stand outside of nature, even while being somehow part of it. Another factor impeding easy assimilation of Heidegger’s thought to contemporary environmentalism is his notorious affiliation with National Socialism.

Heidegger’s major work, Being and Time (1927), maintains that human existence opens up the temporal-historical “clearing” or “world” in which entities can manifest themselves, and in this sense “be.” By asserting an integral relation between being and time, Heidegger emphasized the historical dimension of being and thus challenged the traditional assumption of the link between being and eternity. Moreover, he contended that “being” names not an eternal ground, foundation, or source – such as Platonic forms or the biblical God – but instead the capacity for entities to present themselves in their intelligibility.

Concern for nature is not much evidenced in Heidegger’s earlier writings. In Being and Time, for instance, we are told that entities reveal themselves primarily as instruments, and secondarily as objects for scientific cognition. During the 1930s, however, Heidegger began to develop his critique of Western humanism. He maintained that Nietzsche’s conception of humans as “clever animals” was consistent with the Darwinism that allegedly animates modern political ideologies. If humans are merely animals, human existence is reduced to the struggle for survival and power, while nature becomes a gigantic storehouse of raw materials. As an alternative to the technological will to power, Heidegger recommended the attitude of “releasement” (Gelassenheit) in which people may “let things be,” that is, allow things to manifest themselves according to their own properties, rather than in accordance with the demands placed upon them by the technological subject.

In Friedrich Hölderlin’s poetic notion of nature as “holy wildness,” Heidegger discerned hints of an encounter with nature, physis, the ontological primal that eludes human mastery. The relation between such “holy wildness” and what some environmentalists have in mind by “sacred wilderness” is not clear. Heidegger defined nature in terms of his ambiguous interpretation of physis. At times, he viewed physis as almost identical with being, that is, the self-manifesting of entities that occurs within the temporal-historical clearing. This sense of physis means nature insofar as it manifests itself and to that extent is said “to be.” Nature defined in this manner is what Heidegger meant by “wild” nature, that is, the overpowering manifesting with which humankind must struggle mightily in order to make entities intelligible, appreciable, or useful to humankind. By emphasizing the interpretative activity involved in disclosing the being of entities, Heidegger indicated that the historical world – the clearing needed to encounter physis or being – is constituted not only by temporality, but also by the articulating power of language. Instead of viewing language as a human possession or tool, however, Heidegger said that language is a dimension of cosmic intelligibility or logos. Language as logos possesses us.

Elsewhere, Heidegger interpreted physis not as the self-manifesting of entities, but rather as their self-emergence, as when an animal gives birth to its young or unfolds into maturity. Nature in this sense does not refer to the intelligibility of beings revealed in its historical-linguistic clearing. Instead, we experience natural phenomena as occurring independently from us, and as having taken place long before human existence began. In places, Heidegger indicates that humankind itself is an aspect of physis, understood now as the complex natural processes that take place independently of human existence. In other places, he states that such processes can “be” only insofar as they show themselves within the clearing opened up through human existence. These incompatible conceptions of nature or physis reveal Heidegger’s own struggle to reconcile or at least to address two central aspects of humankind: that we are beings, and that we are disclosers of beings in their intelligibility. Heidegger never deviated from his conviction that humans transcend nature even while somehow being part of it.

Starting in 1933, Heidegger infamously used his own philosophy to support National Socialism, which condemned enlightenment modernity. During this same period, the German Reich – inspired by Nazi rhetoric of “pure land and pure blood” (Blut und Boden) – passed what was at the time the world’s most far-reaching environmental legislation. These disturbing facts should give pause to environmentalists who engage in totalizing condemnations of modernity, while failing to appreciate the positive contributions of modernity. Thomas J. Sheehan offers another reason for not conceiving of Heidegger as a proto-environmentalist. Sheehan argues that Heidegger’s conservative views – his anti-urbanism, his preference for the countryside, and his critique of modern science and technology – conceal that the real thrust of his thought is consistent with the modern view that humankind is destined to make all entities completely present for study and exploitation. If Sheehan is right, then, Heidegger’s thought is consistent with the titanic project of world domination that Nietzsche allegedly foretold and celebrated. Still, his criticism of the excesses of anthropocentric humanism, including mistreatment of animals and heedless destruction of the natural world, retains its force, even if one affirms modernity’s achievements of renouncing political repression, freeing science from religious dogmatism, and providing a far better material living standard for countless millions of people. Moreover, even if modernity
cannot adequately be understood in terms of the clever animal seeking power, by taking this approach, Heidegger points to the dangers involved in reading humankind in reductionistic terms that ignore its remarkable capacity for understanding itself and other phenomena.

During the 1950s, apparently decentering humankind’s role in constituting the clearing in which things can be manifest, Heidegger suggested that beings are disclosed in connection with the dynamic interplay of the “fourfold” of Earth and world, gods and mortals. In 1966, he stated that “only a god can save us” from the dire consequences of modern technology’s mobilization of humankind and nature. Nevertheless, he usually affirmed that only humankind is endowed with the linguistic capacity that holds open the clearing for beings. Far from being a biocentric egalitarian, then, he held that humans are dramatically different from other entities. He once wrote that the loss of the clearing opened up through humankind would be even worse than the destruction of the natural world by nuclear war. Many environmentalists would disagree with this opinion.

Heidegger’s thought that things can “be” only in the world opened up through human language and history, enormously influenced postmodern theory, including deconstruction, which now challenges the very idea of a pristine “nature” that exists independently of human language, culture, and social practices. Many environmentalists, of course, prefer the good old days, when the pristine “nature” that exists independently of human beings is discarded. Radical constructivism, according to which nature is reduced to a virtual product of human imagination and practices, may go too far. Nevertheless, in order to understand our obligations to nature, and even whether we have any such obligations, we must understand as well our role in conceiving and defining it.

Michael E. Zimmerman

Further Reading

See also: Deep Ecology; Descartes, René; Fascism; Holism; Nietzsche, Friedrich; Philosophy of Nature; Radical Environmentalism.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179)

Hildegard of Bingen was a twelfth-century Benedictine nun whose synthetic vision of nature, [female] fertility, and spirituality represented a radical departure from the dualistic thinking of her time. Some believe she offers a model for a contemporary environmental consciousness that is centered on wholeness, mutuality, sensuality and respect for the sacrality of nature. As a theological writer, healer and composer, Hildegard occupied a role that transcended the boundaries set for women in her society by writing books on theology and medicine, undertaking preaching journeys and composing music. Adopting the
stance of a “poor little woman” whose voice was not her own but that of God’s prophet, she devised a unique spirituality in which the natural order was fused with the essence of God, and the divine was restored to the feminine through the body of Mary.

Hildegard’s worldview derived in part from the medieval aesthetic which conceptualized the universe as a harmonious whole, with all things ordered, yet interdependent, and most importantly, suffused with the presence of God. Her writing was characterized by exuberant natural imagery of fertility, light and life, and reflected her sense of oneness with the living, breathing material world. At the center of her cosmology is the notion of viriditas, the sunlight-filled greenness, the essence of the life-force which emanates from the divine and permeates the natural world. In the Liber operum divinorum, she recorded what she believed was the voice of the Living Light (or God), revealed to her in a vision:

I, the fiery life of divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows, I gleam in the waters, and I burn in the sun, moon and stars. With every breeze, as with invisible life, that contains everything, I awaken everything to life. The air lives by turning green and being in bloom. The waters flow as if they were alive. The sun lives in its light (1987: 8-9).

For Hildegard, Viriditas was the ultimate expression of sacred fertility, and it abrogates the dualism between the spiritual and the natural/fecund Earth/feminine. Viriditas is most clearly manifested through the divine motherhood of Mary, whom Hildegard positioned as the salwatrix, the “author of life,” whose “holy vitals” redeemed human nature from the effects of the Fall. In the song cycle, Symphonia armonie celestium revelationem, which Hildegard composed for performance by her nuns, she intentionally arranged the pieces in hierarchical order. The sixteen songs to Mary, though titled, “For Mother and Son,” are clearly addressed to Mary, and they are placed in the second position of the traditional Trinity – the place of the Son. Barbara Newman refers to this as a “pointed theological statement” that celebrates Mary’s divine childbearing and indicates that Mary, like Christ, belongs in the very heart of God (Newman 1988: 59). Thus, the feminine, through the fertile/female body of Mary, metaphorically recovers its space in the divine order, which it now shares with the crucified male body of the Son.

In these songs, the natural imagery with which Mary’s body is inscribed fuse the fertile greenness and flowering of her Earth/womb with those of celestial light and radiance, in this way recognizing the divinity of the female generative force. While it is not possible to know what Hildegard’s awareness might have been of those ancient religious traditions that predated the belief in a celibate male god, and in which there was a virtually universal recognition of a cosmic Earth mother/nature whose fruitful energy/desire was the animating force of the universe, her treatment of Mary embodied this goddess ideal. As the leafy branch whose womb blossomed with wheat, and whose flesh held joy, Mary represented the divine sensuality that Hildegard saw in the natural world. Through the body of the Mother of God, that “luminous matter,” (“shining white lily”) and “resplendent jewel,” the feminine was exalted as the incarnation of divine viriditas [translations of the Marian Songs are Barbara Newman’s]. Always cognizant of the gender boundaries of her age, in her songs to Mary, Hildegard nevertheless comes as close to resurrecting the Earth/nature goddess as she dared.

Beverley Lomer

Further Reading
See also: Apocalypticism in Medieval Christianity; Christianity (5) – Medieval Period; Ecofeminism (various); Dualist Heresies.

Hinduism

Hinduism is the major religious tradition in India and the faith of more than eight hundred million people around the world. It has no single founder or beginning date. There are many philosophical, ritual, narrative, theistic, and non-theistic traditions within Hinduism. Although there are few concepts that all Hindus would believe in or accept, notions of immortality of the soul, a supreme being, and karma would be accepted by most Hindus. Given the diversity of the traditions, it is easy to see why there are pluralistic views toward nature. Hindus value nature, think of the universe as the body of God, pray for peace between all the elements of the universe, urge non-violence to all beings on Earth, and personify nature and the Earth as goddesses. However, some Hindu communities devalue nature by thinking of matter (homologized to women) as ensnaring the spirit which should free itself from its shackles to get liberation. Yet others think of the universe as ultimately without reality. Some Hindus think of the final goal as transcending all dualities of good and evil, spirit and matter, culture and nature.

The terms “Hinduism” and “Nature” have both been contested and problematized and yet both have considerable
currency in scholarly discourses. The meanings of both terms have differed strikingly at various times and in various traditions, cultures, and communities. There are several Indian words in Sanskrit and in vernacular languages which have philosophical and colloquial meanings corresponding with the many meanings of “nature.” In general, the term will be used here to refer to those elements which are considered to be part of the lived or conceptualized environment in the many Hindu traditions. Many Indian religious traditions make a distinction between the sentient – those with consciousness (chit) – and the insentient (achit). The first category includes the deity and souls; the latter ordinarily, though not always, includes all material substances, their primordial essences, as well as time. The Indian terms for “nature,” especially prakriti, may refer to matter as well as the inherent tendencies in material substances.

The terms “Hindu” and “Hinduism” are very flexible. The term includes those who may just be acquainted with some texts and narratives (like the epics), some concepts (like karma and reincarnation), or who practice some of the customs and rituals (such as performing sacraments in front of a sacred fire) associated with the many traditions that consider themselves faithful to the Vedic tradition or which self-consciously depict themselves as “Hindu.” It would also include people in India who may have never heard of some of the Hindu texts by name but who participate in the larger world of the extended family of deities, beings, and/or modes of ritual behavior shared in a loose way by some of those people who do call themselves Hindu. Hindu notions of sacrality also cover what may be considered “secular,” “supernatural,” or even “superstitious” in the Western world. Thus, among other things, to understand the Hindu way of life, it is necessary to understand sacred times, places, omens, architecture, music and dance, trees, plants, and planets in the Hindu tradition.

It is hard to identify many common denominators in the many Hindu traditions. While some texts and some deities are accepted by many, there is no single text, single deity, or single teacher that all Hindus would deem authoritative or supreme. There is a corpus of holy works, and many people hold some of those texts to be revealed and of transhuman or divine origin; but other, non-literate Hindus may not even have heard of these compositions. Similarly, there are many local deities with local names who may or may not be identified with the more recognizable pan-Indian gods and thousands of folk tales and vernacular ballads known only in a few villages or communities. Hundreds of communities and sectarian movements make up the Hindu tradition, and each community has its own hallowed canon, its own sacred place to which its members make a pilgrimage, and its own deity whom it holds to be absolutely supreme.

Notions of dharma (duty, righteousness, “religion”) have been communicated through stories from the epics and Puranas (Sanskrit and vernacular texts glorifying deities and places composed primarily though not completely in the first millennium) and narrated by family or village elders. We should also note that the many Sanskrit texts within Hindu traditions have had a limited role to play in the history of the religion. The many Hindu traditions consider custom and practice to be as important as the texts themselves. Nevertheless, one may say that, with the intellectual colonization by the West and the advent of mass media, Hindus today have started to focus on the sacred texts and many search for answers to the environmental crises both in text and practice. In this entry, therefore, we will consider textual sources as well as eco-practices adopted by Hindus. We will initially consider the phenomena of nature in historical, philosophical, and narrative texts, and then move on to the relevance of some philosophical concepts, and finally discuss the various forms of environmental activism in India which use religio-cultural concepts as sources of inspiration or guidance.

History
The earliest civilization in India, which is said to be a progenitor of latter-day Hinduism, has variously been called the Indus Valley or the Sarasvati culture. One of the most disputed issues in Indian history is the origins of the people who inhabited the banks of the river Sindhu (Indus, from which we derive the words Hindu and India). While colonial scholars and many historians hold that the original inhabitants here were eventually displaced by the Indo-Europeans, recent challengers of the theory argue that the Indus was really the ancient river Sarasvati, spoken of in the Vedas, and that this was the original home of the Indo-Europeans. It is the references to the flora and fauna (the existence of a horse in the early culture) as well as the references to local landscape (descriptions of the river and an ocean) in the Vedic literature that fuel the controversy. The civilization seems to have been urban and the many seals uncovered here have shown the importance of several animals in society. Because of the excavation of a large swimming-pool-like structure, carefully constructed, as well as fire pits, one may speculate a reverence for water and fire. It is possible that the flooding of the Indus River destroyed parts or all of this early civilization.

Early Sanskrit Texts
The earliest compositions we have in India are called Veda or “knowledge” and these were composed by the Indo-European people. There are four Vedic collections, each divided into four sections composed possibly between 1500 and 600 B.C.E. The four collections or Vedas are known as Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva. The sections in each of these collections are samhitas or hymnic compositions; brahmanas or ritual treatises; Aranyakas or
"compositions for the forest"; and Upanishads, "sitting near [the teacher]." The earliest compositions are hymns of the Rig Veda. The hymns were used in sacrificial rituals, and some of the instructions on conducting rituals are contained in the Yajur Veda and the brahmanas. Philosophical speculation is found in the sections called Aranyakas and Upanishads. Although considered to be extremely important by all orthodox philosophers and theological treatises, the Vedas are not books kept in people's houses. Rather, they are ritual texts understood by many Hindus as eternal sound, eternal words passed on through the generations without change. A few hymns from them are known and recited regularly at temple and home liturgies, and the philosophical sections have been translated and commented upon frequently, but the rest of the Vedas are known only to a handful of ritual specialists.

The earliest hymns of the Vedas are addressed to many gods and many of them are connected with natural phenomena and the environment the people lived in. Agni, the god of fire, is seen as a messenger between human beings and the deities because offerings were placed in the fire to be carried to other worlds. Agni is the fire on Earth, lightning in the atmosphere, and the sun in the sky. Soma, also addressed in the hymns, is identified as the moon and, frequently, is depicted as the presiding deity of a creeper-plant, and also as an elixir that was derived from the plant and used in the ritual sacrifices. Usha, the goddess of dawn, Varuna, who presides over the waters, the oceans and even aquatic animals, and Indra, who is associated with the thunderbolt and rain, are all worshipped.

A goddess known as Sarasvati is also spoken of, sometimes as a river, sometimes as representing learning. In the Rig Veda, Sarasvati is described as the inspirer of noble thoughts, one who gives rise to truthful words, one who is beautiful and fortunate, the best of rivers filled with dynamic vitality. In later literature – the ritualistic sections called the Brahmanas – Sarasvati is identified with the goddess Vac (speech), who has an individual identity in the early verses of the Rig Veda. Vac was perceived to be the consort of the creator Prajapati. The stories and attributes associated with her become superimposed on Sarasvati. As Vac, she was speech incarnate, the power of the word, the mother of the Vedas. When identified with speech in some texts, Sarasvati is also known as Gayatri (the triple song) and Savitri (hymn to the sun) and is associated with the formula that is given to young boys in a ceremony when they are invested with a sacred thread. The formulaic verse (mantra), called the Gayatri, dedicated to the sun, becomes the mantra that marks the initiation of a young boy into his life as a student. The votary, through the mantra, meditates on the brilliance of the sun and asks for that illumination to be in his mind. Although only young men were initiated into this mantra in the last two millennia, in the last two centuries women in some Hindu traditions also recite it. The important deities of later Hinduism are mentioned a few times in these earliest hymns. It is only in the later Vedic literature that goddesses like Sri (Lakshmi) or gods like Narayana (Vishnu) are addressed directly in hymns.

Some hymns speak of a connection between the rituals and the prevalence of cosmic and earthly order, rta. Rta is truth and justice, the rightness of things. It makes harmony and peace possible in the Earth and the heavens. Although it is an impersonal cosmic principle, Vedic gods like Varuna were considered its upholders.

In one key hymn, the Hymn to the Supreme Person (Purusha Sukta), the universe itself is said to have come out of a cosmic sacrifice in which the primeval man (Purusha) was offered. The hymn is important even today in domestic and temple ritual for the Hindus and has figured continuously in the tradition for about 3000 years. In it, the composer strains to capture infinity in words and uses the notion of a “thousand” to denote all that cannot be measured or perhaps even conceptualized. In this hymn, the “cosmic man” (purusha) is said to have a thousand heads, eyes, and feet. Covering the Earth, he still extends beyond; that is, he is all space. He is the past, present, and future. He was offered as a sacrifice, and various elements of the universe are said to arise from this ritual. From his mind came the moon; from his eye, the sun; the gods Indra and Agni from his mouth; and the wind came from his breath. From his navel came space; from his head, the sky; from his feet, Earth; from his ears, the four directions. Thus, says the hymn, the worlds were created. It is said that the four classes (varnas) of society also came from this initial cosmic sacrifice. While the origins of what eventually came to be called the caste system are generally seen to lie in these verses from the Rig Veda, it is important to recognize that the social order is connected with the natural order of the origins of the universe.

The sacrificial worldview of the early Vedic age gave way to philosophical inquiry and discussion in the Aranyakas and the Upanishads. The Aranyakas (compositions for the forests) and the Upanishads ("coming near" a teacher) were composed at a time of intellectual ferment and philosophical speculation, possibly between the seventh and sixth centuries. We note from the title of these texts that the forests were places of quietude and hermitages where there were small educational institutions. In yet other verses of the Vedas, we find the forest as wilderness, opposed to the culture of the village.

In retrieving and re-visioning the Vedas, Hindus have emphasized those sections which speak of peace and harmony. Thus, the Song of Peace (shanti path) has become popular in India and in the diaspora. Repeating a hymn composed more than three millennia ago, the Hindu devotee recites: "May there be peace in the skies, peace in the atmosphere, peace on Earth, peace in the waters. May
the healing plants and trees bring peace; may there be peace [on and from] the world, the deity. May there be peace in the world, peace on peace. May that peace come to me!” (Yagur Veda 36.17)

The quest for a unifying truth is a distinctive feature of the Upanishads, and recurs in Hindu philosophical traditions of later centuries. In the Mundaka Upanishad (1.1.3), the one who seeks the truth phrases his question: “What is it that being known, all else becomes known?” Knowledge, both of nature and the spirit, is all swept into a unified category. The dualism between matter and spirit seen in some philosophical schools – both in Indian and Western thought – is not explicit in the Upanishads.

The Vedas, considered absolutely transhuman by the many Hindu traditions, are termed sruti (that which was heard). However, the literature that was composed after their period, starting approximately around 500 B.C.E., was acknowledged as human and loosely called smruti (that which is remembered). Though of human authorship, the material called smruti was nonetheless considered inspired. And while this literature has been theoretically of lesser authority than the Vedas, it has played a far more important role in the lives of the Hindus for the last 2500 years. Sometimes this category is divided into the epics (itihasas), ancient stories (puranas), and codes of law and ethics (dharma shastras). The term smruti can also mean the codes of dharma alone.

The two epics, the Ramayana (Story of Rama) and the Mahabharata (Great Epic of India), have been the best-known works within the Hindu tradition. The narratives, both in the Sanskrit and the many vernacular, and the many folk versions, have been memorized, recited, sung, danced, enjoyed, and experienced emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually for the last 2500 years. These texts have largely been transmitted through the performing arts and through oral tradition. Invariably the narration of the epics is the first and most lasting encounter that Hindus have with their texts. It is in these texts that we find an enormous wealth of materials on the glory of the natural universe, the conservation of resources, as well as the cycles of time.

The Bhagavadgita (sometimes rendered Bhagavadgita) was probably written around 200 B.C.E. or during the following centuries and added to the epic Mahabharata. It is frequently printed separately, and many people have a copy of this sacred text or know parts of it by heart. In the Gita, Krishna instructs his cousin Arjuna (who is generally understood to be any human soul who seeks spiritual guidance) on the nature of the human soul, God, and how one can reach liberation.

In verses that are still recited at a Hindu’s funeral, Krishna describes the human soul as being beyond the reach of human senses and thought; it is not affected by the sense organs or physical nature and is removed from it. Just as a human being casts off old clothes and wears new ones, so too does a soul discard bodies and assume new ones. Thus the soul inhabits bodies that are born and that die. This continues through the ages until the soul is finally liberated from the cycle of births and death. The soul does not die when the body dies; it is never born and never killed. According to some Hindu theologians, the Gita clearly demarcates the line between the “physical” part of the human being and the “soul” – a distinction that becomes well discussed in Hindu schools of philosophy. When Arjuna is not quite clear about Krishna’s claim to be God incarnate, Krishna reveals his own cosmic form, which is only visible to Arjuna’s divine eye. In this vision, the entire universe makes up the body of Krishna and the concept is elucidated several centuries later by the philosopher Ramanuja (1017–1037).

Starting around 300 B.C.E. and continuing until a little after 1000, books known as the Puranas were composed. The word purana means “old” in Sanskrit; the Puranas dealt with old tales. These devotional books, whose use was not limited to the priestly caste, are well known. The Puranas praised deities that had become important in the Hindu pantheon. The chief deities of the Puranas are Vishnu, Shiva, and the goddess Parvati (also known as Devi) in their many manifestations.

Vishnu
One of the most important deities in the Hindu tradition, Vishnu (“all pervasive”) has been worshipped in various forms since the time of the Rig Veda. Considered by his devotees to be always united with the goddess Lakshmi who is portrayed as seated on a full-blown lotus flower, Vishnu is portrayed as the creator, protector and destroyer of the universe.

Iconographically, Vishnu is usually depicted as standing, as sitting majestically on a throne, or as reclining on a serpent called Ananta (Infinity). In the last form, Vishnu, who pervades all of creation, is couched in the coils of infinite time, showing his dominion over space and time. Vishnu, like most Hindu deities, has several arms, each holding a specific symbol. They are said to indicate the deity’s omnipotence as well as their characteristics, symbolized by the objects they hold in their hands. Vishnu usually holds a conch, a flying wheel, a mace and a lotus flower. As with all other objects connected with deities, some devotees hold that these items have symbolic meaning: the conch is said to depict space and the wheel portrays the cycle of time. Vishnu is portrayed as being dark blue in color, the color of a rain-filled cloud. Just as the cloud drenches the Earth with life-giving rain, Vishnu is said to shower his devotees with grace.

Hindus believe that Vishnu has several incarnations (avatara); he comes down to Earth aeon after aeon in animal and human form to rid it of evil and establish dharma or righteousness. One of Vishnu’s incarnations is as a fish, to save Manu, the primeval man, from the flood.
This story was originally seen in the Vedic literature, but is expanded now in the Puranas. It focuses on Manu, the progenitor of all human beings. While bathing in a lake, he finds a small fish in his hand. The fish speaks to him and asks him to take it home and put it in a jar. The next day, it has expanded to fill the jar, and Manu is asked to put it in a lake, and eventually when it outgrows it overnight, into a river and then the ocean. The fish, who is really Vishnu, then tells him that he is to build a boat, put his family in it, along with the seven sages and “the seeds of all the animals.” Manu does as he is told. When the floods sweep the Earth, the fish asks him to harness the boat to its horn and they ride the waves. Thus he and those on the ship survive the flood. This story is reminiscent of some of the flood myths in other religions and is set in a frame of periodic destruction and re-creation of life forms.

Some Hindu texts speak of Vishnu having ten incarnations in this cycle of time. Nine of these are said to have already happened. Of them, the fish is the first. The seventh incarnation is as Rama, the hero of the epic. In some versions of the narratives, his eighth incarnation is as the Buddha, who according to some interpreters diverged people from Hindu teachings but according to others gave an important place to nonviolence as an ethic. The tenth incarnation is to come at the end of this cycle of creation of the universe. Some twenty-century interpreters see in the list of ten incarnations (fish, tortoise, boar, half-man/half-animal, a dwarf, a warrior, and then the full man Rama, followed by Krishna, his older brother and finally the destroyer of evil, Kalki) as illustrating Darwin’s theory of evolution. Vishnu’s incarnations from a water animal to an amphibian, land animal and so on are said to depict evolution through narratives. It must be remembered, however, that the sequencing of the lists changes in several texts.

The Earth Goddess is prominent in both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Known as Bhū-Devī, and sometimes as Prithvī, Dharini, Vasudha, or Vasundhara, she bears all life forms and nourishes them. In the Hindu tradition, she is seen as a beloved consort of Vishnu and is iconographically depicted as being on his left side in many south Indian temples. Lakshmi or Shri, the goddess of good fortune is on Vishnu’s right. In many of the Puranas, it is this goddess, who, unable to bear the grief rendered to Vishnu, left him and went to live in; thus in praising the Earth and incarnated himself.

**Shiva**

Like Vishnu, Shiva emerged as a great god in the post-upanisadic era, but unlike Vishnu, he did not become the important focus of a doctrine of consecutive incarnations.

The icon of the dancing Shiva – the king of dance or Nataraja – is one of the best-known pieces of Hindu art in India and in Southeast Asia. The drum that is sounded before he dances is like the recitation of Om, the most sacred syllable in the Hindu tradition. The icon of the dancing Shiva is said to embody five functions – creation, preservation, and destruction; concealment of the truth and the granting of salvation. The first verse of the Abhinaya Darpana, a well-known book of dance says: “his limbs are the worlds, his songs are the languages of universe, his clothes are the moon and the stars.” As Nataraja, the lord of the dance, he is depicted with his right hand holding the drum of creation, and his left hand holds the fire of destruction. There are other dances – in sculpture and dance he dances his omnipotence, his immanence, his omniscience; he dances time and eternity. Above all, the devotees implore him to dance in their hearts. The dancing icon simultaneously embodies and articulates one dominant Hindu paradigm of the cosmos and, to the attentive devotee, a lesson in theology.

Although the many deities are well known all over India, in most southern Indian villages and towns, they are known by (and usually, only by) a local name. Thus, Vishnu in Tirumala-Tirupati is known as Venkateswara or the lord of the Venkata Hills. Many of these places also have what is called a sthala purana, namely, a narrative that tells one why that place is holy, what were the kinds of hierophanies that took place there, and why the deities linger there for the welfare of human beings. Each sthala purana is unique, even though many of them are strikingly similar and can be seen as fitting into a familiar genre. Since each story – and place – is unique, visiting one is not a substitute for another. It is this sense of the special nature of each place that gave rise to the major traditions (and now, business) of pilgrimage within Hinduism. The sthala puranas frequently glorify the place where the deities have revealed themselves. Some descriptions are generic, but there is also a great deal of specific detail, exulting in the local landscape and describing the flora and fauna with considerable care. The purpose of these descriptions is to praise the land in which Vishnu or Shiva or the goddess has come to live in; thus in praising the natural landscape, one is glorifying the deity. These texts serve as sources of inspiration for contemporary ecological initiatives.

**Ages of Time**

As noted earlier, many Hindu philosophies include the category of time under the rubric of “achit” or that which is insentient. The Puranas speak about cycles of creation and destruction of the cosmos. These cycles are known as the days and nights of the creator god (a minor deity) called Brahma. During a day (which is called a kalpa) there are secondary cycles of creation and destruction. Each kalpa is approximately 4320 million earthly years. (There are distinctions between earthly years and the much longer years of the gods.) The nights of Brahma are of equal length. The total of 360 such days and nights makes...
a year of Brahma and Brahma lives for 100 years. This cycle therefore is 311,040,000 million years. After this, the entire cosmos is drawn into the body of Vishnu or Shiva (depending on which Purana one is reading), and remains there until another Brahma is evolved.

During each of his days, the creator god brings out the universe periodically and withdraws it into himself. A day in the life of Brahma is divided into 14 manvantaras, and each lasts 306,720,000 years. During the long intervals between manvantaras, the world is re-created and a new Manu or primeval man appears and begins the human race.

Each manvantara contains 71 great aeons (maha yugas), each of which is divided into four aeons (yugas). A single one of these aeons is the basic cycle. The golden age (krta yuga) lasts 4800 divine years (1,728,000 human or earthly years). During this time, dharma is on firm footing. To use traditional animal imagery, the bull of dharma or righteousness stands on all four legs. The Treta age is shorter, lasting 3600 god years, that is, 1,296,000 earthly years; dharma is then on three legs. The Dvapara age lasts half as long as the golden or krta age; it is 2400 god years long (864,000 earthly years) and dharma is now hopping on two legs. During the kali yuga, the worst of all possible ages, dharma is on one leg and things get progressively worse. This age lasts for 1200 god years (432,000 earthly years). We live in this degenerate kali yuga, which, according to traditional Hindu reckoning, began around 3102 B.C.E.

There is a steady decline through the yugas in morality, righteousness, lifespan, and human satisfaction. At the end of the kali yuga – obviously still a long time off – there will be no righteousness, no virtue, no trace of justice. According to many of the texts, when the world ends, seven scorching suns will dry up the oceans, there will be wondrously shaped clouds, torrential rains will fall, and eventually the cosmos will be absorbed into Vishnu. The Puranas deal with astronomical units of time; the age of the Earth and of the human being is infinitesimally small in relation to the aeons of time the universe goes through.

The Epics and Puranas give detailed narratives of the periodic and cyclic destruction of the world. By the beginning of the third eon, things are perceptibly going awry. The Kurma Purana (1.27.16–57) says, “Then greed and passion arose everywhere, inevitably, due to the predestined purpose of the Treta [Third] Age. And people seized the rivers, fields, mountains, clumps of trees and herbs, overcoming them by strength” (in Dimmitt and van Buitenen 1978: 39). That is just the beginning of the decline in virtue and behavior. The epic Mahabharata (c. 500–200 B.C.E.) is graphic in the portrayal of the events at the end of the fourth – and worst – aeon and what happens after a thousand such ages. At the end of the aeon the population increases; there is a stench everywhere. The “natural” order of things becomes sluggish; the cows will yield little milk, and the trees, teeming with crows, will yield few flowers and fruits. The Brahmans – the priestly class – it is said, will plunder the land bare for alms. Householders, out of fear of the burden of taxes, will become thieves; students who should normally work on virtues like non-attachment will be false with greed for possessions. At the end of a thousand aeons, the text continues, there will be a drought of many years and all creatures will starve. The fire of destruction will rage and large clouds will rise up in the sky. The epics pessimistically say that all humans will become “omnivores” and barbarians and naturally cruel. They will destroy parks and trees and the lives of the living will be ruined in the world (van Buitenen 1978: 586–9, 595–6).

These destructions are portrayed as cyclical and periodic; it almost seems that the events are inevitable and in someway predestined. However, many Hindus tend to take these notions of time in a metaphoric way. More literal interpretations place the beginning of kali yuga around 3102 B.C.E. It should also be noted that although these cataclysmic events are forecast, almost all theologians and philosophical texts insist on the importance of a free will for human beings and give them full agency.

There are also several texts which speak about correct human behavior. These offer advice and a large toolbox of strategies which have been deployed to avoid conflict and promote nonviolence. The Mahabharata, one of the most important texts in the Hindu tradition, focuses on a civil war, but the line that lingers in our consciousness is “ahimsa paramo dharmah” (nonviolence is the highest virtue). The Mahabharata also speaks about the eternal dharma (sanatana dharma), the virtues that should ideally exist in all human beings. Here too, it is nonviolence that is valorized: “Lack of enmity to all beings in thought, word, and deed; compassion and giving; it is these which form the eternal dharma” (Santi Parva – the section on peace, Mahabharata).

Dharma and Artha Texts and Practices as Environmental Resources

The many texts which focus explicitly on dharma or righteous behavior were composed in the first few centuries of the Common Era. Many sections of the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Puranas also focused on dharma. Other scriptures have encouraged the planting of trees, condemned the destruction of plants and forests, and asserted that trees are like children. In this context, a passage from the Matsya Puranam is instructive. The goddess Parvati planted a sapling of the Asoka tree and took good care of it. She watered it and took care of it and it grew well. The divine beings and sages came and told her:

O [Goddess] ... almost everyone wants children. When people see their children and grandchildren,
they feel they have been successful. What do you achieve by creating and rearing trees like sons . . .? Parvati replied: “One who digs a well where there is little water lives in heaven for as many years as there are drops of water in it. One large reservoir of water is worth ten wells. One son is like ten reservoirs and one tree is equal to ten sons (dasa putra samo droma). This is my standard and I will protect the universe to safeguard it . . .” (Matsya Puranam, chapter 154: 506–12).

The words of Parvati seem relevant even today. Trees are said to offer more than aesthetic pleasure, shade, and fruits. They are vital to maintain our ecosystem, our planet, our well-being, and Parvati extolls them by saying they are comparable to ten sons. The main Puranas, texts of myth and lore, composed approximately between the fifth and tenth century C.E. have wonderful resources on trees. The Varaha Purana says that one who plants five mango trees does not go to hell, and the Vishnu Dharmottara (3.297.13) claims that one who plants a tree will never fall into hell. The Matsya Purana also describes a celebration for planting trees and calls it the “Festival of Trees” (Kane 1958: 415).

Just as the planting of trees was recommended and celebrated, cutting them was condemned by almost all the dharma shastras. Kautilya Arthashastra (ca. fourth century B.C.E.) prescribes varying levels of fines for those who destroy trees, groves, and forests. Kautilya said:

For cutting off the tender sprouts of fruit trees, flower trees or shady trees in the parks near a city, a fine of 6 panas shall be imposed; for cutting off the minor branches of the same trees, 12 panas, and for cutting off the big branches, 24 panas shall be levied. Cutting off the trunks of the same shall be punished [with a fine between 48–96 panas]; and felling of the same shall be punished with [a fine between 200–500 panas] . . . For similar offenses committed in connection with the trees which mark boundaries, or which are worshipped . . . double the above fines shall be levied (in Shamasasya 1967: 225).

Despite such exhortations, there has been massive destruction of trees in India. This has been particularly true in the twentieth century when, in the deforestation that has occurred in the Himalayas and in the Narmada basin, there has been a tragic transgression of dharma in the destruction of national health and wealth. Some temples are now in the forefront of the “afforestation” (re-forestation) movements, urging devotees to plant saplings.

Aspects of Nature

Although the philosophy of Ramanuja may not be well known to the larger Hindu population, it is most definitely true that most Hindus perceive divinity in many aspects of nature. Many animals, snakes, mountains, rivers, trees, indeed the entire universe, pulsates with something divine. Some Hindus personify natural phenomena as divine; others think of them as having presiding deities. Although the divinity is considered invested in some natural phenomena and habitats, it does not follow that these are not used or abused. As with many religious traditions, there is dissonance between perception and behavior.

Sacred Animals

Many deities are connected with animals, birds, and/or plants. Elephants are considered to be omens of auspiciousness; they are connected both with the goddess Lakshmi and with the deity Ganesha. Lions and tigers are associated with the goddess Durga; still, they are hunted and killed. The Garuda bird, which is like the eagle, is a mount of Vishnu and held to be sacred. Almost all south Indian Vishnu temples have a shrine for this bird. Hanuman, a divine person who was born as a monkey, is the paradigmatic servant of the god Rama. There are other animals and birds that are sacred, but it is only the cow that is not killed and consumed.

Cows have been revered for the last two to three millennia and most Hindus do not eat beef. Some scholars interpret early Vedic texts as saying that cows were consumed; others consider this to be a misinterpretation. Certainly, in the last two millennia, the cow has been seen as an animal worthy of veneration, an animal that symbolizes everything good in nature, and as an animal symbolic of the maternal giving of the deities Vishnu and Lakshmi. Some Hindus think that by venerating the cow they are symbolically venerating all living creatures. Others believe that the cow is the ultimate “giving” animal; its products and hide can be used in many ways.

It is for very different reasons that the naga or snake is venerated. In many villages and in many quiet places in the cities, there are sacred trees that have a simple platform built around them. Under the trees may be many small stone images of intertwined snakes. These serpent images are venerated with red spots of kum kum powder that is used to adorn the forehead of women, or used in worshipping the goddesses. Women come to these open-air shrines to worship at particular times of the year, or when they need a wish to be fulfilled. The serpents, called nagas, may well be one of the earliest features of the Hindu tradition. Hindus think of nagas both as serpents and as having human characteristics. Epics mention groups called Nagas and it is possible that snakes were tutelary deities for them. Hindus in many parts of Kashmir, Nepal, and other areas consider themselves as having Naga ancestors. Similar stories are found in the Hindu kingdom of Kambuja-desa (Cambodia) where the people thought of themselves as having been descended from the Nagas. Snake imagery is still dominant in the Cambodian
countryside. Nagas are said to have powers that human beings do not have and are considered worthy of veneration and protection.

Sacred Mountains and Rivers
Many of the mountains and rivers are personified and venerated in Indian culture. Mountains are generally considered male, though there are some exceptions such as Nanda Devi in the Himalayas. The goddess Parvati, whose name means “born of the mountain” is a much-beloved goddess who is also called “vanaja” or born of the forests. These mountains and rivers are glorified in the many shala puranas or texts which speak about the sanctity and mythical history of a place. Hills such as the ones in Tiruvengadham (Tirumala Tirupati in South India) were thought of as so sacred that there are stories of how holy teachers climbed them on their knees just so that their feet would not sully the sacred soil. Many mountains such as Kailasa – thought of as the abode of the deity Shiva – in the Himalayan range are places of pilgrimage.

The towers of the temples are frequently compared to mountains. The inner shrines of Hindu temples, known as the “womb house” or garbha griha are the caves which served as houses of worship. But more importantly, it is not just any mountain to which temples are compared – many Hindu and Buddhist temples are modeled after Mount Meru, which is believed to be the center of the universe. The largest and most famous example of this correlation is the Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

Rivers such as Ganga, Kaveri, Godavari, and Narmada are much venerated by devotees, both as rivers and as goddesses. In many south Indian temples, the river goddess Kaveri is present in the inner shrine. Many rituals are also associated with the river. For instance, in the Tamil month of Adi (July–August), when the river Kaveri is turbulent because of the monsoons, she is considered to be pregnant, and many local residents who live by her banks in the state of Tamilnadu picnic on the banks of the river and offer food to her. Veneration and rituals to river and mountain deities can thus be very personal.

By bathing in the great rivers of India, one is said to be both physically cleansed and morally purified of one’s sins (papa), which are destroyed. Moreover, one acquires merit or auspiciousness in this way. A story popular in oral tradition makes the point:

A king goes to sleep on the banks of the River Ganga. When he wakes up in the middle of the night, he sees some women covered in filth taking a dip in the holy river. They emerge from the river cleansed and then disappear. The king returns on several nights and sees the same thing. Eventually he asks them who they are; they reply that they are the embodiments of the rivers of India. Everyday, they tell him, human beings bathe in the rivers and their sins are absolved by that act. The rivers – embodied as women – absorb the moral dirt and then come to the Ganga, the grand purifier, to purify themselves.

Variations on the story say where the Ganga goes to get herself purified, although it is generally assumed that she needs no purification. In stories that extol the river Narmada, Ganga goes to bathe in that river. In a metaparadigm, ascribed to oral tradition, she goes to bathe in the holy city of Prayag (modern Allahabad) to absolve herself of the moral filth. The story obviously praises the sanctity of Prayag, but ends up being a circular narrative because the holy city itself gets its importance because the Rivers Ganga and Yamuna meet there.

The generic version of the story distinguishes between two kinds of dirt – moral dirt or sin, known as papa in Sanskrit, is perceptible as physical dirt in the bodies of the river. The story, therefore, makes a direct connection between morality and physical pollution, a connection that is dominant as we saw initially in the fin de siècle myth. In addition to moral and physical purity, one may also note that in other Hindu contexts there is a third kind of purity: ritual purity. When one bathes in them, rivers and other bodies of water may bestow the pilgrim and his/her clothes with ritual purity. Ritual purity encompasses physical purity, but as Kelly Alley has explained, all that is physically clean is not ritually pure. Even if a person is physically and ritually clean, the mere association with people and garb which are deemed ritually unclean or impure may be contagious and polluting.

Many families keep a small jar of Ganga water in the shrine to use when someone is dying. The holy water is then sprinkled on the dying person. After death, the body is cremated and the ashes are immersed in any body of water. Some families may preserve a small amount of the ashes of a dead person to be immersed in the Ganga at a later time. The waters of these rivers are also brought to various continents and mingled with the waters of local rivers, and used to consecrate newly built temples. So important are these rivers that Hindus who migrated to Southeast Asia in the first millennium considered local rivers such as the Kbal Spean in Cambodia to be like the Ganga. In late twentieth century, Hindus in the diaspora have used rivers like the Thames in London as local substitutes for the Ganga.

Although there is strong belief in the religious purity of the rivers, from an environmental perspective they have become severely polluted. In light of accelerating rates of environmental degradation, the story relating the need of rivers to cleanse themselves has become particularly poignant. The desire for consumer goods and quick profit has led to a rapid industrialization and release of toxic waste in the rivers. Due to overpopulation and the lack of
basic sanitary facilities, the sacred rivers have become latrines, despite injunctions in the dharma texts against such behavior. The rivers, which are supposed physically, morally, and ritually to purify human beings, now reflect adharma: unrighteous behavior. Devotees’ belief that the rivers are intrinsically pure, moreover, works against the cleansing of the rivers, for some people believe that they cannot really be polluted.

Sacred Forests, Trees, and Groves

While the texts praised the planting of trees, temples tried to exemplify the practice of venerating them. Almost every temple in south India dedicated to the gods Shiva or Vishnu, or to a manifestation of the goddess, has a thala vriksa (“the tree of a [sacred place]”), a particular tree that was sacred to that area. This is the “official” tree of the temple and is usually a grand old specimen that is surrounded by a beaten path used for circumabulation by pilgrims and devotees. Early Tamil texts such as the Ahananuru and Purananuru (first–second century) affirm the sacrality of trees. Many temples in south India have sacred temple trees that have been venerated by the local devotees for centuries. Such sacred temple trees stand symbolically for other trees, all of which are worthy of respect.

The sacred temple tree is generally venerated by women; it is adorned with colored thread, scarves, red and yellow kumkum and turmeric powder. Lamps are waved in front of the tree and acts of ritual adoration are occasionally performed. Despite this worship, all trees are not necessarily considered to be major deities or divinities; they are like the cow and some other sacred animals, recognized to be essential providers for and sustainers of human life. Planting of trees in temples has been a latent ideal in many communities. Now, in the light of extensive destruction of trees, many temples in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have revitalized the custom of planting trees within their precincts.

References to various trees in the epics and Puranas as well as the practice of worshipping the deities with plants and leaves sacred to them have inspired some activists to grow “sacred plants.” Research by some of these activists has led to the identification of dozens of varieties of plants and trees in the holy texts, and many have learnt a new respect for forests and trees.

The religious significance of plants is also related to their healing properties, which are emphasized in many texts and healing practices. The medicinal texts of Ayurveda (“the knowledge of [long] life”), for example, find that trees have medicinal qualities. The neem tree was one of the most useful in this regard. Its twigs are used as tooth brushes in rural areas, its leaves are used to treat skin ailments, and the tree as a whole is said to have antibacterial properties. Many of these claims are now being scientifically tested. Plants and herbs in India were also used for digestive and respiratory ailments, and were therefore regularly planted and nourished. As early as the time of King Ashoka in the third century B.C.E., there are rock edicts urging the planting of medicinal and herbal plants and trees all over the empire. The Second Major Rock Edict of King Asoka (who reigned 269–232 B.C.E.) says that medicinal herbs which are useful to human beings and animals are to be planted everywhere along with various kinds of plants and trees. This king also had wells dug and trees planted on the roadside to help travelers and pilgrims.

Trees and groves are also seen as the habitats of semi-divine beings known as yakshas and yakshis, who, when disturbed from their natural habitats, may cause problems to local human residents. Many groves were left undisturbed in the past because they were considered homes of these beings and it was thought that felling the trees and plants would render these beings, animals, and birds, homeless.

The Eight Cardinal Directions and Building Structures

Many Puranic texts speak about the ashta dik or the eight directions. The eight directions are spoken of in many contexts. Each one of the directions has a guardian (dik pala) who is venerated. Sometimes the directions figure as part of the rhetoric used to praise a hero or heroine who is said to have conquered lands in all the eight directions. The potential and power said to be inherent in each of the directions is also discussed in texts and observed in practice. Thus, the east is frequently associated with everything good; many temples face this direction. The west is also good and many Vishnu temples face this direction. The south is considered to be associated with death. The northeast is one of the best directions; the north has the potential to increase one’s fortune. The directions also have presiding deities; Agni, the fire god, for instance, presides over the southeast. Frequently, he is portrayed in carvings in the southeast corner of temples. When applied to the function of the buildings, these concepts translated to placing of rooms in particular directions, so as to magnify and harness the potential of the Earth. Thus, the kitchen in a home, or the halls for fire sacrifices, were frequently built in the southeast part of the structure because Agni, or Fire, presided over this direction.

Many temples in India and in Southeast Asia were aligned very specifically in certain directions, to maximize the perceived power of the land and the directions. While a lot of this was based on various conceptual belief systems, some temples were precisely aligned with the planets and the stars to serve as giant calendars or perhaps even observatories. This is not immediately evident in Indian temples today because, as with many structures, they have been added upon and rebuilt over the centuries, but has been abundantly shown in recent research by Eleanor Mannikka on temples like Angkor Wat. The orientation...
of these buildings and the shape of the structures have historically been connected, as in many cultures, to notions of space and time. Angkor Wat may have served as a giant calendar and or astronomical calculator, tracking the movement of various planets.

Hindu temples were considered to be bodies – some say of the cosmic person, some say of a giant being, some say, of a human being. The temple could be the body of God or the cosmos. But the concept most pervasive in Hindu popular cultures is that of the vastu mandala, a specific geometric grid of 64 or 81 squares in which we find the body of a person of somewhat ambivalent disposition, neither human nor divine, called the Vastu Purusha, who lies on the ground on which we build our homes, our businesses, and temples. The legends are not very clear as to whether he is good or is an asura, a demon. The stories say that this being fell into Earth and, to vanquish him, the many celestial beings – devas – jumped on him and pinned him to the ground. The head is to the east; this is the most auspicious direction; and the figure of this person is fitted into the square of the extended universe. The mandala and the form of this Vastu becomes “a diagrammatic field of co-ordinates, intersections and diagonals [and] is sensitive to any interference with its order and in this respect it functions like the subtle body of the human being.” Such constructions have wide currency in Indian thought where they are said “to signify the universal law as a working entity” (Kramrisch 2002: 71). The body is said to be a place of coordinated activity where each part is the seat of a special function. Such coordinated function is made factually and repeatedly in Brahmanical cultures and in Buddhism; in sacred texts, rituals, and works of arts. The presence of the Buddha is spoken of in reliefs in Sanchi and Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh, India) by having his footprints in the place of the feet, a tree or pillar as the trunk and axis of the body, the wheel as head and the sun-shade above it.

The many principles of vastu and geomancy govern the positioning of a house, a bed, a desk or even one’s computer. The orientation of buildings to specific directions, whether east to the rising sun or to the west, informs us about the notions of the people’s spatial relationship to the cosmos; their function as astronomical centers, aligned with and observing planetary and stellar movements, informs us of their calculation of time. Sacred cities and towns were built like mandalas, powerful diagrams of the universe. Hindu temples, towns, and cities tell us how human beings have experienced embodiment, conceptualized the divine, constructed social hierarchies, and aligned themselves with the natural forces of the Earth, the stars and the planets.

**Planets and Stars**

An integral part of Hindu religious life is one’s relationship with the planets and stars. Many Hindus believe that human beings are integrally connected with various parts of the universe, including the stars and planets. The position and relationship of these bodies are believed to affect human nature and destinies. The belief and practice of “the study of stars” (jyotisha) or astrology was a significant branch of knowledge in ancient India and considered to be a vedanga or a field ancillary to the study of the Vedas. The Indian astronomers were in contact with the Greeks and framed their knowledge in religious discourses. By about the middle of the first millennium C.E., nine planets (nava graha) were recognized. These nine planets included the sun and the moon, along with Mars, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn. Two other entities, called Rahu and Ketu or the ascending and descending nodes of the moon, were added to this list. Since the study was primarily on bodies which affected people on Earth, our planet was not included in this scheme. As with various other aspects of nature – mountains and rivers, for instance – the nine planets have been personified and venerated. Architects depicted them on the lintels of temples in Orissa by the ninth century. In the last few centuries these planets have been consecrated in south Indian temples all over the world, including Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Tampa, Chicago and other cities. They are arranged in a specific square format, without any of them facing each other directly – a symbolic way of showing that their orbits do not intersect.

Many Hindu communities have the birth horoscopes of infants drawn in great detail and this becomes a blueprint to guide a person through good and bad times. In certain periods of one’s life, for instance, Mars or Saturn may not be in the right place. This, a Hindu may assert, can cause havoc in one’s life. To minimize the negative placements of these planets, specific worship ceremonies are indicated and are carried out. Belief in astrology cuts across social class, caste, gender, and education. Highly educated Hindu communities have strong faith in the stars and planets and consider their influence on life as perfectly natural, taking this for granted as they would a force like gravity. Computer software programs now chart horoscopes and in many communities these are used as compatibility guides for marriages.

Although there have been texts and practices which extol the protection of Earth, several centuries of colonial rule, industrialization, and increasing human numbers have led to extensive pollution and denigration of the environment. Many contemporary environmental activists, both inside and beyond India, view Hindu religious culture as a valuable resource for responding to this crisis.

**Hindu Philosophical Systems**

Some environmental philosophers, particularly in the West, have seen the Hindu philosophical systems as potential resources for India’s environmental crises. While these systems of philosophy are significant in some areas,
they have not inspired solutions to the environmental crises as much as the texts of dharma.

Six traditional or orthodox systems of philosophy are recognized within the Hindu tradition. The word translated as “philosophy” is literally darsana or “vision.” One may call these schools viewpoints or visions of reality. Some of the schools go back to about 500 B.C.E. The development of Vedanta, on the other hand, continues even now and is of considerable speculative significance in the intellectual history of the Hindu tradition.

Samkhya (“numbers” or “count”) was probably one of the earliest philosophical schools. It predates the Bhagavad Gita and is explicitly dualistic in its conceptual framework. Innumerable souls (purusha) are seen to be enmeshed in matter (prakriti). Prakriti is composed of three strands, which also color human attributes. These are sattva (purity), rajas (passion), and tamas (sloth). During creation, the five sense organs (the functions of sight, smell, taste, touch and sound) are derived from the notion of ahankara, (“i-ness” or ego) and connected with the essences of sight, smell, taste, touch and sound. These subtle essences produce the five gross elements – Earth, water, fire, air, and akasha (translated usually as “ether,” “space,” or “vacuum”).

Liberation of the Soul Is through its Extrication from Primordial Matter

In its liberated state, according to such philosophy, the soul is blissful in its splendid isolation. In later compositions like the Bhagavad Gita, the worldview of Samkhya-yoga is integrated into a theistic worldview. Elements of the Samkhya worldview were also integrated into Buddhism and Jainism. Yoga, the second school, was tied up with Samkhya in its philosophical framework. Yoga in its theoretical aspects is theistic in outlook, differing from Samkhya philosophy, which does not focus on a deity.

Vaisesika, one of the six schools, dealt with nine categories of irreducible principles (Earth, water, time, space, fire, etc.) constituting the universe. Vedanta (end of the Vedas) is the sixth school of philosophy and has been significant over the last 1000 years. While yoga has been overshadowed by devotion in importance, the intellectual and spiritual interpretation of Vedanta philosophy has preoccupied and continues to engage many Hindu thinkers.

Traditionally the term Vedanta was used to denote the Upanishads, the final part of the Vedic corpus. But the term has more popularly been used to denote systems of thought based on a coherent interpretation of three works, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and a text called the Brahma sutras. Vedic philosophers wrote extensive Sanskrit commentaries on these texts; modern writers do it in English and also give oral discourses to the public, explaining particular viewpoints.

Shankara, who lived around 700, was a prominent interpreter of Vedanta. He portrayed this Earth and life cycle as having limited reality; once the soul realizes that it is and always has been Brahman, this life passes away like a dream. For Shankara, reality is nondual (advaita). There is only one reality, Brahman, and this Brahman is indescribable and without any attributes. Brahman and Atman (the human soul) are identical. It is because of maya, an illusory power that ultimately defies definition, that one believes oneself – or the universe – is different from Brahman. When this maya is cut through, the soul is liberated through the realization of its true nature. Liberation, therefore, is removal of ignorance and a dispelling of illusion through the power of transforming knowledge. Shankara’s philosophy, therefore denies ultimate ontological reality to nature and to this universe, but postulates that for people caught in the cycle of life and death, it is real.

While the “oneness” doctrine and its ecological implications are sometimes underscored by some Western philosophers, recent work by Lance Nelson shows how the advaita (“nondualism”) conceptual system does not promote eco-friendly behavior. Nelson presents overwhelming evidence that Shankara’s nondual (“oneness of all creation”) doctrine does not find any spiritual value inherent in nature and ultimately expresses a functional dualism. He demonstrates that this philosophy actually devalues nature and concludes that this “is not the kind of nondualism that those searching for ecologically supportive modes of thought might wish it to be” (Nelson 1998: 65). In addition to what Nelson says, it is also important to note that the oneness is only in the state of liberation and not when one is trapped in the sea of life and death. Thus, arguments that Hindus ought to value nature because ultimately there is a sense of non-difference do not really hold much weight, because the reality of nature and the physical universe is ultimately denied when one is liberated. We should remember, however, that Shankara’s interpretation is only one of several schools of Vedanta.

Ramanuja (ca.1017–1137) was the most significant interpreter of theistic Vedanta for the Sri Vaishnava community of south India. For Ramanuja, Vishnu is immanent in the entire universe, pervading all souls and material substances, but also transcending them. Thus, from a certain viewpoint there is only one reality, Brahman, but from another, one may say that Brahman is qualified by souls and matter. Since the human soul is the body (sharira) and the servant (sesh) of the Supreme Being, liberation is not portrayed as the realization of identity between the two. Rather, it is the intuitive, total, and joyful realization of the soul’s relationship with the lord.

The elaboration of this philosophy, where the universe is understood as the body of Vishnu, is found in the many texts of Ramanuja and his followers, according to John Carman. According to Ramanuja, the universe, composed
of sentient (chit) and non-sentient stuff (achit) forms the
body (sharira) of the Vishnu. Just as a human soul (chit)
pervades a non-sentient body (achit), so too does Vishnu
pervade the souls, the material universe, and Time.
Vishnu-Narayana is inseparable from Shri-Lakshmi, the
Goddess. According to the Sri Vaishnava theologian
Vedanta Desika (1268–1368), both Vishnu and Shri per-
vade the universe together; the universe is their body. It is
important to note that in this philosophy, it is not the case
that the material universe is female and the transcendent
god is male; together, the male and female deities create
and pervade and yet transcend the universe. What the
body–soul metaphor translates to in devotional praxis for
Ramanuja and Vedanta Desika is that human beings and
the entire natural universe are the body of Vishnu and
Shri; they are owned and supported by them. However,
while the devotional songs emphasize the drama and
engagement of interpersonal relationships between the
deity and the devotee, the philosophical underpinnings of
the universe as the body of the deities has been practically
unknown, except among a few philosophically learned
people in the Sri Vaishnava traditions.

**Tantra**
The component of the Hindu tradition that is termed
Tantra is hard to define, partly because it is portrayed
differently by its advocates and its detractors. Essentially
it centers on a body of ritual practices; some of these
have been integrated into the larger devotional universe
of the Hindu traditions, while others are considered by
many Hindu communities as socially unacceptable.
Tantra, which etymologically means “loom,” began to
gain importance in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions
around the fifth century. The tantric tradition influenced
many sectarian Hindu movements; Shaiva and Vaishnava
temple liturgies, still practiced, are in large measure
derived from tantric usage. For example, when the images
of the deities are installed in temples, large geometric
drawings (mandalas) representing the god or goddess and
the entire cosmos are drawn on the floor and used as a tool
for meditation and ritual.

The tantric tradition advocated its own form of yoga,
known as kundalini yoga. Kundalini refers to the shakti or
power of the Goddess, which is said to lie coiled like a
serpent at the base of one’s spine. When awakened, this
power rises through a channel passing through six
cakras or “wheels” to reach the final center located under
the skull. This center is known as a thousand-petalled
lotus. The ultimate aim of this form of yoga is to awaken
the power of the kundalini and make it unite with Purusha,
the male Supreme Being, who is in the thousand-petalled
lotus. With this union, the practitioner is granted several
visions and given psychic powers. The union leads
eventually to final emancipation. In some tantric texts, the
Goddess is identified with prakriti or material nature.

**Theological Resources for Social Problems**
The many Hindu theological texts and philosophical
systems (darsanas) do contain engaging accounts of
reality, which, could serve as important resources for
several social and moral problems. The Hindu traditions
have competing and intersecting worldviews recommend-
ing specific behavior patterns. In some Hindu philo-
sophical systems, these are arranged in a chronological
fashion – thus, it was mandatory for a male from one of
the so-called higher castes to be celibate and not earn a
living while he was a student, but when he got married, it
was the norm to procreate, earn money and so on. In his
later years, he had the option of becoming a forest dweller
(not too many did) or monk, to be engaged in the study of
theological texts which would guide him to his liberation
from the cycle of life and death. As a householder, goals
such as dharma, money and power, and sensual pleasure
were important; as he focused on his liberation, he would
be encouraged to understand and experience the tattva,
the categories of reality posited in the texts of liberation
(moksha). In theory, these stages were not available for
women and the so-called lower castes, but in practice,
most men did not become students and stopped at being
householders.

There are many meanings for dharma. In some of its
manifestations it is concerned with loka sangraha or the
welfare of human beings. Dharma refers to many topics
including notions of righteousness and duty as well as
virtues such as gratitude and compassion, which are
thought of ideally as common to all human beings. The
texts on dharma also form the basis for formulating parts
of Hindu family law in India. Moksha, on the other hand,
refers to liberation from the cycle of life and death. While
in some philosophical traditions, doing one’s dharma or
duty led to moksha, in other cases, the dictates and norms
dharmas to sustain society (beget children, earn money)
could be seen as binding one to the cycle of life and death
and as tugging in a direction away from liberation.

The pathways to liberation included meditative and reflective
paths focusing on control of the human body and mind as
well as intellectual and emotional devotion to the deity of
one’s choice. Detachment from everyday life – even while
living in the midst of the world – was an integral part of
the enterprise.

The texts that deal with moksha or liberation are
generally concerned with three issues: the nature of
reality, including the Supreme Being and the human
soul; the way to the supreme goal; and the nature of the
supreme goal. Generally the nature of reality/supreme
being is called tattva (truth) and corresponds to the term
“theology” or “theology.” These texts do not focus much
on ethics or righteous behavior in this world; that is
the province of dharma texts. The theological texts or sections
that deal with tattva focus on weaning a human being
from the earthly pursuit of happiness in favor of what they
consider to be the supreme goal of liberation (moksha) from this life. It is important to keep this taxonomy in mind, because theological doctrines do not necessarily trickle down into dharmic or ethical injunctions; in many Hindu traditions there is a disjunction between dharma and moksha. Some scholars, such as Johannes van Buitenen, see a fundamental opposition between them; while dharma involves the ordering of society and the centering of the human being, liberation may be considered to be an abandonment of the established order, not in favor of anarchy, but in favor of a self-realization which is precluded in the realm of dharma. Other scholars, including Daniel Ingalls, disagree with the sharp nature of the cleavage described by van Buitenen but acknowledge that there have always been some religious leaders who have insisted on the contradiction between dharma and moksha. This disjunction between dharma and moksha is marked in Hindu literature and communities. Dharma texts promote righteous behavior on Earth and moksha texts encourage one to be detached from such concerns. A few texts like the Bhagavad Gita have tried to bridge dharma and moksha paradigms.

Thus, a theology that emphasizes the world as a body of God, a pervasive pan-Indian belief that Goddess Earth (Bhu Devi/Vasundhara/Prithvi) is also a consort of Vishnu, or the notion that the Mother Goddess (Amba, Durga) is synonymous with nature (prakriti), does not necessarily translate to eco-friendly behavior. Likewise, renunciation, celibacy, and detachment are laudable virtues for one who seeks liberation from the cycle of life and death, but the texts on dharma say that begetting children is necessary for salvation. These bimorphic worldviews have to be kept in mind if we are to see the relevancy of philosophical viewpoints such as deep ecology for the Hindu traditions.

On another front, the dissonance between dharma and tattva/moksha texts also accounts for how some Hindu traditions hold the Goddess to be supreme while women do not always have a high position in society. It is true that some theological/tattva texts speak of certain kinds of “oneness” of the universe and in some cases, of the equality of all creation. Some tattva texts speak of the oneness of creation and the Creator, and the absolute identity between the Supreme Being (Brahman) and the human soul (atman) – a oneness which transcends the concept of “equality of many.” This philosophical system of nonduality is considered an important resource for environmental ethics by some Western philosophers, who have interpreted the idea presented in some schools of Hindu philosophy – that there is ultimate oneness of creation – as an affirmation of continuity between human beings and all other life forms. They surmise that because Vedanta philosophy maintains that all life is one, there must be a natural reverence for all things. This generalization, however, does not hold true on two fronts; first, the “oneness” of the universe is a concept seen only in one school of Vedanta (that of Shankara) and secondly, this oneness is only seen when the soul is liberated from the cycle of life and death.

Thus, in Hinduism, the philosophies of Shankara and Ramanuja are relevant to those who seek liberation and are not seen as guides to everyday behavior. Hindu communities, customs, and traditions are ordinarily not established on the sense of oneness or equality found in moksha, but on many hierarchies based on gender, caste, age, economic class and so on. Hindu institutions and eco-activists have therefore found more resources in the narratives found in the dharma texts.

Thus, although some tattva texts contain rich resources for the problems of ecology, population, and consumerism, in the Hindu contexts they have limited power over ethical behavior. While logically the theological/tattva texts ought eventually to translate to human action, the timeframe for such connections would probably be rather long. Texts of dharma, on the other hand, function like law codes in some countries – sometimes not known by the subjects, sometimes followed, sometimes flouted, sometimes ignored, sometimes evaded, sometimes taken to heart as the right thing to do to maintain social stability.

Environmental Activism in the Contemporary Period
In India there has been a fairly long, though sporadic, history of environmental activism. One of the most famous has been the faith of the Bishnoi; and in recent years the Chipko movement and the Narmada Andolan have become well known. The Bishnoi tradition – or as some call it, the eco-religious revolution – was started around 1485 in Samrathal Dhora (north India) by Jambhoji (b. 1451). Jambhoji was said to have been influenced by the pastoral life led by the deity Krishna and is believed to have preached his faith for about 51 years. Of the 120 sayings credited to him, 29 (“bish-noi”) directives are said to be particularly significant. Many adherents today interpret these teachings as promoting biodiversity and the protection of trees.

Some temples like the one at Tirumala Tirupati in south India – the largest and richest temple complex in the country – have also encouraged eco-activism. Billboards saying “Vriksho rakshati: rakshatah” (“Trees protect: Let us protect it”) or “Trees, when protected, protect us”) greet visitors to the sacred pilgrimage town of Tirumala-Tirupati in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

The statement on the billboard is obviously adapted from the Laws of Manu which say that dharma when protected, protects us. In response to the ecological crisis in India, the Venkateswara (“Lord of Venkata Hills”; a manifestation of Lord Vishnu) temple at Tirumala-Tirupati began what is called the Vriksha (tree) Prasada scheme. Whenever a pilgrim visits a temple in India, s/he is given a piece of blessed fruit or food to take home. This is called a prasada or “favor” of the deity.
The Tirumala-Tirupati temple, which is located at an elevation of 3000 feet and was once surrounded by heavy forest, has now established a large nursery on the hills and encourages the pilgrims to take home tree saplings as prasada. But one must also remember that the Tirumala-Tirupati temple is not just any other temple; it is the richest shrine in India and carries with it a great deal of dharmic and financial clout. The nurseries of the Tirumala-Tirupati temple have many varieties of plants, both decorative and those considered to be medically useful. The saplings cultivated are suitable for the soil in various parts of India, and by planting them at home one can have a real piece of the sacred place of Tirumala wherever one lives.

Apart from this public-relations initiative, which one may call an ecology-consciousness-raising venture for the pilgrims, the T.T. Devasthanam (the official bureaucracy of the temple) has also started the Shri Venkateswara Vanabhiswarthi Schemes. The Forestry department of the T.T.D. began this scheme in 1981 and it was initially called the “bioaesthetic plan.” The donation made by the devotee is used for the purchase and planting of trees and plants. The donor is honored by being granted special darshan (viewing of the deity in the inner shrine) and by having his/her name displayed next to the tree that has been planted. Over 2,500,000 indigenous trees are said to have been planted on the hills and the plains as a result of this program. In support of it, the temple itself quotes relevant texts on the importance of trees and, most importantly, honors devotee-participants in this thriving program. Both in texts and in practice, the Hindu traditions and some institutions have encouraged a proactive plan in the planting and protection of trees and plants.

Environmental activists have deployed several religious strategies in the fight against the damming of rivers. Sunderla Bahuguna, a famous environmental activist, says that damming a river is like killing it. In resisting the building of the Tehri Dam in the Himalayas, a seismic zone, he has argued that several holy pilgrimage sites will be destroyed if the dam were to break.

Most of the rivers of India are considered to be female and mountains male. There are exceptions: some rivers like Krishna have male names and some mountains like Nanda Devi bear women’s names. Rivers are perceived to be nurturing (and sometimes judgmental) mothers, feeding, nourishing, quenching, and when angered, flooding the Earth. Hindu girls in India are frequently named after rivers. Rivers are personified as deities. River Ganga is sometimes portrayed as a consort of Lord Shiva. In the south, Kaveri Amman (Mother Kaveri) is the name by which the river is fondly addressed. Hundreds of girls born in the area of Coorg, where the Kaveri has her source, are named after her. In the plains of Tamil Nadu, Kaveri is seen as a devotee and sometimes the consort of Lord Vishnu, and several temples (like Terazhundur, near Kumbakonam) have a striking image of this personified river in the innermost shrine. In the eighth-century Vishnu temple at Tirucherai, a small village near Kumbakonam, River Kaveri is seen as in a maternal posture with a child on her lap.

In the hundreds of grassroots movements around India, leaders like Veer Bhadra Mishra and Sathya Sai Baba, institutions like the World Wide Fund for Nature, and pilgrimage sites such as Badrinath have all used religious narratives, ritual, and values of dharma as ways of successfully motivating Hindus to take action and clean up the environment, plant new trees, and value biodiversity as an integral part of their activities. In many of these movements, women have played a very active role.

**Women and Contemporary Environmental Action**

Beginning in the late twentieth century, activist intellectuals such as Vandana Shiva began to bring together an ecofeminist critique of gender and environment pertinent to India, comparing the denigration of the rivers to the denigration of women at various times in the history of Hindu civilization. Shiva has also eloquently and forcefully explored the ways in which women suffer as “development” destroys forests near their homes. Gruzalski summarizes such dynamics:

Deforestation, as well as replacement of mixed forests with eucalyptus or Chir pine groves, has degraded not only the environment, but also the condition of these women. They often need to spend the entire day gathering fuel and fodder, not only an exhausting task in itself, but one that makes cooking and the care of children more difficult. In addition, deforestation, as well as replacement of mixed forests are destroyed, springs and streams dry up and the women must go further for water. In short, the degradation of the forest environment means more work and suffering for the rural village women (Gruzalski 1993: 107).

Shiva’s argument was that these are “maldevelopment” projects in which “Nature and women are turned into passive objects, to be used and exploited for the uncontrolled and uncontrollable desires of alienated man” (1988: 6), and this argument has been influential globally, especially among ecofeminists. Shiva also works on issues of hazardous wastes, biodiversity conservation, globalization, patenting and intellectual property rights (calling the profiteering of corporations from traditional ecological knowledge “biopiracy”). Often inspired by such critiques, women from diverse social classes have become environmentally active in India. It is not surprising that women, in the Chipko (“hugging trees”) movement for example, have been involved in protecting trees, for they are generally the first to feel the impact of deforestation. In an important development, however, many women from more powerful classes have become influential environmental
activists in their own right, adding their own strengths to the cause.

Women have been actively and creatively involved in communicating the tragedy of ecological disasters and facilitating environmental awareness and action, sometimes using traditional religious art forms, sometimes through mainstream media and technology. Many women, for example, publish regular reports about the ecological crises in India, including ones that draw out the religious dimensions of environmental concern, as does Manushi, a “magazine for women and about women.”

Indian Classical Dance and Environmental Action
Awareness of ecological concerns has also been heightened through the medium of traditional Indian dance, the Bharata Natyam. The theory and practice of classical dance in India (nataashastra) is seen as a religious activity. The birth myth of the dance describes it as the fifth “veda” or sacred knowledge, one that is accessible to all human beings. In other words, dance – indeed, most performing arts – are optional ways to salvation within some Hindu traditions. In the twentieth century, classical dance has also served as a medium for a social commentary on women. Bharata Natyam is now the medium by which other social concerns are being expressed. Mallika Sarabhai, a noted dancer and feminist communicator, has choreographed many dances with environmental themes. She presents in “Shakti: The Power of Women”, the story of the Chipko movement in northern India. Through this medium, audiences around the country, urban and rural, both literate and illiterate, understand quickly the urgency of this message.

Sarabhai’s communication through this art form is not a novel example of innovative dance portraying the courage of the rural women who protect and are protected by the trees – there are other performers who focus on this socially relevant theme. Instead of performances where the central piece highlights the pining of the individual soul for God, some women performers have begun to portray ecologically sensitive messages. Dancers in the United States also have begun to dance to environmental themes.

With the growing awareness of our ecological plight, Hindu communities are pressing into use many dharmic texts and injunctions. They are drawing on the epics and Puranas for inspiration as they plant gardens and revive customary lore regarding the medicinal importance of trees and plants. Women, through song and dance, increasingly communicate about the ways in which environmental deterioration injures both women and nature, and call for environmental protection and restoration, sometimes engaging in direct action resistance to environmentally destructive practices. The philosophic insights of Hinduism may not have been strong enough to prevent environmental disasters, but the dharmic resources have provided rich resources for the sub-continent’s early initiatives to reverse these trends and make the sub-continent green and toxic free.

Vasudha Narayanan

Further Reading


See also: Ahimsa; Amte, Baba; Appiko Movement (India); Art of Living Foundation; Athavale, Pandurang Shastri; Aurobindo, Sri; Bahuguna, Sunderlal; Bhagavadgita; Bishnoi (Rajasthan, India); Buddha; Caves – Sacred (Thailand); Chipko Movement; Creation Myths of the Ancient World; Dance; Dharma – Hindu; Domestication; Elephants; Gandhi, Mohandas; Goshalas; Harris, Marvin; Hinduism and Pollution (and adjacent, River Ganga and the Clean Ganga Campaign); India; Indian Classical Dance; India’s Sacred Groves; Krishnamurti, Jiddhu; Mother Earth; Naess, Arne; Prakriti; Ralegan Siddhi; Re-Earthling; Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; Religious Studies and Environmental Concern; Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement; Seeds in South Asia; Serpents and Dragons; Shakti; Shiva, Vandana; Southeast Asia; Swadhyaya; Tantra; Tantrism in the West; Tehri Dam; Theosophy; Yamuna; Yoga and Ecology.

**Hinduism and Pollution**

The river Ganga, known to Hindus of India as *Mother Ganga*, is sacred. She is a mother, goddess, purifier and sustainer of all life. Along with the Ganga, many other rivers and mountains are considered sacred and powerful in the Hindu worldview. In fact, Hindu sacred sites in India are often located aside rivers or on top of mountains. Yet when considering the Ganga, the less faithful and followers of other religious persuasions consider the river polluted and in some reaches almost dead. To non-believers, the coexistence of sacred purity and environmental pollution appears paradoxical.

Anthropological analysis in India shows that the coexistence of sacred purity and environmental pollution is not paradoxical for Hindus who believe in Ganga’s sacred purity. Hindus talking about sacred purity do not render purity and uncleanness mutually exclusive conceptual categories and conditions. Hindus consider the Ganga a goddess who possesses the power to purify all sorts of human and worldly impurities. They invoke the purifying power of “Ma Ganga” (Mother Ganga) through ritual ablutions, meditation, and worship. They understand Ganga’s deep symbolic history and cite eulogies to her developed in the sacred texts – the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, and *Mahatmyas*. A popular narrative, drawn from a chapter of the *Ramayana*, describes how she descended from heaven on the locks of Lord Siva.

Numerous places of healing and sacred power for Hindus are located along her 2525 kilometer traverse across northern India. In these sacred complexes, pilgrims and residents perform ablutions and undertake the ritual of arati to revere her. Devotees perform arati by waving oil lamps in front of Ganga while standing on the riverbank. The sounds of bells, gongs, drums, and conch shells also play a prominent role in focusing the devotee’s attention
River Ganga and the Clean Ganga Campaign

Scientific assessments of ecological conditions made by government officials often conflict with assessments of ecology made by members of religious organizations and members of non-governmental environmental groups in India. While scientific theories use terms such as biological oxygen demand (BOD) and fecal coliform count (FCC) to indicate river-water-quality conditions, devout Hindus use notions of sacred purity and female forgiveness to talk about a river’s power. In the Ganga river basin, there are marked disagreements between those claiming that the river is polluted and those claiming she is eternally pure. One particular non-governmental organization plays a leading role in bridging these radically different interpretations.

The Sankat Mochan Foundation, a religious trust in Varanasi, spearheads the “Clean Ganga Campaign” (Swatchha Ganga Abhiyan). The campaign is run by three professors who teach engineering at Banaras Hindu University and their local and international support groups. In 1982, they formed an organization called the Clean Ganga Campaign and listed it under a religious institution run by one of its principal members. They have found that the distinction between physical cleanliness and sacred purity is crucial to their environmental message and they evoke it as a way to form a syncretism of Hinduism and science. The importance of this distinction is evident in their organization’s name. They use the word svaccha, which they spell swatchha, to show that they are an organization concerned with physical cleanliness rather than sacred purity. But campaign members are not removed from religious concerns. The leading member of the group is the head priest of a religious institution, the Sankat Mochan Foundation. This organization manages the Sankat Mochan Temple, an important Hindu temple where the saint-poet Tulsi Das received his vision of Hanuman, the monkey-god of the Ramayana. The leaders explain that their concern is with the impact of waste on the physical Ganga. They do not contest or seek to denigrate her eternal sacred purity. However, while they revere Ganga through worship rituals in their private lives, they do not claim to promote a revitalization of such rituals through their own organization work.

Although there is no large-scale environmental movement in Varanasi today, campaign members continue to work from their unique position bridging Hinduism and science. They engage in direct confrontation with government officials in the Ganga Project Directorate using scientific arguments. Yet they also understand the deep religious connection to the river goddess and respect her purificatory power. However, this bridging of perspectives is not appreciated by either the Ganga Project Directorate or Hindu pilgrim priests in Varanasi. Instead, government officials and pilgrim priests appear skeptical about the sincerity of any party’s desire to respect Ganga’s purity or prevent her pollution. Pilgrim priests see sewage treatment plants and projects as vehicles for state moneymaking, and complain that pollution prevention work “on paper” has not made any real progress. The Clean Ganga Campaign provides scientific evidence for the argument that officials have not adequately capped the drains feeding wastewater into the Ganga. Pilgrim priests agree with this, though their evidence rests on what they consider to be temporary conditions of material uncleanness, not sacred impurity. Pilgrim priests are not active in the Clean Ganga Campaign, and appear alienated by scientific concepts that do not match up with their own worldview. All concerned citizens acknowledge that sewage treatment and public activity on the riverbank fall well short of keeping human uncleanness away from the river. But when pilgrim priests and other residents of Varanasi face the vacant meanings of scientific concepts and witness blunders in official projects, the divide between them and environmental scientists and officials widens. Bridging science, religion and official policy and practice in this context is an extremely difficult task, but the Clean Ganga Campaign members are determined to continue their efforts.

Kelly D. Alley

Further Reading


on the sacredness of the river. The festivals of Ganga Dussehra and Ganga Saptami celebrate her purifying power and please her immensely. When Ganga is pleased, she blesses the faithful and purifies their minds and souls. Hindus of the sacred city of Varanasi consider that the following elements entering the Ganga are unclean (gandagi): dirty water from drains (nals), industrial waste, household trash, soap from bathing and washing clothes, human excrement from “doing latrine” on the riverbank, and betelnut (pana) spit. Many consider that
material dirtiness and bodily wastes have only a temporary impact on Ganga, making her unclean at a particular stretch. Sacred texts and popular manuals on pilgrimage, spiritual life and good conduct communicate ideas about distancing unclean bodily functions from pure-water bodies. They direct people to distance some everyday human processes such as defecation, brushing teeth, spitting, and washing clothes from the riverbank. Yet at many sacred places that border sacred rivers, while pilgrims perform ablutions, others wash clothes with soap, a pilgrim priest spits, an old woman “does latrine” on the riverbank (for lack of public facilities), and urban sewage flows into the river. Material uncleanness surrounds the people who seek purification.

The Hindu practice of cremation on the banks of sacred rivers aims to reduce the corpse to the five basic elements of existence: fire, air, water, ether, and Earth. Hindus use the words asuddha or apavitra to describe the state of impurity brought on by corpses and cremation, and they tie these notions to ritual and cosmic order. According to Hindu concepts of death, dead bodies, per se, are not problematic for Ganga because she has always accepted the bodies of holy men (sadhus), children, lepers, and smallpox victims, who are by rule not cremated. But pilgrim priests point out that some corpses found floating down the Ganga fall outside this acceptable category. This indicates a lapse in the respect for ritual order.

Some Hindus include uncremated or partially cremated corpses in the category of dirtiness (gandagi) they enunciate. At first glance, dead bodies in the Ganga represent another example of how the unclean is in the immediate vicinity of sacred purity. The issue is more confusing, however, because corpses are carriers of ritual impurity as well. When mentioning uncremated bodies dumped in the Ganga, Hindus conflate notions of ritual impurity and physical uncleanness. Moreover, government officials use floating corpses as key symbols in their assessments of river pollution.

Hindu pilgrim priests firmly believe that dead bodies do not threaten Ganga’s spiritual integrity. But they fear that industrial waste, or more generally dirty water from drains, may have a harmful impact over time, by making the Ganga asvachcha or physically unclean. Still residents insist that gandagi cannot alter Ganga’s power to give liberation (mukti or moksa) and purify the ashes of the deceased. This power is eternal and not subject to fluctuations in material reality. As long as humans demonstrate their reverence through ritual ablation, arati, and other forms of worship, Ganga will remain happy. As long as she is happy, she will purify the cosmos, soul, body, and heart. But even if, in theory, Ganga’s purificatory power remains eternal, Hindus who express concern about their personal health when bathing appear disturbed by gandagi.

Hindus also conceive of the river in feminine terms, linking femininity with motherliness, housekeeping, clean-up, and forgiveness. Hindus will remark that Ganga, a good mother, cleans up the messes her children make and forgives them lovingly. In this way, she cleans up other kinds of dirtiness people bring to her and excuses dirty behavior with maternal kindness. Ganga is forgiving rather than angry about human dirtiness. By attributing a forgiving nature to Ganga, environmental activists argue, Hindus undermine pollution-prevention activities. Environmental activists argue that this view of sacred purity and loving tolerance leads to a passive acceptance of polluting behavior. However, these very activists understand that revising the deep religious association between water and womanhood to include human responsibility for Ganga’s well-being is difficult indeed. Hindus link morality to gandagi but do not find that the Ganga participates in the sin-game (pap-lila) of humans. This means that she is unaffected by the sins of humans and not motivated toward retaliation. She did, after all, descend to Earth to wash away those very misdeeds.

Kelly D. Alley

Further Reading

See also: Ahimsa; Appiko Movement (India); Bhagavadgita; Dharma–Hindu; Hinduism; India; Prakriti; Tehri Dam; Yamuna.

Hippies

The counterculture that blossomed in the Western world in the late 1960s and early 1970s had as a major theme a romantic love of nature. The hippies were sharply critical of the degradation of the environment that had accompanied the development of industrial and technological society. The seeming human desire to master nature was, the hippies argued, a fatal mistake; instead, one should realize that human beings were simply part of nature’s flow and should seek to become one with that flow rather than swimming upstream.

The hippie writings that took industrial society to task at length were often influenced by Asian religious thought and certain strains in American Indian religion. Many hippies read Asian religious classics avidly (the
From its early days in the mid-1960s, the counterculture counted many in its midst whose desire for natural living embraced a desire to leave the city and live in a rural area, preferably one as remote as possible. Many hippies fled the cities as individuals and families, seeking peaceful and natural lives on homesteads that would be as self-sufficient as possible. Others sought companionship in the rural quest and founded thousands of communes in scattered locales from coast to coast. From their earliest days the hip communes displayed strong natural leanings; Tolstoy Farm (1963, Washington state), for example, worked toward self-sufficiency using old, non-motorized tools, and Drop City (1965, Colorado) consisted of about a dozen domes pieced together largely from discarded construction and junkyard scrap to create a place where one could live apart from modern industrial society.

The counterculture began to disappear as a distinct cultural phenomenon in the middle to late 1970s, but its legacy lives on in Western society. Its waning days coincided with the rise of neo-paganism and Wicca, and many hippies pursued their love of nature within that framework. The desire of hippies to avoid processed food and large supermarket and restaurant chains helped the previously tiny health-food industry mushroom into an extensive international network of natural food stores, many of them run cooperatively, and health-oriented restaurants, generally small local proprietorships. The passion of the hippies for the preservation of the environment helped cultivate the ground for the international environmental movement found in all Western countries today. The countercultural sense of love for and enhancement of the human body has been an important feeder of the modern bodywork movement that ranges from reflexology to yoga to rolfing. The desire to get out of the cities and back to the land is embodied in the thousands, probably millions, who live in rural locations and, in thousands of cases, in communes, hundreds of which founded by the hippies survive today. It is fair to conclude that the countercultural love of nature contributed substantially to later natural interests and commitments in the larger society.

Timothy Miller

Further Reading
Hogan, Linda (1947–)

Native American writer Linda Hogan, born in 1947 in Denver, Colorado, grew up in Oklahoma among a Chickasaw family with a vigorous storytelling tradition. The award-winning author of numerous poetry and short-story collections, novels, essays, and most recently a memoir, *The Woman Who Watches Over the World* (2001), Hogan has also coedited three important anthologies of women’s writing on spirituality and the natural world. Hogan considers herself primarily an environmental writer; her work emerges from a pan-Indian tradition of reverence for nature, an interest in physics and biology, years of volunteer work in wildlife preservation, and an ecofeminist orientation that links the exploitation of women, natives, animals, and the Earth.

Much of Hogan’s work focuses on the dispossession of indigenous peoples that began with the European conquest of North America and persists in contemporary land and resource appropriation. Her first novel, *Mean Spirit* (1990), is set during the “Osage Reign of Terror,” a series of murders of Osage people for their land and oil rights during the Oklahoma oil boom of the 1920s. Her second and third novels are also based on historical events – *Solar Storms* (1995) on Cree resistance to the Canadian government’s James Bay hydro-electric project in the 1970s, and *Power* (1998) on the killing of an endangered Florida panther in the Everglades. Each is a female quest narrative in which an abused and alienated mixed-blood teenager undertakes a wilderness journey, remaking her identity as she negotiates new relationships with history, place, and a community resisting the devastating effects of “progress.” Environmental justice, Hogan suggests, is predicated on a recovery of human embeddedness in nature that recognizes the sentience, agency, and voices of the natural world.

Hogan traces the current environmental crisis to a “broken covenant” between humans and world that originated in Christianity’s dominion theology and Enlightenment values of abstraction, objectivism, and materialism. Language, Hogan believes, has the power to heal the splits between humans and nature, mind and body that are written on the bodies of women, natives and Earth, a power she realizes most effectively in *The Book of Medicines* (poetry 1993) and the lyrical prose of *Solar Storms* and *Dwellings* (essays 1995). Drawing parallels between indigenous cosmologies and post-modern science, between tribal oral narratives and the stories of Christianity, Hogan enfolds Western dualistic discourses within a reimagined indigenous worldview of interconnectedness and participation. Her recent work continues the project of rewriting the Bible begun in *Mean Spirit* by Osage healer Michael Horse, whose “Gospel According to Horse” corrects the Christian “mistake” that gives man dominion over nature; *Solar Storms* adds the “lost days of creation,” which give humans their place in relationship to stories, the animals, and Earth. Hogan regrounds, feminizes, and “heterarchicalizes” (i.e., levels hierarchical relationships in; see Murphy 1995) the stories of Western culture, writing into being a new spirituality that is inclusive, process-oriented and evolving.

Ellen L. Arnold

**Further Reading**


See also: Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism; Memoir and Nature Writing; Silko, Leslie Marmon.

**Holidays**

The holiday is a time of celebration that interrupts the normal business and legal cycle. It is mandated either by law or custom and usually commemorates or honors a particular event or person – whether hero, saint or deity. The holiday would appear to have grown out of the feasts originally connected with the observance of rites of passage marking the important transitions in the life of the individual: birth, naming, circumcision, adulthood, marriage, pregnancy, death and post-mortem commemoration. As a parallel to celebrating the significant stages of the person, the holiday more collectively became a means to recognize the turning points of the year: solstices, equinoxes, full and new moons. Consequently, the festival is a social institution that affirms the cycles of both men and women as well as that of nature. As a communal expression, it extends in addition to remembering...
fortuitous occasions for the community, religion and state and also the significant events in the lives of the gods.

As collective celebrations, holidays undoubtedly originate with commemorating the food supply and its production upon which the community depended: first-fruit ceremonies and harvest festivals. First-fruits were offered to whomever was deemed responsible for the crops, fish and/or animals: nature spirits, the gods, the priests as their representatives, the king or the ancestors. These offerings were intended to ensure the protection of produce in its maturation process. The harvest ceremonies commemorated the other end of the cycle: its completion and the death of vegetation. Symbolically, the suspension of fertility was represented in the withdrawal of the Earth Mother of nature or her child to the underworld. The harvest festival was both a time of concern for the fertility of the future and of rejoicing for the current bounty. Although festivals have continued to be augmented through additional occasions on which to commemorate an illustrious civic contributor or those memorials of national thanksgiving, disaster and armistice, at their base are the seasonal observations that honor the round of nature and humanity’s intimate connection with it.

Nevertheless, with the increased urbanization of Western culture, the natural festival continues to undergo radical transformation. This process began already with the shift away from spontaneous pagan sensitivities that occurred in Judea and Christian Europe. For instance, Jewish harvest festivals suppressed their primitive fertility features and became occasions simply for jubilation. Pagan vernal and Yule celebrations were converted into the Christian holidays of Easter and Christmas – to which were added the feasts of Pentecost, Epiphany, the Ascension, All Souls as well as those of the saints and the Virgin. But as the Christian ascendency already indicates a restriction of the sacred when compared to the notions of immanence held by its pagan predecessor, contemporary times in the twentieth century and beyond are increasingly characterized by secularization. This decline of religion can be witnessed in the suspension of prohibition against business trade on Sundays and in the transference of commemorative celebrations to the closest Monday. This drive toward greater efficiency and non-interruption to the business/working week is a far cry from the original holiday impulse that in pagan times allowed one to become accustomed to interruptions of normal life “which broke up the calendar and honoured the gods” (Fox 1986: 67). As Fox recognizes from this, “Pagan cults created the divisions of civic time” (Fox 1986: 67). The merrymaking and feasting associated with these civic breaks of the holiday relate to the original idea of carnival as a time-outside-time. The festival and carnival represent suspensions of the ordinary and/or intrusions of the special and the holy.

Consequently, the holiday provides an occasion for both the individual and community to step outside normal routine and view things from a different perspective. In the gaining of new insights and understandings, a person or collective experiences the possibility of regenerative renewal. For many people today in Western societies, with the diminishment of religious if not also municipal and national significance within the accepted calendar of established holidays, along with the increased sense of urban alienation, the framework of legal days of interruption become opportunities to visit national parks and reserves in order to commune with nature and regain a sense of the natural and holistic. Increasingly, as people today lose a sense of the religious associated with traditional holidays, these times of commemoration become instead windows through which the sanctity of nature is often rediscovered.

Michael York

Further Reading
See also: Pagan Calendar.

Holism

Holism, coined in 1926 by the South African philosopher and statesman Jan Christiaan Smuts in his work *Holism and Evolution* (1926), is a modern term for an ancient concept (known under differing names as the whole, to holon, or totality) that refers to a whole, composed of many parts, or in its modern usage, to a greater whole than the individual parts of which it is composed. Modern concepts of holism then describe a comprehensive worldview that produces order and coherence not only among the sciences, but also in the realms of ecology, politics, aesthetics, theology, and morals. Indeed it provides meaning for the parts and the whole as they mutually and reciprocally influence and modify each other. Holism, in reaction to much contemporary scientific reductionism, not only stresses relationship, but in addition introduces concepts of history and teleology into the scientific worldview.

Holism was reconceptualized temporally through the influence of Christianity, in particular through the notion of the three historical ages advanced by the twelfth-century mystic Joachim de Fiore. His views prefigured later socialist and Marxist understandings of society. Antonio Gramsci held that socialism was an “integral vision of life” because it included not only the economy,
but also a philosophy, a mysticism, and a morality. This vision was developed particularly by Western Marxists such as Ernst Bloch, who included nature as an essential element. While certainly anthropocentric, this was rooted in a cosmic vision of wholeness that went far beyond the Marxism of his time. His work Principle of Hope was to deeply influence German political theologians such as Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, who both linked nature to the Christian conception of hope and promise of eschatology that points to God’s guidance of the whole. Both these theologians were to influence early liberation theologians.

Smuts coined the term holism to express his philosophical doctrine according to which the universe is understood as an evolutionary process that produces wholes of ever-increasing complexity and self-awareness. The constituent parts are such that their totality is greater than the sum of their individual parts. Not only is the concept of holism conceived of as a process of synthesis, (chemical analogies are used to indicate the creation of more inclusive wholes), but it is also combined with a deep belief in personalism. For Smuts, personality was the highest level of development in an ever-developing universe. This included belief in the value of the individual, and in love as the force that brought humans together in associations. Holism then for Smuts, as for others in the Western philosophical tradition, represented a reaction against the mechanist conceptions of science and the accompanying individualistic fragmentation that marked much of the modern worldview. Against such reductionism, holism understands all the elements of the human whole as continuous with each other, the world, and the whole universe. The part rather is a manifestation of a prior whole. The human personality is the center of self-determination and evolution comprises the achievement of higher forms of self-determination, resulting in an inner cosmos where the part is more related to the whole than to the constituent parts. Such spirituality in turn gives purpose to the whole. This almost mystical perception enables the individual to strive to the whole through the struggles and negations of existence.

Whether as a normative or as a descriptive term, holism or wholism or totality remained a critical concept in ecology, psychology, the natural sciences and theological movements in the late twentieth century. These are ably synthesized and presented in the recent works of Leonardo Boff which draw directly on Smuts’ concept. Boff utilizes holism to present an ecological theology which offers an integrated vision of all reality. Such a paradigm stresses the interrelatedness and complexity of all being and is expressed through the metaphor of the Spirit. This paradigm avoids the errors of past Western thought and their accompanying cosmologies, namely: the Theocentric (understood as hierarchical and whose metaphor is the organic chain of being) and the modern or Anthropocentric (understood as objective and rational and whose metaphor is the machine). Holism thus, ever since Aristotle, has implied hierarchy and subordination and modern reconceptualizations have sought to address these facets, with varying degrees of success.

Iain S. Maclean

Further Reading

See also: Boff, Leonardo; Christianity (7b) – Political Theology; Descartes, René; Dualist Heresies; Ecofascism; Haeckel, Ernst; Smuts, Jan Christiaan.

The Holocaust and the Environmental Crisis

On Holocaust memorials we often proclaim that we will “never forget.”

Yet when we discover the myriad radiation experiments done on unknowing subjects and communities in support of the Cold War, do we remember the medicalized torture of children in Auschwitz?

When our communities face pesticide-spraying airplanes, dioxin-spewing industrial chimneys, chemical food contaminants, and leaking landfills, do we remember the Zyklon B flowing into the gas chambers?

When we listen to our children cough, and wonder why so many have asthma, and continue a way of life that creates the air pollution that weakens their lungs, do we remember how well-meaning, passive bystanders helped make the Holocaust possible?

When we hear about the countless indigenous peoples with monstrous cancer rates because of uranium mining on their land, or victims of cultural genocide because their forest homes were turned into so many board feet of lumber, their villages dispossessed in the name of some mindless “development” scheme – do we remember how the world (most of the Allied governments, the Catholic Church, the spokespeople for great and noble causes) managed to ignore what was happening to the Jews?

When we see how the assault on the rainforest eliminates dozens of species of trees that have been evaluated as having potential for cancer treatment (even for the cancers that may afflict those who direct the assault), do
we remember how the German government made transporting the Jews to the death camps their first priority, even when that priority interfered with their own military goals?

When we hear of a corporation lying to the public to protect a toxic chemical it sells, or paying off a legislator to get some environmental regulations weakened, do we remember how the Nazi elite got rich off Jewish slave labor?

When we see the full force of our own denial of the ecological dangers surrounding us, do we remember that it was thought impossible — especially by the victims! — that a modern, industrialized state could systematically slaughter millions of unarmed civilians?

Some years ago, Holocaust survivor Eli Wiesel, commenting on the potentially final ecological catastrophe of nuclear war, said: “It seems that the whole world has become Jewish” (in a television interview about the television movie The Day After).

Wiesel was not saying that a nuclear war would have been just like the Holocaust. And neither is the environmental crisis “just like it.” Despite the obvious differences, however, the Holocaust can serve as a warning. This is so because there are several important analogies between the two events. Both the Holocaust and ecocide depend on highly developed technology and large, impersonal bureaucracies; and both reveal how irrational modernity can be. They disclose a profound inability to empathize with other people and other forms of life and express a vision of human relationships keyed to domination and exploitation. That is why the Holocaust and ecocide both call into question many of the basic premises of our civilization. Religious traditions, family structure, forms of personal identity, and distribution of economic and political power are all rendered suspects when humanity’s way of life undermines its own survival.

While the Holocaust involved the centralized, strategically planned annihilation of a particular group, ecocide stems from myriad sources and is not anyone’s self-proclaimed goal. It happens because corporations pursue profit, governments develop military power, ordinary citizens seek a “better lifestyle,” and peasants deforest hillsides so they can cook dinner. From these varying strategies for profit, power, pleasure, or simple survival comes the ruin of the world. Yet what the Holocaust does reveal, and part of what connects the two events, is just how devastating modern states, bureaucracies, and technologies can be; and thus how carefully we “ordinary men and women” must examine our participation in them. It is precisely the “normal” and “ordinary” that may be the most terrible.

We also can learn in this context that while environmentalists’ direst predictions must always be evaluated in detail, they cannot be dismissed out of hand due to a mistaken confidence that governments and corporations would not commit mass murder; or that intelligent citizens might not just sit back and let it all happen. After Auschwitz, such confidence makes little sense. In a way, the Holocaust “prepares” us to take in the fact of ecocide, teaching that there is virtually no limit to human folly, lust for power, and bureaucratic complicity in mass murder. The slaughter of six million Jews and five million other victims, carried out coldly and “rationally” by civil servants and professionals as well as politicians and soldiers by a “legitimate” government and with the sanction or passive acceptance of much of the rest of the world, is an omen for the environmental ruin we are creating now. This time, however, the catastrophe may spread far beyond the borders of any particular community, nation or region.

Also, both events depend on a complex structure of aggressors, victims, and bystanders. Thus both raise particularly complicated moral questions about good and evil, guilt and innocence, responsibility and forgiveness.

Finally, in both settings people facing overwhelming odds have fought back. The presence of this resistance can help change the way we think about both the Holocaust and the environmental crisis — transforming them from examples of unrelieved horror to settings in which, despite everything, people managed to resist.

As an example of the connections between the Holocaust and the environmental crisis, consider the history of Zyklon B.

Zyklon B was the gas used on Jews in the death camps. It came to the attention of a young SS officer as Auschwitz was starting to operate. Remembering how a Hamburg pesticide firm had fumigated the insect-laden Polish army barracks that the SS had taken over, Hauptsturmführer Fritsch decided to try the pesticide on people. It worked well enough. The next move — from killing insects and rodents with a powerful chemical to killing millions of Jews the same way — was not very difficult. The Nazi leadership believed, after all, that Jews were vermin, and that the “health” of Germany required that the Jews be exterminated.

Ironically, while the Nazi machine has long been defeated, the use of chemical pesticides still threatens human beings; and the notion that “vermin” can simply be exterminated without any ill effects on those of us left alive has led to widespread poisoning of many life forms — including our own. Pesticides kill people even when they are aimed at bugs. In agricultural communities throughout the world, for instance, water supplies are tainted by pesticide run-offs. In some areas so much has accumulated in women’s bodies that breast milk is legally considered too dangerous to feed infants. And breast-fed babies have more than three times the amount of the toxic PCBs in their bloodstream as bottle-fed infants.

What is common, then, is the logic of extermination. The challenge is to learn from the Holocaust the con-
sequences of using modern forms of power in the pursuit of extermination – whether of people, bugs, weeds or anything else.

Roger S. Gottlieb

See also: Fascism; Judaism.

**Holy Land in Native North America**

What is sacred? That is a question asked in courtrooms, administrative hearings, and city council meetings across the country. In the end there is no absence of irony: indeed, the oppressed must go to the Court or administrative hearing process of the oppressor to quantify exactly how sacred something is in North America. Nowhere is the discussion more passionate than the debate over the preservation and protection of sacred sites.

Chris Peters, a Pohik-la from northern California, discusses the distinction between native spiritual practices and Abrahamic religious traditions as having different paradigms. Native spiritual practices are “affirmation-based religions,” while Abrahamic religious systems are “commemorative religions,” in terms of a broad definition (author’s discussion with Peters, 8 June 1992). Native American religious and spiritual practices are often based on the reaffirmation of the relationship of the human to the creation. Native oral traditions often tell of the place of the “little brother” (i.e., the humans) in the larger creation, and consequently, our need to be continuously thankful for our part in creation; the gifts given to us by the Creator are always underscored. These teachings are reinforced in Midewiwin lodges, Sun Dance ceremonies, world renewal ceremonies and many others. Abrahamic religious teachings and events frequently commemorate a set of historic events: Easter, Christmas, Passover, Hannukah, as examples within two of the dominant religious practices in the world.

The difference in the paradigms of these spiritual practices has, over time, become a source of great conflict in the Americas. The history of religious colonialism, including the genocide perpetrated by the Catholic Church (particularly in Latin America), is a wound from which native communities have not yet healed. And, the notion that other non-Christian spiritual practices could have validity was entirely ignored for centuries. Consequently, while there may be some “sacred sites” in Abrahamic religious traditions, for instance the “holy land” in modern-day Israel/Palestine, the existence of other “holy lands” has been denied.

There is a place on the shore of Lake Superior, or Gichi Gummi, where the Giant laid down to sleep. There is a place in Zuni’s alpine prairie, where the Salt Woman moved, and hoped to rest. There is a place in the heart of Lakota territory where the people go to vision quest and remember the children who ascended from there to the sky and became the Pleiades. There is a place known as the Falls of a Woman’s Hair, which is the epicenter of a salmon culture. And there is a mountain upon which the Anishinabeg rested during their migration, and looked back to find the place they were instructed to go by their prophets.

A “holy land” cannot be exclusive in a multicultural and multispiritual society; yet indeed it has been treated as such. Papal Law became the foundation of colonialism, the Church a handmaiden to military, economic, and spiritual genocide and domination. In their time, each subsequent pope would pass new papal bulls, all underscoring the legitimacy of Christian manifest destiny. Those papal bulls underscored the supremacy of Christendom, and ostensibly authorized the practices of colonialism. All of that carried over to the Americas, with perhaps some of the most virulent and disgraceful manifestations of dominance beginning the process of colonization in the Americas.

Indeed, xenophobia and a deep fear of native spiritual practices became the centerpiece of early reservation policy as native religious expression was outlawed in North America. To practice your traditional form of worship was tantamount to a death sentence for many peoples. The Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 occurred in large part because of the fear of the Ghost Dance Religion which had spread into the Lakota nation, and hundreds of Lakota, and other native spiritual leaders, were sent to the Hiawatha Asylum for Insane Indians in present-day Canton, South Dakota, just for their spiritual beliefs. So it was by necessity that native spiritual practitioners went deep into the woods, or into the heartland of their territory, to keep up their traditions, always knowing that their job was to keep alive their instructions, and hence, their way of life.

In 1978, some two hundred years after the American constitution guaranteed freedom of religion for most Americans, Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act and President Carter signed it into law. Although the act contains worthy language which seemed to reflect the founders’ concepts of religious liberty, it had few teeth. The act states:

It shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut and native Hawaiians, including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonial and traditional rites . . .

While the law insured that native people could hold many of their ceremonies (although Native American Church
ceremonies remained challenged), it did not insure the protection of the places where many of these ceremonial practices would take place, or the protection of that which is needed for the ceremonies, such as salt from the sacred Salt Mother for Zuni ceremonies, salmon from the Columbia River for Columbia River Tribes, or the sanctity of these places from desecration whether by rock climbers or bulldozers. The Religious Freedom Act was underscored with President Clinton’s 1996 Executive Order 13007, for preservation of sacred sites:

In managing federal lands, each executive branch agency with statutory or administrative responsibility for the management of Federal lands shall . . . avoid adversely affecting the physical integrity of such sacred sites . . .

Those protections were applied to lands held by the federal government, not by private interests, although many sacred sites advocates have urged compliance by other landholders to the spirit and intent of the law. The administration of George H.W. Bush, however, has ignored that Executive Order.

Dr. Henrietta Mann is a Northern Cheyenne woman and chair of the Native American Studies Department at Montana State University. She reiterates the significance of the natural world to native spiritual teaching:

Over the time we have been here, we have built cultural ways on and about this land. We have our own respected versions of how we came to be. These origin stories – that we emerged or fell from the sky or were brought forth – connect us to this land and establish our realities, our belief systems. We have spiritual responsibilities to renew the Earth and we do this throughout Ceremonies so that our Mother, the Earth, can continue to support us. Mutuality and respect are part of our tradition – give and take. Somewhere along the way, I hope people will learn that you can’t just take, that you have to give back to the land (Taliman 2002).

So, we have a problem of two separate spiritual paradigms, and one dominant culture. Make that a dominant culture with an immense appetite for natural resources. The exponential growth of the U.S. economy for two centuries was largely related to the expropriation of Native American lands and resources, as colonialism would be replaced with neo-colonialism, but each step of the way requiring more land to feed the growing industrial infrastructure. The U.S. consumes one-third of the world’s resources. To create that level of consumption a significant level of production had to occur, much of it on and from native people’s lands. By the 1930s, the native land base had been reduced to 52 million acres, or about 4 percent of our original land base. Indeed, we saw some 90 million acres taken by the federal government from native people just from 1889–1934, and within all of those takings, more than 75 percent of our sacred sites were removed from our care and jurisdiction.

Native people must now request permission, quite often to use their own sacred sites, and, more often than not, find that those sacred sites are in danger of being obliterated, or just simply desecrated.

To complicate the challenge of attempting to maintain your spiritual practice in a new millennium is the problem of the destruction of that which you need for your ceremonial practice. The destruction of 50 million buffalo in the Great Plains by the beginning of the twentieth century caused immense hardship for traditional spiritual practices of the region, especially since the Pte Oyate, the buffalo nation, are the older brothers of the Lakota, and many other indigenous cultures of the region. Similarly, the decimation of the salmon on the Columbia, Klamath and other rivers in the northwest by huge dam projects, overfishing, water diversion, and logging has caused great emotional, social and spiritual devastation to the Yakama, Wasco, Umatilla, Nez Perce and many other peoples of the region. New efforts to domesticate, patent and genetically modify wild rice similarly concern the Anishinaabeg people of the Great Lakes region.

In terms of struggles over sacred sites in the United States, there are many which are ongoing, although some have been resolved, favorably, at least for now. The Valley of the Chiefs in Montana was almost destroyed by an oil drilling project, but was protected, at the last minute, by the concerted efforts and organizing of many. Containing one of the largest collections of sacred pictographs on the continent, it contains a refuge for those involved in many ceremonies. Threatened by oil drilling, a campaign of opposition by the Crow, Comanche, Lakota, Blackfeet, Northern Cheyenne and a host of environmental groups led to the donation of oil leases to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, after which the Bureau of Land Management followed suit, withdrawing an additional 4200 acres in the area from the mineral leasing process. During the battle, the coalition against the mining was able to leverage support of U.S. congressional representative Nick Rahall of West Virginia, who introduced legislation to protect the Valley of the Chiefs, terming the proposal to drill something like “erecting an oil derrick in the Sistine Chapel.”

Medicine Lake rests high in the northern California mountains and is held sacred by the Pit River, Modoc, Shasta, Karuk and Wintu people. The Pit River people recall that after creating the Earth, the Creator and his son bathed in the waters of the lake. And then, the Creator imparted his spirit to Medicine Lake. That water is used for ceremonies, and the entire area is recognized as a place to train medicine people from the region. In 1999 a coalition...
of tribes successfully petitioned the National Register of Historic Places to recognize the Medicine Lake Caldera as a Traditional Cultural District. The Calpine Corporation proposed a geothermal project in the area, with the hopes of harnessing enough steam power to run as many as six power plants. Court and administrative battles went on until California’s energy “crisis” created a political climate making it possible for the Bush Administration to site a $120 million, 48 megawatt geothermal power plant at Telephone Flat, one mile from Medicine Lake.

Zuni Salt Lake rests peacefully within the domain of the Great Salt Mother. It is here, among purple mesas, lush grasses, and tenacious trees, that Zuni Salt Lake rises majestically in the center of a gentle sanctuary. She is called Ma;Oyattsik’dii by the people of Zuni pueblo, and stories are remembered of her movement to her present resting place, across the land. Today, great pilgrimages are taken by the men, not only of Zuni, but of neighboring Acoma pueblo, Dine Biit Kaya, or Navajo land, Apache, and other neighboring peoples to collect salt for their ceremonial life, indeed, their lifeblood. That is perhaps why A:shiwi A:wan Ma’k’yay’a dap an’ulapna Dek’ohanna Dehyakya Dehwanne exists, a 185,000-acre sanctuary, from time immemorial.

The Salt River Project, however, the nation’s third largest public utility, is running out of coal at the McKinley mine near Gallup, New Mexico. The company has its sights on 80 million tons of coal just 11 miles from the lake, with the proposed 8000 acre Fence Lake Mine, and the state is supporting the proposed mining. Despite protests by native nations and the environmental community, it appears the mining will be permitted.

Black Mesa is located in the heartland of the Colorado Plateau, and is the region’s largest and most productive watershed. It is also a coal body, representing at its prime over 22 billion tons of coal. But the largest community in the area, Tuba City, receives only a scant seven inches of rainfall annually. The Navajo Aquifer is the sole source of dependable drinking water for the region. Hence, the combination of massive mining development, combined with the use of water from the aquifer, has been a huge blow to the ecology of the region. For the past 35 years, 1.3 billion gallons of pristine water annually has been sucked from the Navajo Aquifer, just to move coal. Peabody, with its affiliate, the Black Mesa Pipeline Company, ship approximately 5 million tons of coal in a pulverized powder-like consistency pushed by up to 4500 gallons of water a minute some 273 miles west to the Mohave Generating Station in Nevada.

The irony of waste is not lost on the Hopi. Vernon Masseyseva is a former Chairman of the Hopi tribe and is now executive director of Black Mesa Trust, a non-profit organization focused on trying to prevent the destruction of the Black Mesa aquifer.

Masseyseva explains that one billion gallons of the ancient, sacred water has been fouled beyond reclamation or evaporates each year in Nevada’s desert skies. Hopi could live on this water for 100 years. Thirty years after the mining began, water levels in some Black Mesa wells have dropped more than 100 feet, and many of the springs are dry. Hopis contend that by the year 2011, the dewatering will leave the Hopi village of Moenkopi without water.

Bear Butte: Mato Paha. There is nothing quite like Bear Butte, as it looms high on the horizon in the heart of Paha Sapa, the Black Hills, the heartland of the Great Plains, and indeed the Lakota universe. A new proposal forwarded by the city of Sturgis, South Dakota (home of the Black Hills Classic, Sturgis Motorcycle race) has plans to build a sports complex and shooting range four miles from Bear Butte, which will lead to 10,000 rounds per day of gunshots from rifles and handguns. The range will negatively impact the serenity sought by the native people who go to Bear Butte to pray and conduct vision quests. The region’s tribes were never consulted about the project and are now fighting its development in an effort to protect Mato Paha.

Spirit Mountain. When the Ojibwe migrated from eastern North America to the west, each of the resting places provided a time for deliberation. It is said that we came to Spirit Mountain, and from there we were able to see our final resting place: Moningwanakwining, now called Madeline Island. The Anishinaabeg journeyed to this Mountain. Then, we were able to understand our instructions and view our destiny. The Anishinaabeg are not the Jews. We did not have a Moses and the tablets of stone. Yet, in Christian analogies, it is perhaps possible that Spirit Mountain would be for us akin to Mt. Sinai. For years, the city of Duluth has grown in the shadow of Spirit Mountain, but in the past few years, the City Council has taken an interest in supporting development of a world-class golf course on Spirit Mountain. Almost every Ojibwe tribal government in the region, and hundreds of individuals, have opposed the project, and during the summer of 2002, Ojibwe traditional spiritual practitioners came to the Duluth City Council meetings to present their concerns about the issue. They were told by one councilman that the Ojibwe migration story was a fabrication, he having read that the Ojibwe first saw this land, and the Spirit Mountain, when brought to the region on boats by explorers. Others asked the Ojibwe to identify which parts of the Mountain were sacred so that mitigation might occur. Such is the problem of quantifying the sacred and presenting a native worldview.

Dzel Nchaa sian or Mt. Graham rises 10,700 feet up from its base in Arizona’s Sonoran Desert, a home to clouds at the top, and streams and flowing hot springs at its base. It is an oasis in the midst of a desert. It is also one of the largest mountains in the state, a part of the Pinaleño Range. Consequentially, in part because of both location and height, Mt. Graham possesses more life zones and
vegetative communities than any other solitary mountain in North America. Within those vegetative zones, live three species of mammals, three species of flowering plants, three species of snails, a mollusk and many anthropods that have never been found anywhere else in the world.

Mt. Graham is also central to Apache spiritual practices, the source of many of their medicines, and the home of deities. It is also a sacred mountain for other native groups in the region. In a battle spanning more than a decade and despite opposition by the Apaches and dozens of national and international environmental groups, in 2004 three telescopes stood on Mt. Graham. Interestingly, one was built by the Vatican Observatory to listen in on the heavens and search for extraterrestrial intelligence, in part motivated by the quest to evangelize any who might be found. As the Jesuit director of the observatory told a reporter, they intended to ask extraterrestrial life forms if they knew “a Jesus who has redeemed” them (in Taylor 1995: 126). The major push behind the projects, however, still comes from the University of Arizona’s Department of Astronomy. The U.S. Congress consistently supported the telescopes, overriding existing laws and circumventing injunctions and lawsuits, approving even five more telescopes, all of which are considered desecrating acts by most Indians and environmentalists from the region and others familiar with the case.

Petroglyph National Monument. Between 2000 and 500 years ago, the ancestors carved their messages into the lava formation just west of Albuquerque. Now known as Petroglyph National Monument, its historic value was recognized when it was named a national monument in 1990. But today both greed and the growth of the city of Albuquerque spurn the ancestors. A six-lane highway connects Albuquerque to its own sprawl and threatens to push through the center of the ancient lava chalkboard. All of New Mexico’s native nations, including the 19 Pueblos, have opposed it, and a tenacious group known as the Sage Alliance continues its work to stop the proposal.

Coldwater Springs is a spring of water which for centuries has been known for its healing properties, and is used by many for ceremonies in the region. The 10,000-year-old limestone bedrock spring flows down the bluff to the Mississippi River and is estimated to have between 100,000 to 144,000 gallons of water per day going by it. It is said that it is fed from Taku Wakan Tipi (Something Sacred Dwells Here), a nearby hill, which was bulldozed to build the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport. The spring has remained and prevailed through the development of the south Minneapolis region, but beginning in the early 1990s, proposals for highway expansion, in particular Highway 55, threatened to intersect the spring. A bitter struggle ensued between native people, environmentalists and the state Department of Transportation. Eventually, much of the highway was built, but some provisions were made to protect the spring. But afterwards flows at the spring vacillated between 55 and 115 gallons per minute (79,000–166,000 gallons per day) and new, further “compromise” proposals are being viewed with skepticism by the Mendota Dakota, Anishinaabeg and other people of the region.

The White Man’s Law and the Sacred
There remain many more sacred site issues in the United States, but the underlying question in all such controversies is “How sacred is it?” In the fall of 2002, the National Congress of American Indians came together with traditional spiritual people and sacred sites advocates to discuss some of the challenges within the context of the battle to protect sacred sites. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) adopted by consensus a resolution declaring “Zero Tolerance for desecration, damage, or destruction of sacred places,” adding, among other things, that there is a recognition that sacred places are to be defined only as places that are sacred to practitioners of Native traditional religions and that sacred places include land (surface and subsurface), water and air, burial grounds, massacre sites, and battlefields, and spiritual commemoration, ceremonial, gathering and worship areas.

NCAI also joined with other native people in pointing out some of the most challenging aspects of the sacred site struggle, calling them objectionable elements, which include: definition of the sacred, prioritizing sacred places, centrality or degree of significance requirements, discrimination against non-federally recognized tribes with traditional sacred places to protect. So-called “mitigation” of impacts to sacred places was also criticized, as well as “reliance on previously published or recorded coerced or incomplete information regarding sacred places.”

In the summer of 2002, the California legislature passed a bill which would have protected sacred sites within the state, and increased dramatically the consultation with native nations with regards to many development projects at such sites. Governor Gray Davis did not sign the bill into law. Proposals for national sacred site legislation will continue to be advanced by Native Americans, environmentalists, and human rights activists until these places are protected and free religious practice fully ensured.

More than two hundred years after the founding of the United States it is still hard to be a native person here. As spiritual challenges continue, native people will continue, as we have for centuries, and in our prayers and songs, given our understanding of the sacredness of the land, we will always be thankful.

Winona LaDuke
Further Reading


See also: Anishnabeg Culture; Black Mesa; Deloria, Vine; Devils Tower, Mato Tipi, or Bears Lodge; G-O Road; Indigenous Environmental Network; LaDuke, Winona; Law, Religion, and Native American Lands; Manifest Destiny; Sacred and the Modern World, The; Sacred Geography in Native North America; Wise Use Movement.

Homosexuality

Atitudes toward and responses to homosexuality and same-sex behavior have varied widely among the world’s religions, from fully accepted and embraced, to completely prohibited and violently repressed. At stake in these differences are widely varying attitudes toward nature, what counts as “natural” and what difference this makes for religious claims and practices, and how diverse sexual behaviors and identities across human cultures and animal species are valued or disvalued.

Indigenous religions often have embraced more diversity in sexual identities and gender roles as an integral and honored part of the natural diversity within nature than the world’s great religious traditions, particularly the monotheistic religions of the West. Robert Baum observes,

In contrast to the patriarchal or asexual image of the godhead in Western religions and the nontheistic focus of most schools of Buddhism, traditional religions of the Americas ... often see spiritual

SP Homosexuality and Science

Atitudes toward human homosexuality in religions and cultures often rest on assumptions about nature, particularly homosexuality in nonhuman nature. Increasingly, scientific studies of sexuality are influencing religious and cultural debates about homosexuality, even as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons reclaim and reshape religious practices and spiritualities.

Recent studies of animal behavior document the widespread presence of same-sex behaviors throughout the nonhuman world. Biologist Bruce Bagemihl notes that homosexual behavior has been observed in more than 450 kinds of animals in every major geographic region and every major animal group across the globe. According to Bagemihl: “Animal homosexuality itself is a rich and multifaceted phenomenon that is at least as complex and varied as heterosexuality” (1999: 42).

Studies of sexual behaviors in nonhuman primates, our closest animal relatives, suggest homosexual pri- mate behaviors go back at least 25 million years to the Oligocene epoch. This suggests that homosexuality is part of both the human evolutionary and cultural heritage as primates. One distinctive difference between human and nonhuman responses is an almost complete lack of hostility on the part of animals toward same-sex and transgender behaviors in other animals; animals exhibiting these behaviors almost without exception are fully integrated into their respective animal groups. In contrast, human cultures and societies vary enormously across time and geography in their attitudes toward homosexual behaviors and identities, from fully accept- ing to completely rejecting to severely repressing, even with violence.

Arguments about the morality of homosexuality have long looked to animal behavior to support claims on both sides of the debate. Ethicists and others have noted the flaws in the logic of these arguments. Many activities that most human groups reject as immoral exist as “natural” behaviors throughout the animal world. At the same time we use our biological facilities in many ways “unintended” by nature without ascribing a moral value to such actions, such as using the tongue for kissing or blowing bubbles. Moral arguments about homosexuality will have to be made on other grounds.

More recently some have looked to scientific studies of human sexuality to answer questions about the etiology of homosexuality in hopes of deciding debates about the morality of homosexuality. Since at least the mid-nineteenth century, most study of human sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular, took place within the field of psychology, where sexuality was understood primarily as a mental phenomenon, largely influenced by social, cultural, and environmental factors. Debates raged about whether homosexuality

Continued next page
power in a sexual dimension, with different types of spiritual power associated with each biological sex. In many instances spiritual beings and their religious specialists in the human community are seen as androgynous, or of an intermediate gender, and thereby provide an importance for a diversity of sexual orientations that remain peripheral to many other religious systems (Swidler 1993: 2–3).

Several North American Native American religious traditions, including the Oto, Zuni, Navajo, Mojave, and Papago nations, for example, have embraced the “two-spirited” person (often referred to in earlier writings as the “berdache”), a sacred man or woman who mixes gender categories and may participate in same-sex relations. Typically two-spirit persons have an honored role in Native American societies as shamans, healers, or wise persons. Similar attitudes and homosexual and transgenerational gender roles are found in many indigenous cultures across the globe, such as the Sambia and Bimin-Kuskusmin peoples in New Guinea, the Araucanians or Mapuche people of Chile, and the Inuit and Yup’ik peoples of the Arctic.

In each of these cultural complexes, nature in general, and animals in particular, are central to the group’s spiritual and religious beliefs and myths; and beliefs about sexual and gender variability in animals often parallel and symbolize the recognition and valuation of homosexuality and transgender among humans. In North America, for example, associations between left-handed bears and two-spiritness are found among the Nootka, Kutenai, and Winnebago peoples. As Bagemihl observes, “Bears are thought to combine elements of both masculinity and femininity, and they are also seen as mediators between the sexes and between humans and animals” (1999: 217). Animal associations with transgender and homosexuality may also be linked to personal vision quests and two-spiritness, such as dreaming of a bison among the various Sioux nations. In other cultures, the trickster-transformer figure, such as a coyote or fox, may symbolize human transgender and homosexuality.

The two-spirited traditions in North and South American indigenous cultures were heavily repressed by European and American colonizers and Christian missionaries, who categorized these complex cultural phenomena as sodomy and barbarism. In Indian communities that largely assimilated into Euro-American culture, two-spirited persons either went underground or disappeared, or risked increasing amounts of scorn from within their community. With the reaffirmation and reclaiming of traditional Native American ways since the 1960s, in the United States has come renewed interest in two-spiritness, and two-spirited persons increasingly are active within and across indigenous nations today, including among the Navajo, Lakota, and Zuni peoples.

While less is known about African sexuality in general, similar patterns of transgender and transgenerational homosexual relations are found among some of the indigenous religions of Africa. Male adolescent homosexual behavior is common among groups such as the !Kung of southern Africa and the Nama of the Namib desert, though such same-sex behavior is expected to cease with adulthood and heterosexual marriage. In cultures with polygynous households, reciprocal relationships among women that may or may not have a sexual component are common, as among the Azande of southern Sudan, the Tswana of southern Africa, and the Nupe of Nigeria. In some African societies, such as the Zulu, and the Ambo of Angola, males who receive a spiritual calling may assume an intermediate gender role similar to the two-spirit person in Native American societies. As in the Americas, European colonialism and Christian missionary activity have in many cases repressed or obscured indigenous African attitudes and practices toward homosexuality and transgender.

In contrast to indigenous religions, the scriptures and dominant teachings of the three Western monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have been...
largely perceived as hostile toward homosexuality. Jewish teaching regarding homosexuality is rooted in the halakhah, traditional Jewish law developed from the Torah and Talmud, which proscribes all same-sex sexual behavior. Jewish moral teaching on sexuality focuses on sexual acts, rather than sexuality, and limits licit sexual acts to those within heterosexual marriage. The sexual relationship plays an important and positive role within marriage, both for procreation and for building intimacy between husband and wife. Male homosexual behavior is specifically proscribed in Leviticus 18:22 (“Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination”) and 20:13 (“If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing; they shall be put to death”), part of Israel’s Holiness Code that required Israel to emulate God’s holiness in refraining from the practices of their Egyptian and Canaanite neighbors. Among these practices were a series of sexual sins that the Israelites must not practice, including incest, adultery, bestiality, and male homosexuality (the Torah is silent on female same-sex acts).

Contemporary Jewish attitudes toward homosexuality largely divide along how the authority of Torah and halakhah are interpreted. Within the North American Jewish community, Orthodox Judaism continues to proscribe all acceptance of homosexuality. Conservative Judaism expresses concern for gay and lesbian Jews and individuals, and supports civil rights for homosexuals while continuing to maintain heterosexuality as the norm and prohibiting openly homosexual rabbis and cantors. Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism largely accept gay and lesbian Jews, including as rabbis and cantors, and several gay and lesbian synagogues and Jewish associations have formed in recent years.

Integrating its Hebrew roots with Greek, Latin and pagan influences, Christianity has shaped much of the moral and theological debates about homosexuality in Western society and religion. These arguments typically draw on either the Christian biblical-theological tradition or the Western philosophical tradition, or both, to argue that only heterosexual relationships (usually within monogamous marriage) can be accepted as moral, natural, and within God’s plan for humankind. Contrary to popular belief that Christianity has always been hostile to homosexuality, however, historian John Boswell has documented a wide spectrum of attitudes and practices within the Christian churches and cultures prior to modern times. These include a long tradition of Christian liturgies celebrating same-sex unions in pre-modern Europe—in many cases long before similar heterosexual marriage ceremonies were practiced within the Christian Church (marriage within the Christian Roman Empire was largely a civil practice outside the Church through at least the first ten centuries).

Roman Catholicism, the oldest of the Western branches of Christianity, combines biblical interpretation with natural law to declare homosexuality unnatural and all homosexual behavior sinful. The primary New Testament text supporting this position is Paul’s letter to the Romans where he writes about the Gentiles and their idolatrous behavior:

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error (Rom. 1:26–27).

Catholic moral theology has followed Aquinas’ emphasis on natural law and declared all non-procreative sexual acts unnatural, including bestiality, homosexuality, and masturbation. With changing views of science that now largely see homosexuality as a natural expression of sexual diversity in human cultures, some Catholic theologians develop theological arguments based on natural law and contemporary science to argue for the full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons within Church and society.

While today the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Conservative Protestant churches largely continue to reject all forms of homosexuality, mainline Protestantism has been engulfed with debates on such issues as ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions. Some denominations, including the United Church of Christ and Unitarian-Universalism, have moved to a theological-ethical stance of full inclusion of their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered members and advocate for their full inclusion in society. These Christian communities ordain openly gay and lesbian persons and often recognize and celebrate same-sex unions. Other mainline Protestant denominations such as Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Methodist, advocate for civil rights for homosexuals while remaining deeply divided over issues of ordination and same-sex marriage within their denominations.

Islam is perhaps the most consistent of the three Abrahamic traditions in its rejection and condemnation of homosexuality. Its primary source, the Qur’an, is understood to have been revealed directly to Muhammad and thus to be uncontestable, and it is explicit in its condemnation of homosexuality as outside Allah’s will for humanity. Drawing on the biblical tradition of Lot and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, homosexuals are termed qaum Lut, Lot’s people. About them the Qur’an records “How can you lust for males, of all creatures in the world, and leave those whom God has created you as your mates. You are really going beyond all limits” (26:165–166). The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said in his “Farewell Sermon,”
Whoever has intercourse with a woman and penetrates her rectum, or with a man, or with a boy, will appear on the Last Day stinking worse than a corpse; people will find him unbearable until he enters hell fire, and God will cancel all his good deeds.

Islam considers itself to be the true religion of nature that all humans should adhere to, and homosexuality therefore is a violation of the laws of nature. Islam puts a strong emphasis on heterosexual marriage, and abhors celibacy. The *shari’a* or Islamic law considers homosexuality not only a sin, but also a crime. But the standard of evidence required to be convicted of the crime of homosexuality is extremely high — as long as one is not public in one’s homosexual behavior or identity, there may be a great deal of tolerance for what goes on in private in many Islamic societies. Hence, as long as homosexual persons are heterosexually married and discrete about their homosexual identity and behavior, most find a degree of tolerance within Islam.

Comparatively less scholarly work has been done on the question of homosexuality in Eastern religions, and particularly of lesbianism, but the broad pattern seems to be tolerance of varieties of human sexual expression. Hinduism scholar Arvind Sharma has surveyed Hindu texts and the scholarly literature and concluded that classical Hinduism saw homosexuality as a matter of marginal concern. Because of subsequent and often negative contact with outside groups, medieval and modern Hinduism has tended to associate homosexuality with outsiders and in a largely negative light. With the rise of modern Hindu nationalism, homosexuality has been associated with the British and Muslim dominant minorities to be overcome, and hence a negative facet of Hindu life.

Buddhism scholar Jose Ignacio Cabezon argues that despite the historical and geographic diversity of Buddhism, on the whole Buddhism has been mostly neutral on the question of homosexuality. The principal question in Buddhism has been one of sexuality versus celibacy, rather than heterosexuality versus homosexuality; where homosexuality has been condemned it has usually been for involving sexual desire rather than for involving partners of the same sex. In contrast to Buddhist doctrine, however, the cultures within which Buddhism has flourished have varied widely in their attitudes toward homosexuality, and Buddhist tradition has tended to reflect the particular socio-cultural norms where it is found.

Generally tolerant attitudes toward homosexual activity interpersed with occasional periods of sexual repression seem to characterize the histories of both China and Japan. Both cultures record long histories of homosexual behavior and same-sex love. In China, primary reservations about homosexuality stemmed largely from Confucianism’s concern for family and social stability and continuity, and with Daoism’s concern for balancing yin and yang energies in sexual intercourse. Japanese culture has been far more embracing of the diversity of human sexual expression, including same-sex behavior. Long associated with the warrior samurai class, male homosexuality was termed “Love in the Satsuma way,” a reference to the locale where military training went together with homosexual practices. Shintoism’s life-affirming worldview and lack of a detailed moral code, together with a cultural focus more on pollution (coming from contact with a woman) rather than sin, seem to lie behind Japan’s generally liberal outlook on sexuality.

Finally, nature plays an important role in the spiritual- and religious practices of many contemporary lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons in modern society. Reclaiming the body and the erotic within nature is seen as central to these emerging traditions, as it is to many radical environmentalists who argue that human cultures will never reharmonize life on Earth until we overturn repressive and misguided restrictions on eros. Within both communities, embracing homosexuality, bisexuality, androgyny and transgender are seen as key to a future that is both ecologically sustainable and socially just. Within gay and lesbian Earth-based spiritualities, sex itself is experienced as sacramental, connecting oneself to nature, others, and a sense of the divine. Among gay men, the Radical Faeries movement began in the 1970s as an effort to reclaim gay identity from both the cultural mainstream and the mainstream gay movement. Closely identified with nature, Radical Faeries reclaim sexuality and ecstasy as central to spirituality and gay identity, while critiquing the often hypermasculine gender identity of the mainstream gay male “clone” culture. Similarly, many lesbian communities rooted in nature have embraced Wicca or other Earth-based and ecofeminist spiritualities as a way to ground their lesbian identities in the Earth. These radical communities in turn have influenced many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons who continue within more traditional and mainstream religious communities, leading to the possibility of the transformation of these traditions to be more embracing of nature and the diversity of the Earth’s inhabitants as central to their religious identities.

Daniel T. Spencer

Further Reading


See also: Dirt; Sexuality and Ecospirituality; Sexuality and Green Consciousness.

Hopi – See Black Mesa; Greenpeace; Hopi–Navajo Land Dispute; Hopiland to the Rainforest Action Network.

Hopi–Navajo Land Dispute

“Welcome to Jerusalem,” opened the Hopi Tribal attorney. “... We have a very serious problem where both religions are coming up against one another ...” The religions: those of the Hopi and Navajo peoples. The occasion: a hearing before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. The context: Jenny Manybeads et al v. United States of America et al, one of many lawsuits filed in the near forty-year litigious history of the Hopi–Navajo land dispute.

The “dispute” concerns arid desert land, sparsely forested with pinyon and juniper, supporting grasses, forbs and shrubs such as greasewood, winterfat, and rabbit brush. It provides poor but sustainable grazing land for cattle, sheep and goats. Occasional pockets of trapped ground water and flood plains provide farming opportunities in desert-adapted corn, beans, squash, melons and fruit trees. Willow, tamarisk and Russian olive line streambeds, dry except in the summer monsoon season when they carry flash floods. Huge deposits of coal, gas, oil, and uranium underlie the entire region. The Hopi and Navajo Tribal governments share ownership of the minerals. But legal jurisdiction over the surface area and rights to use its sparse resources constitute the subject of contested histories and competing definitions of community, personhood, and cosmology.

History

Created in 1868, the Navajo Reservation has its western boundary in Hopi country. The Hopi Reservation was not created until 1882. After 1884, the government expanded the boundaries of the Navajo reservation so that by 1934 the 25,000 square-mile Navajos surrounded Hopi land on four sides. Navajos’ land base had increased, but not enough. Navajos, who numbered close to 200,000 by 1970, moved onto the Hopi Reservation, competing with the 10,000 Hopis for grazing land.

In implementing stock reduction to reverse erosion, the Government divided the Hopi and Navajo reservations into twenty grazing districts and assigned all but three of them completely to Navajos. Although in theory the “Hopi Reservation” comprised 2.45 million acres, Hopi jurisdiction was limited to one district, covering only 624,064 acres; Navajos were granted permits to live and graze their livestock everywhere else.

In 1961, a federal court ruled that each Tribe had “joint, equal, and undivided” possession to the surface as well as the subsurface (the minerals) property of the 1882 Reservation outside District Six, 1,822,000 acres. This area subsequently became known as the Joint Use Area, or JUA. But in fact, Navajos continued to exercise exclusive use and control of the JUA for all practical purposes. Hopis lodged protests.

In 1977, a mediator appointed by the U.S. Government divided the “JUA” into two areas: the Hopi area – 905,000 acres – Hopi Partitioned Lands, or HPL; and the 922,000 Navajo acres – NPL, Navajo Partitioned Lands. Hopis and Navajos on the “wrong” side of the partition line had to move.

Life and Land

Hopis live in nuclear family households and in thirteen compact settlements. At birth, each child’s umbilical cord should be placed in the mud-and-brush ceiling. Few houses have been built with these traditional ceilings since the 1930s. Within a village, a larger group of people, a matrilineal clan, collectively own houses and use rights to farm land. A clan or family’s farming and grazing land are located outside the village, often as far as ten miles distant.

In contrast, each of the several dozen Navajo communities on the HPL portion of the JUA consisted of three or four households, usually representing three generations, related through parental or brother-sister ties. At birth, every child’s umbilical cord is buried near the home. Farm land and grazing land are located nearby, although a spouse’s grazing land might be located in a distant community.
The Religious Factor: Hopi

Living side by side for three centuries, the Hopi and Navajo honor parallel, but distinctly different, worldviews and ritual commitments. Hopis may cooperate in planting and harvesting, but their main sense of community comes from collectively owning one or more rituals, along with ritual items. Rituals are performed by a group of persons specially recruited and initiated who are, for the most part, not members of the clan that owns the ritual. The groups perform the rituals in specially constructed chambers, kivas, owned by one of the clans that owns one of the ceremonies conducted in it. Nearly every ritual includes some public performances that are attended by most, if not all, members of the village. Thus, Hopis within a village are tied together in solidarity by a complex warp and weft of clan and ritual ties.

Hopi religion revolves around “duty” and land, although Hopis do not have a word for “religion” per se. Rather, Hopis speak of wiimi “religious rites to which one is initiated,” navoti (“teachings, traditions”), and tumala, “responsibility,” that mandate performing rituals and maintaining clan identity. Part of that responsibility entails stewardship of the area within boundaries marked by stone ruins of villages no longer inhabited and by shrines. Hopis claim an aboriginal territory bounded by Tusak Choma (San Francisco Peaks); Po ta ve taka, Polungaoihoya, Nei yavu (Lolomai Point, Grand Canyon); Tokonavi and Ky westima (Betatakin Ruin); and Tsi mun tu qui (Woodruff Butte). Various shrines, at the boundaries and inside them, constitute pilgrimage areas. Some of these shrines are associated with springs, while others are known by location and marked only by the depositing of prayer feathers. The area marked by all of these shrines is much larger than the Hopi Reservation. It includes shrines in national forests, on private land, and on the Navajo Reservation. A number of shrine areas are nesting areas, where Hopis go at a certain time of year to secure young eagles and hawks necessary for ceremonies. Ancestral ties to material surroundings stretch back centuries. Not to periodically venerate these shrines would be to shirk important duties.

Destruction and desecration threaten shrines. A century of tourists hiking the “Hopi Salt Trail” in the Grand Canyon, disregarding shrines and offerings deposited at them, led the Park Service to close the area to all but authorized Hopi priests in the 1980s. Peabody Coal Company has operated a gargantuan strip mine on Black Mesa, within Hopis’ shrine area, since 1968, under leases from the Hopi and Navajo Tribal Councils. Opposing the mining at the time, many Hopis still feel that despite the income to the Tribal government, the lease was a big mistake. Tsi mun tu qui, Woodruff Butte, has been in private, non-Hopi ownership for decades. Recently turned into a gravel mine, the top of the butte was dynamited and five of six shrines were destroyed in the process.

The Religious Factor: Navajo

Navajos also do not have a specific word meaning “religion.” Rather, traditional Navajo “religion” centers around maintaining hozho, “harmony.” Illness stems from hocho, “ugly conditions,” the opposite of harmony. To remove hocho and restore balance, a ceremony, a “chant,” must be conducted by a ritual specialist, a “singer.” The singer must use appropriate materials. Because nearly everyone needs several chants during his or her lifetime, many individuals maintain an “Earth bundle” of appropriate materials, gathered from near home, for this purpose.

The chant is held in a Hogan. Although Hogans were formerly used as dwellings and for ritual purposes, now nearly all Hogans are constructed specifically as ceremonial chambers and are blessed by a singer. The Hogan represents the world and its elements. Navajos sometimes compare the sky to the ceiling of an immense Hogan; the Earth is its floor. Thus the round ceiling of an actual Hogan is the sky and the Hogan floor is the Earth. When a singer performs a ritual, the singer does so within a microcosm representing the universe. Chants last at least two and often five or nine nights. Although only the singer, the patient, and a few close relatives participate in the rituals, dozens of relatives come to supply moral support and food. Thus, a sing entails much preparation, including construction of temporary structures to shelter the visitors, and many people.

The Dispute and Relocation

After division of the “JUA” in 1977, Government crews began demarcating the line by constructing a fence. Elderly Navajos in the isolated Navajo community of Big Mountain resisted the fencing, and their cause became publicized and celebrated nationally and internationally. Supporters came to Big Mountain from urban areas, undertaking what amounted to pilgrimages to assist what they perceived as a handful of Navajo elders resisting destruction of their lives. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the peaking of the “deep ecology” movement, which searched not only for solutions to environmental problems, but also for models for how to live a renewable, sustainable, “low-tech” lifestyle. What Navajos in the remote communities lived with from necessity – one- or two-room houses shaded by willows and surrounded with sage; unpaved roads; juniper and pinyon as cooking and heating fuels; meat from range-fed livestock; careful husbanding of water – urban-dwellers saw as a desirable and appropriate lifestyle. The politics of resistance to relocation became increasingly linked with religion and life in a particular ecosystem.

Conclusion

Relocation proceeds inexorably, but some Navajos still refuse to move. A further complication entails the Sun
Dance. Brought to the Navajos on the JUA by Lakota ritual specialists in the 1970s, the annual “Big Mountain Sun Dance” emphasizes community solidarity as well as personal commitment and sacrifice and attracts hundreds of participants. In a dubious demonstration of its sovereignty over HPL, the Hopi Tribal Government ordered the area bulldozed shortly after conclusion of the 2001 ceremony, outraging many people, including some Hopis.

Hopis and Navajos have not always been at odds over religious land. In the 1970s, they united to oppose the construction of a second ski resort on Tusak Choma, the San Francisco Peaks. The opposition was unsuccessful. But tribal jurisdiction on Tusak Choma did not exist and was never a possibility. Regarding the fraction of their “shrine” over which Hopis now have jurisdiction, attorneys referenced “Jerusalem” to raise questions of definition and access: whose religion ultimately defines sacred places? Does mandatory relocation impair a Navajo’s ability to practice religion in specific ways because it requires irrevocably abandoning the Hogan where ceremonies are conducted, where a person’s umbilical cord is buried, and where materials for Earth bundles are obtained? Do continued use and occupancy of ancestral Hopi land and shrine areas by Navajos impair Hopis’ ability to practice their religion? Despite mediation in the 1990s and congressional legislation enacted in 1996 purporting to settle their religion? Despite mediation in the 1990s and congressional legislation enacted in 1996 purporting to settle the dispute, whether phrased in historical, economic, or religious terms, persists.

Richard O. Clemmer

Further Reading

See also: Black Mesa; Hopiland to Rainforest Action Network; Law, Religion, and Native American Land.

From West Virginia to Hopiland

In the contemporary world of my youth, religion and nature were separate, though both were a part of my life. From birth to age eight I grew up enjoying the four seasons and the forests of West Virginia. At year eight, we moved to Central Florida where the swamps became the playgrounds of my explorations and adventures. My great-grandmother deeply influenced these outdoor reveries. She was half Blackfoot Indian and wonderful to me. With childlike wonder I often pranced through these forests and swamps, pondering what it would have been like to be Indian. As a “half-breed” in a white-dominated society, she didn’t talk much about her Indian heritage. Still, my West Virginia family was somewhat clanlike, even tribal. Mystery and intuition seemed to permeate my youth. The mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmother of our family would often state who was calling on the phone before anyone had a chance to answer it. They were usually right. They often declared the gender of the upcoming baby. This was before modern methods of testing. My religious upbringing was Protestant, the First Christian Church. I went most Sundays as a kid and enjoyed it. However, I don’t recall any significant references to nature or to God’s earthly creations. In church, sacred was a term that had little meaning for me. What I do remember is looking out the church window a lot and seeing the beautiful and mysterious Spanish moss hanging from the scrub-oak trees. The natural world moved me, and although I thought church interesting, it held no spirit for me. Much later, after college, I moved west, spending time over the next ten years with the Elders of Hopi Nation. At that time, sacred came to mean something that was both pragmatic and profound. This redefinition of sacred has influenced all my work since then, whether in the world’s tropical rainforests, or in the corporate boardrooms where I negotiate on behalf of Mother Earth as the President of the Rainforest Action Network.

In college (1968–1973) there were many classes, of course, but college life in these years was also about sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Yet, there was an additional element to those times – cosmic consciousness. Janis Joplin and others sang about it. And we read a great deal about it in the popular works about native people like Black Elk, Lame Deer, and Don Juan. I did well in school learning the usual things, but by my senior year I was questing for a more spiritual connection. A college friend suggested I go to a poetry reading by Gary Snyder. I did and became enamored with the California/beat movement. Snyder knew a lot about things I cared about.

Soon after this encounter, after a yoga class my instructor told me, “I see you going west and working with
the Indians.” I don’t know if he was prophetic or if I just liked the idea but I soon went west and landed in the former beat enclave, and now artist/tourist town, of Sausalito.

In California I took a yoga class from the teacher of my teacher. There I met a likable yoga student named Tom Styles, who in a way stereotypically Californian later became Swami Mukunda. Styles had been researching a college thesis on crosscultural prophecies, and when he invited me to go with him to some Indian land near the Grand Canyon, I was happy to go. I did not at the time know the name of the tribe, but he led me to my unique and rewarding decade with the Hopi elders.

The Hopi

The Hopi have lived for at least ten thousand years (they say a lot more) on Black Mesa, the Colorado Plateau of the Southwestern United States, in an area the size of the state of West Virginia. The Hopi villages are just north of the Painted Desert and east of the Grand Canyon at the south end of Black Mesa. I was not an understudy to any spiritual leader or medicine person but worked more as secretary and driver for the elders. From them and the high desert of Hopiland I learned much. The elders would often say that white people have tribal wisdom if they would just go back in their own histories. They put the onus of discovery right back on me. It was probably a way to not have to answer too many stupid questions, but nevertheless, I leaned many lessons, including that the laws of nature are final and have absolute authority governing this Earth. Natural laws will prevail regardless of man-made laws or governments. When we disturb the cycles of nature by interfering with the natural elements, destroying species of life, or changing species of life, the consequences may be immediate, or may fall upon our children, or our children’s children, but we will suffer and pay for our mistakes.

Hopiis say that we human beings are charged with the responsibility of working for the continuation of all life. Our fate is intertwined with one another; what affects one affects all. Euro-American domination and destruction of nature as well as of indigenous ways continues. To alter this course, Westerners would do well to seek advice from and cooperate with indigenous people.

The Hopi tribe did not just survive for thousands of years as desert farmers. They developed a high culture and one that can help us with issues of ecological sustainability and peace. I am honored to stand in solidarity with nature based on the Hopi tribal perspective. It is work to maintain their land and the natural ways of life. Hopi, as well as other tribal cultures, would often say that their work is to help hold the world in balance. That phrase means something I do not fully understand, but I know it relates to an annual set of ceremonies.

Hopi as my Seed Time

It was in 1973 that Tom Styles and I left Sausalito around midnight one evening and made it to the south rim of the Grand Canyon around sunset. The descending sun cast shadows over red rock walls. We drove into the Hopi Nation to the village of Old Oraibi. A dirt road heads south to Oraibi off of the only paved road in Hopiland. Oraibi is the oldest continually inhabited village in North America. Just outside of Oraibi we came to a sign that said essentially, “Warning white man. Because you cannot obey your own laws, let alone ours, you are hereby prohibited from entering this village.” The night was upon us and we camped next to the sign along the road. We did yoga atop nearby rocks and hoped that some Indian blasting by in a pick-up truck would invite us in. The Milky Way was stellar and we could hear the drumbeat from a ceremony going on in this forbidden village. We were left in the dust that night, but the next day was a different story.

Somehow Yoga Tom knew the names of several of the elders. We were soon at the next village of Kiyakotsmovi, knocking on the door of Thomas Banyacya’s adobe and cinderblock house. Thomas, I was to learn, was not a medicine man, but he was from the Coyote Clan. Coyotes are bakers. His role was one of spreading the word about Hopi relationship with nature and their message of peace. Fermina Banyacya, a Bear Clan woman, answered the door. She was gracious regarding our many undoubtedly naive questions. I was 23 years old, and spellbound by her singsong voice, beauty, and what she had to say about nature and future and purpose. Her demeanor harkened back to my great-grandmother. Eventually, she invited us in. To this day she remains a friend. From Fermina and many other Hopi I came to my deeper understanding of sacred.

When the Hopi talked about the Great Spirit or the many spirits in nature it had a ring of authenticity that I did not experience in the First Christian Church. I would stay for weeks at Hopi, often shuttling elders around to community meetings. The meetings were often about the government trying to put electricity lines in some of the villages or about coal and uranium mining on their ancestral lands. These were the lands they had been charged with protecting. They had the responsibility of maintaining the cycles and fecundity of nature. It was a difficult time for them, and they still struggle with these imposed conflicts. I was going back and forth to California from Hopiland, many times a year at this point, a pattern I repeated for an entire decade. The Hopi Elders with whom I worked eventually realized I was earnest about wanting to help the Earth and support native peoples.

After many years there, one rather common-looking old man revealed to me that he was a Snake Priest. He spoke of how the snake was a communicator between the minerals in the Earth’s crust and the climate-making aspects of the atmosphere. Snakes are often painted as

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lightning strikes in Hopi art, traveling between the sky and the land. The Snake Priest explained to me, though I doubted him at the time, that lightning strikes not just from the sky to the Earth, but from the Earth to the sky.

At such times I could sense the importance of their oral traditions. Their method of learning included one of trial-and-error experimentation, just as we do in Western science. Learning occurs while living in the same desert home over generations, and is transmitted over thousands of years. This is why they know so much about the ways of the plants and animals, and the land and sky.

The medicine person, it seemed to me, was more of a scientist then a magician. The Hopi Snake Priest stood amidst a library and lineage of teachers. That is not to say that one doesn’t learn through intuition. At Hopi, I believe, everyone is intuitive and something of a medicine person. Some are better at it than others or have a sub-set of special gifts, but in Hopi Culture, the line between science and intuition are relatively indistinguishable.

Some lessons seep into your soul slowly and expressing them in words is difficult, but I’ll try. When a plant, insect, or animal is killed or perhaps the entire species goes extinct, this is tragic. But, that loss is more than the loss of a sentient being or species. Its function in the web of life is lost as well. Certain species or certain aspects of nature have a special function in the web, and the loss of that function weakens the Whole, subsequently reducing Earth’s resilience to the human onslaught on destruction. The following example is mundane, but in our Euro-American culture we know about the special function of the canary in the coal mine. When the canary dies, the air is so foul that you had better vacate or make some change fast. The functionality of many things in nature can be very specific and can relate to life-and-death issues. These special functional places or aspects might be a certain mountaintop, a water spring, or a rattlesnake in an electrical storm. It can even be something invisible to us like a line of energy running through a village like Hotevilla just east of Old Oraibi. These are sacred sites or sacred animals to the Hopi and to many indigenous peoples including those in the Amazon rainforests. Knowledge about the sacred/functional is passed on by the priests, or in the case of the Hopis, by certain people initiated into one of the many clans like the One Horn or Two Horn Kachina (nature spirit) Clans. Some of the knowledge can come directly from a person’s sensitivity to nature and nature’s ways. Even a sacred feather placed near a Kiva (underground ceremonial chamber) can be of great significance perhaps in helping keep the world in balance. As I was not an understudy I can say little more about these matters.

One doesn’t necessarily need to know a lot about these things to know one should desire to protect the natural world. And it isn’t just sacred sites that must be protected. When asked once to draw a circle around a sacred site, the Hopi just shook their heads and walked away. They told me later that such a line would convey that anything outside the circle was not sacred. An isolated spot in the web of life cannot be saved without maintaining the entirety of it.

**From Hopiland to the Rainforest Action Network**

Such are the lessons of Hopi that I bring into my current work. The Rainforest Action Network, co-founded with the Earth First! hero Mike Roselle, is a forest protection group, but it is also a human rights group with a focus on the rights of native peoples. As we all know, the people in some governments and giant corporations are profiting at the expense of nature, indigenous peoples, and future generations. The web of life we call the biosphere is being dangerously shredded. Climate change and what scientists now call extreme weather events mark a particularly precarious moment in human history. At Rainforest Action Network we call these extreme weather events “ecospasms.” The biosphere, Mother Earth, is becoming spastic. Ecological spasms show up as gigantic hurricanes of greater force then we have ever seen before. They include tornados occurring in places that have never seen them before. The forces degrading ancient forests and native peoples are many. They include industrial invasion of agribusiness, toxic waste, uranium mining, timber cutting, cattle ranching, and unfortunately, racism. But, individuals and movements have arisen to address and reverse such problems.

A clear set of principles and policies around which we can build a better world is emerging that starts with giving honor to the laws of nature. The new global movement gathers annually at the World Social Forum (WSF), among other places. That event started in year 2000. The WSF has had three annual gatherings in Puerto Alegre, Brazil. India will host the 2004 gathering. These efforts will continue to invite the widest possible participation.

The Hopi speak about a window of opportunity where the age of appropriate technology (the marriage of the circle and the cross, but that is another story) can come about. At Hopi there is a petroglyph on a sandstone rock that shows healthy corn plants in the future and the possibility of hope for all life. Hopi say this won’t necessarily be our future, but it could be. It depends on what we all do to help shape that course. It is fair to ask the key question, can we rally to the task in time? Can we rally on a scale commensurate with the problem and the urgency?

Another lesson I learned at Hopi has to do with prophecy. Prophecy, I surmise, is what people of European heritage call what the Hopi elders see as supposition or projection based on a combination of human nature and probability or trend. As the elders often told me with a chuckle, prophecy is far easier to declare after events have occurred. The marriage of religion (spirituality) and nature has not been completely lost. It can and must be restored.
When you dedicate yourself to nature’s needs, there is mystery and providence in the journey. Though we may come from different cultural, economic, and racial backgrounds and though we will not agree on everything, we can cooperate, share honestly, and work with one another in respect. Again, a broad-based movement to protect nature, develop just societies, and halt the demise of native peoples exists. It is growing. At the Rainforest Action Network we know that we must be a part of these efforts and we hope you will be as well.

Randy Hayes

Further Reading
Randy Hayes also directed the award-winning film The Four Corners, A National Sacrifice Area. The film won the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences award for “Best Student Documentary” in 1983. This epic film documents the tragic effects of uranium and coal mining on Hopi and Navajo tribal lands in the American Southwest.
See also: Beat Generation Writers; Black Mesa; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; Greenpeace; Radical Environmentalism; Snyder, Gary.

Hopkins, Gerard Manley (1844–1889)

A Jesuit priest born in mid-Victorian England, Gerard Manley Hopkins composed some of world’s most vivid nature poetry. Unknown during his lifetime, his highly distinctive work was first published in 1918 and is now considered a major literary achievement. Hopkins’ influential contribution to the religious nature lyric tradition features striking stylistic and technical virtuosity, acute descriptive observation, and an urgent eco-poetical consecration of wild nature.

A star student and promising young poet at Oxford in the 1860s, Hopkins was converted there to Roman Catholicism, and afterwards became a priest of the Society of Jesus. For several years he renounced verse-making as an aesthetic pastime inconsistent with his religious vocation. But in 1875 he abruptly resumed composition and began privately producing, for the eyes of a few literary friends, a remarkable new kind of poetry chiefly representing human obligations and response to a natural world deeply infused with specific religious and theological meaning: “news of God.” Evidently this newly “prophetic” approach was the justification for an otherwise unaccountable change of mind regarding the religious value of writing.

Hopkins’ letters and journals record the attentive habits of a lifelong amateur field naturalist and artist, as well as his horror at wanton environmental despoliation by an industrial society “founded on wrecking.” But it is in much of the best poetry itself that he affirms, to an unusual degree among Christian writers of his or any era, the mutual interdependence of humanity and created nature and the inter-implication of our own salvation with its survival.

Of particular interest, then, are Hopkins’ poems that do associate God and humankind and the Earth in ecological terms. Of these, the best known is perhaps the sonnet “God’s Grandeur,” a lament for a world obscured from us by industrial commerce: “All is smeared with trade, bleared, seared with toil / And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell” (Hopkins in MacKenzie 1990: 139). We can no longer discern or detect what lies beneath the burnt, begrimed, oily, stinking surface of modern things. Still, the poem also testifies to the divine “charge” of meaning in the physical world. Something resilient, a “dearest freshness,” still “lives” somewhere “deep down” under the now “spent” and blighted surface of creation, and it abides in “things.” The basis for this hope, the firm “Because” of it, is faith in a divine spirit, the “Holy Ghost,” its life principle. Implicit here is something more active, or even activist, than passively trusting in God. The breath of the Holy Ghost is also traditionally charged with the function of inspiring language and utterance, the words of poets, prophets, priests, and possibly all of us, and by this agency possibly to animate the human world to action, to sound the alarm, as it were.

Another eco-lyric, “Ribblesdale,” confirms that writing poetry was justified, for Hopkins, by its exertions in response to and on behalf of suffering Earth’s voiceless appeal. This poem also resumes the “God’s Grandeur” motifs of wrecking, of spending, of “bentness,” and of the bareness of the Earth’s once lush surface. In this instance, the visibly wronged being of Earth is said to plead silently (or by implication through the voice of poets?) to “self-bent” and “thriftless” humankind.

Confirming Hopkins’ perceptual or even epistemological emphasis on the consequences of destroying nature is another lyric, “Binsey Poplars.” Here the fragility, the delicacy of nature is more than “sweet.” In some mysterious way we depend upon it. We know not what we do when we dig, cut, hack, and rack, or imagine we are somehow improving a world whose very “being” is actually as sensitive to permanent injury as our own translucent eyeball tissue (“But a prick will make no eye at all”) (in MacKenzie 1990: 157). Here again is the ominous cycle of violence and self-blinding, with the enigmatic implication that the consequences for ourselves are, if anything, greater than for the physical world itself. The poem’s most important warning is about losing access to channels of knowledge and understanding.
clearly connects an ethic of conservation with the means and prospects for our own salvation.

Among the many other religious nature poems by Hopkins that include similar elements are “The Starlight Night,” “Spring,” “The Sea and the Skylark,” “As Kingfishers Catch Fire,” “Pied Beauty,” “Hurrahing in Harvest,” “Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves,” and “That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire.”

The famous nature poems of Hopkins demonstrate the urgency with which he seized upon ecological contexts as an essentially religious impetus or imperative for his suddenly renewed poetic mission. The world would otherwise probably not have had his poetry at all.

Michael D. Moore

Further Reading


See also: Roman Catholic Religious Orders.

Huaorani

World Creation and Predatory Forces
One of the greatest problems with Tylor’s view of animism, according to Nurid Bird-David, is its monolithic character. She argues instead for a plurality of animisms: different belief systems conceptualize “life,” “non-living” and “human” in fundamentally different ways. Exploring the animism of a forest people from the Ecuadorian Amazon, the Huaorani, who have lived between the Napo and the Curaray Rivers and from the Andean foothills to the Peruvian border for hundreds of years, indicates the value of such an approach.

There are no words in huaorani, “the language of the true people,” corresponding to nature, ecology, religion, animals or plants. Like most Amazonian societies, and most indigenous societies, the Huaorani do not conceptualize the world in abstract, reified categories that separate the body from the mind, belief from perception, or human society from the nonhuman environment. “Our homeland,” “our territory,” the rainforest or nature is monito òmè. Within monito òmè, people distinguish pristine forests with high and old trees (òmè) and secondary forests, defined as “places where trees have grown again” (ahuene). Successional fallows are further divided into huyencore (four- to ten-year-old clearings characterized by the frequency of balsa trees), huyencore (ten- to twenty-year-old clearings), huiñeme (twenty- to forty-year-old clearings characterized by the high incidence of adult palms), and durani ahuè (forty- to a hundred-year-old clearings remarkable for their bigger trees). Huaorani ecology is primarily based on specific plant/animal relationships and on people’s experience of how different plant species grow, mature and reproduce. Animals are identified and named at species level, although, when pushed by an inquisitive researcher, a Huaorani may use the name of an iconic species to define broad categories such as fish, primates, or birds.

Huaorani territory is not definable from without as a well-demarcated space bounded by clear limits on all sides. It is, rather, a fluid and ever-evolving network of paths used by people when “walking in the forest” (òmè). Men, women and children spend a great part of their lives slowly exploring monito òmè. They hunt and gather but they also simply walk, observing with pleasure and interest animal movements, the progress of fruit maturation, or vegetation growth. When walking in this fashion, people feel in and with the forest, their bodies absorbing its smells. Walkers keep these paths open through many small and careful gestures, such as the picking up of a thorny leaf fallen during the night, the breaking of bending branches, or the cutting of invasive weeds. As soon as they have fallen into disuse, paths revert to forest, indistinguishable from the vegetation cover. Well-trodden paths located at strategic intersections become the repositories of traumatic memories in the same way as physical landmarks (i.e., creeks, particularly tall and old trees, lagoons, or hill formations) recall bloody attacks or spearing raids. Other paths form a network criss-crossing unknown or forgotten land; they lead to exciting discoveries, especially food plants said to have been planted by past people. Trekking in the forest is therefore like walking through a living history book in which natural history and human history merge seamlessly. Walkers, while maintaining the paths, move from direct observations of animals or people to detecting their presence; they also note material signs evoking times long gone.

Life as a continuous process involving the right combination of elements and species is central to Huaorani spirituality. Their social life, knowledge of the world, and cultural understanding are all inspired by the life-force and energy characteristic of all organisms – especially plants – which caused them to be born, grow and mature. This energy, in a sense, has authored their lives. The myth of origin, which develops around the giant ceibo tree (Ceiba pentandra), container of all life forms, expresses the fundamental characteristics of the Amazon ecosystem, which largely depend on a delicate balance between heat and humidity, and shade and light.
In the beginnings of time the Earth was flat; there were no forests or hills, moon or night. The Earth was like a dried, barren, and endless beach, stranded at the foot of a giant ceibo tree. This tree, attached to heaven by a strong vine, was the only source of shade against the merciless heat of the sun. All that was alive dwelled in the giant tree. In those times of beginning, living beings, neither animals or humans, formed one single group, with the exception of birds (doves), the only game available to hunters. There were also two dangerous individuals, Eagle (raw meat eater) and Condor (eater of rotten flesh), who preyed on people and doves alike. Life in the giant ceibo would have been good, if it had not been for the two predators. Every time someone left home, Eagle or Condor would descend on their victim, kill her and take her back to the nest on the highest branch. The victim’s relatives would hear in grief the noises of the cannibal repast, and see the bones of their dear kin fall to the ground, one after the other. At last, Squirrel and Spider decided to take action and put an end to this dreadful business. They climbed one day to the very top of the tree, where Eagle had fallen into a deep sleep after one of his copious meals. Spider wove a tight and intricate web all around Eagle’s body. Eagle remained unaware of the snare until the following day when he attempted to swoop down on his next prey. He was soon seen hanging upside down, his head swinging in the air. Squirrel’s plan was to detach him and let him crash to the ground, like a dead log, but the maneuver went wrong. Instead of cutting the web off the branch, Squirrel’s teeth incised the vine linking the tree to the sky. The vine sprang up, with Squirrel still biting on its end, causing the giant tree to fall westward all the way to the ground. Squirrel’s tail can still be seen in the sky, especially on the bright nights that precede heavy rains, where it glows like a fluffy trail of golden dust. The Amazon watershed was born from the fallen tree, and numerous fish species from its leaves. Before the fall, there was only scarce rain avidly collected in small clay pots. During the fall, the plug which blocked the underground waters loosened up from the giant tree’s roots, causing the country to be submerged under an enormous flooding which killed almost everything in its wake. A few people survived by taking refuge in a hollow branch in which they made their way up river. They died of exhaustion, except for a brother and a sister, who became husband and wife. By flying over the immense flood plain, Woodpecker succeeded in lifting hills out of the sea of mud. Forests soon covered the hills, in which the first Huaorani found refuge, dwelled, multiplied and grew numerous (in Rival 1997: 69–70).

Although the correlation between mythology and society is far from direct or straightforward, there are grounds for arguing that the Huaorani myth of origin expresses the fundamental characteristics of the Amazon ecosystem. There would be no life on Earth without trees, as they provide shade, food and shelter, and prompt rain formation. The primordial tree is a small ecosystem in itself, and the world expands when this perfectly self-contained microcosm collapses, giving birth to a new ecosystem, which is as integrated and self-generative as the primordial tree. The story of the fall of the great ceibo tree unambiguously belongs to the Cosmic Tree religious complex. Like in a number of ancient religions founded on the sacred tree of life, the Huaorani cosmic tree represents the central axis around which the universe is ordered. The myth of origin articulates another powerful message, which associates social categories with two distinct natural processes: the aggressive relation between predators and their prey, as found in the animal kingdom, and the life-sustaining relation between people and forest plants.

**Hunting and Shamanism**

Before the recent introduction of new garden crops, shotguns, dogs and Western medicine, as well as the intensive use of air transport and radio contacts which undermined traditional foraging, the Huaorani hunted almost exclusively monkeys, especially the woolly monkey (*Lagothrix lagotricha*), the howler monkey (*Alouatta seniculus*) and the spider monkey (*Ateles paniscus*), birds, such as the curassow (*Mitu salvini*) and the Spix guan (*Penelope jacquacu*), and white-lipped peccaries (*Tajassu pecari*) with essentially two kinds of weapons, the blowpipe and the spear. The Huaorani say that monkeys and birds reproduce without difficulty as long as humans leave them enough food to eat, and as long as inter-species population dynamics are balanced, that is, as long as human settlements remain relatively small, interspersed, and transient. Huaorani hunting is a form of gathering, whereby using and consuming natural resources does not impair – and possibly even encourages – their continued reproduction. Furthermore, game animals are kept close and in plentiful supply through shamanic practices. Supernatural jaguars who visit shamans in rites of spirit possession and control game stocks make birds and monkeys stay closer to humans, and tell humans where to find game in the forest.

Men become shamans (*meñera*, literally “parents of jaguars”) at a mature age. A man does not choose to be a shaman, but is chosen as an adopted father by a jaguar spirit who first appears in his dreams. If the dream recurs, the jaguar spirit feels welcome and confident that the man has accepted him as his son. From then on, the jaguar spirit visits his human father, his “mother” (i.e., his human father’s wife) and his “siblings” (i.e., his human father’s...
children) regularly at night. Such visits make the man “die” temporarily, as the jaguar spirit/son takes the place of the man’s soul, and uses his body as a “tape recorder” to broadcast his visions and conversations with his human audience. Adoptive fathers of jaguar spirits are not only mature men with a family of their own, but also survivors of a grave childhood illness, who were given the hallucinogenic drug mahu (Banisteriopsis muricata) as the ultimate remedy. Finally, the “heart souls” (mimo) of dead shamans and warriors killed while fighting are said to “give birth” to several female jaguar cubs which are adopted and raised by “real” forest jaguars as their own cubs. In short, the spirits that live in jaguar bodies, adopt certain men as their fathers, and visit humans, once lived in human bodies.

Palm Groves and Natural Abundance
The Huaorani vision of life is not limited fertility, but natural abundance. Huaorani people, like other Amazonian trekkers and foragers, largely depend on managed, but not yet domesticated plant species. They also use a whole range of more or less intentional management practices to encourage the continuous growth of certain fruit trees and palms in old sites and to facilitate the propagation of certain plant species (Rival 2002). It is in the nature of trees and other food plants of the forest to give continuously to humans without asking anything in return. The Huaorani say that past people “did” (què) and “lived” (hüè) in such and such a part of the forest, and that their activities “have made the forest grow,” by which they mean that subsistence and ceremonial activities have encouraged the natural growth of useful forest plants. The forest is turned into a giving environment – that is, an environment that gives in profusion without asking anything in return – by the life activities of past people. In short, the forest, which stands as the historical record of past human activities, is inseparable from the people who have lived in it, and with it.

People are also conscious that their present activities are making similar activities possible in the future. However, such awareness is devoid of moral implication, and has nothing to do with the modern notion of planning for the benefit of future generations. Future and past are envisaged from the point of view of a continuous, timeless present. The dead do not ask for anything, so no exchange takes place between the living and the dead. What they “give” to the living is not really a gift, anyway; it is more like a by-product, a consequence of spending their lives giving to, and receiving from, each other; today’s useful resources are the legacy of their sharing economy. The forest, far from being a pristine environment external to society, exists as the product of the productive and consumptive activities of past peoples. Both the forest and society are regenerated through the business of ordinary life, without need for accumulation, surplus, stealing, or the transfer of life energy from one sphere to another.

Socio-cosmologies and Value Systems
This exposition makes it obvious that the Amazon rainforest has had a profound impact on Huaorani cosmology and social philosophy. Huaorani relational epistemology, rooted in the recognition of the shared physicality and biological unity of beings that grow, mature and decay, connects persons across species boundaries, including supernatural entities. Social life is embedded within organic processes.

Huaorani religious ideas have arisen from an obsession with predation, which, as the myth of origin indicates, constitutes one dimension of the world as it was created, and, as such, pre-dates speciation. Perceiving themselves as the victims of powerful predators (human enemies or evil spirits imagined as jaguars or harpy eagles) who reproduce themselves by continuously snatching the creativity, vitality and life-force of “true human beings,” Huaorani people can do no more than elude contact with cannibal attackers and rely on their own forces. Shamanism privileges a more symbolic and positive relation with nature, particularly with the animal world. Shamans, who have the power to see what is normally inaccessible to human consciousness, receive help from visiting jaguar “sons,” who, among other deeds, keep game animals close to humans. Shamanic power symbolically replicates the forest management practices through which people transform the forest into a giving environment.

The forest’s natural bounty is understood to result from the interlocking of animal, plant and human life cycles. It is the relationship between living people, the forest and past generations that makes forest resources bountiful. The forest naturally and abundantly provides people with food and useful materials, as well as with the means of establishing physical links with the past. The past is encountered while cruising in the forest, and history is made out of the intricate relationship between ecological cycles, such as massive seeding or fructification, and past activities that naturally increase forest resources. For the Huaorani, who associate the power to generate vitality with spontaneous vegetational growth, reproduction and continuity do not depend on the acquisition of, nor can they be appropriated by, external political or religious powers.

As Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff wrote just before his untimely death, there are two Amazons: the Amazon of modern development based on fossil fuels, ruthless exploitation, gold mining, logging, cattle ranching, hydro-electric dams, violence, corruption and human misery; and the Amazon of the small number of indigenous peoples who still retain their tribal ecological knowledge and ancestral value systems, and for whom to know the rainforest ecosystem is to communicate and socialize with
the natural kinds or natural forces which make it alive. The Huaorani, who still belong to the latter, cultivate interspecies communication and relate to the energies inherent in animals and plants by living in – with – the forest. Their eco-economy is in this sense solar, given that all living organisms originate from the same cosmic source, the sun, its rays, and powers of fecundity.

For the last fifty years, Huaorani people have been confronted with the other Amazon, that of oil development, although it is only recently (in 1994) that oil has been commercially extracted from their land to feed the global fossil economy which is exhausting raw resources, destroying lives and livelihoods, and undermining the future. Confronted with pernicious and contradictory economic and political interests, the Huaorani are not embracing the market place ruled by the imperatives of carbon energy and corporate law in the way expected by the oil companies operating on their territory. Witnesses of the transformation of their forest into a busy oil field, with thousand of kilometers of seismic lines cut, tens of wells drilled, and numerous temporary camps established, the Huaorani have subverted the cultural logic of corporate outsiders by treating them as sources of endlessly renewable wealth. Large quantities of foreign commodities imported by oil workers have reached Huaorani homes and have been distributed, shared and used according to the same egalitarian principles as other forest resources. The forest is bountiful. Past activities of long dead people are understood to be at the origin of forest abundance. The wealth of game and plant resources, accessed through the skilled activities of every hunter and gatherer sustains the longhouse sharing economy. By treating the oil companies as impersonal giving agencies not unlike that of long dead people, the Huaorani have turned the religion of the market on its head. What they continue to value are the subjects of the sacred Earth/forest. At the beginning of creation, there was the giant ceibo tree, rooted in Earth and tied to the sky. Through the dynamic interplay of social agency, the tree of life was transformed into a great water system and landscape. The world with all its differentiation and biocultural diversity is, and will continue to be, the historical transformation of what was given, the tree of life.

Laura Rival

Further Reading


See also: Animism (various); Amazonia; Shamanism – Ecuador.

Hudson River School Painters – See Art; Romanticism – American.

Hundredth Monkey

The claim that a spiritual transformation of consciousness is prerequisite to the reharmonization of life on Earth is a recurrent theme in environmental enclaves. One expression of this theme is that of the “Hundredth Monkey,” first published by Lyall Watson in Lifetide: A Biology of Consciousness (1979).

In Lifetide Watson described how on the Island of Koshima in 1952 a Japanese monkey of the species Macaca fuscata was provided with a new food, sweet potatoes. They were covered with sand and dirt and this particularly intelligent monkey, dubbed Imo by the primatologists studying the troop, quickly apprehended the potatoes would taste better if first washed in the river. Imo subsequently taught the behavior to his neighbors, which between 1952 and 1958 spread throughout the island, adopted by most of the monkeys. “Then something extraordinary took place” (1979: 147), Watson wrote, indicating that what happened next is not certain and that he had to gather the rest of the story from the personal anecdotes and bits of folklore among primate researchers, because most of them are still not quite sure what happened. And those who do suspect the truth (1979: 147) are reluctant to publish it for fear of ridicule. So I am forced to improvise the details, but as near as I can tell, this is what seems to have happened [Watson 1979: 147–8].

In the fall of 1958, a large group of monkeys was washing potatoes, “Let us say, for argument’s sake, that the number was ninety-nine” (148), when “one further
Monkeys in the Field
During the 1980s there were regular “Hundredth Monkey” protests against nuclear weapons at the U.S. government’s Nevada Test Site. While engaged in fieldwork exploring radical environmental sub-cultures I learned that many Earth First! activists had participated in protests at the test site and had been inspired by the story. One of them told me during a 1992 interview (4 January, Siskiyou National Forest, Oregon) that the idea has to do with paradigm shifts:

I’m trying to remember if it was a myth that became a scientific experiment, or a scientific experiment that became a myth, but during the ’50s, there were studies on these monkeys on an island off the coast of Japan. The scientists gave the monkeys potatoes to see what they would do with them, and they would eat them whether they were sandy or not. Then one day a girl (sic) monkey took her potato . . . and washed it off and ate it, preferred it, showed her friends, then the parents, and they caught on, and pretty soon all the parents, and the whole island washed the potatoes, and then [as if by magic] monkeys on all the other islands begin doing it, even though there was no physical contact.

When I responded, “So this shows interconnectedness of all beings?” he replied, “Oh yes. The magic of these paradigm shift stories shows that a lot is going on we can’t easily feel, touch and taste.”

Shortly after this conversation I noticed an article in Earth First! endorsing a similar metaphysics. Commenting on the “one percent effect” claimed by practitioners of Transcendental Meditation, the author wrote that it “demonstrates that when 1% of the population in a given area practices meditation . . . crime rates decrease along with instances of mental illness and disease. We literally can [therefore] dream back the bison, sing back the swan” (Lewis 1989: 27–8).

John Seed, the Australian deep ecology activist and itinerant Council of All Beings missionary also mentioned the “one percent effect” during an interview (5 November 1992 in Osceola, Wisconsin). He indicated that there was a journal article documenting it and that, although he was not sure about the validity of this research, the environmental crisis is so grave that only a miracle precipitated by massive spiritual-consciousness transformation could prevent massive extinctions.

Not all radical environmental activists, however, are enthusiastic about such beliefs. During a 1993 conversation between Dave Foreman, probably the most charismatic of the founders of Earth First!, and board members and staff of the Wildlands Project in the United States (24 February 1993, Tuscon, Arizona), the conversation turned to the collision of sub-cultures that had led to a schism in the radical environmental movement a few years earlier. In this context the idea of the Hundredth Monkey came under discussion. Then executive director of the project, David Johns, noted how activists from Oregon had shown up at Earth First! campaigns wearing “no them” buttons. These buttons expressed an antidualistic perspective toward political adversaries, in other words, the point of view that one’s opponents are not enemies or evil but misguided, implying that a transformation of human consciousness (like those envisioned in New Age circles and in stories like the Hundredth Monkey) will eventually overturn such distinctions. Foreman indicated that he did not fit in with such people and that he tended to ridicule the Hundredth Monkey stuff.

Johns, however, stated that there may be some truth to the theory, adding that such an effect would be too subtle to yield the radical changes needed to protect the Earth’s forests. As the conversation continued it became clear that most of those gathered thought the idea might be plausible. One mentioned favorably Peter Thomkins’ The Secret Life of Plants (a book that reached #1 on the NY Times best-seller list), which purported to show scientifically that plants have feelings and could communicate. Another board member talked about the sense of communication that American explorers reported having with the land. And for all his relative skepticism, Foreman himself stated, “I talk to trees. I think they’re telling me that it’s all connected.” He added that trees have even warned him on a number of occasions not to camp in a particular place.

Such interviews and conversations suggest that the plausibility of the Hundredth Monkey story resides not in its accuracy or scientific credibility. Such stories are resilient within the environmental countercultures because they cohere with the personal spiritual experiences of connection and extra-ordinary communication that many of these activists have had with nature’s various energies and life forms.

Bron Taylor

Further Reading
See also: Breathwork; Council of All Beings; Deep Ecology; Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front; New Age; Radical Environmentalism; Re-Earthing; Seed, John.
convert was added to the fold in the usual way,” sitting down and imitating the others.

But the addition of the hundredth monkey apparently carried the number across some sort of threshold, pushing it through a kind of critical mass, because by that evening almost everyone in the colony was doing it. Not only that, but the habit seems to have jumped natural barriers and to have appeared spontaneously in colonies on other islands and on the mainland...

The relevance of this anecdote is that it suggests there may be mechanisms in evolution other than those governed by ordinary natural selection. I feel that there is such a thing as the Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon and that it might account for the way in which many memes, ideas, and fashions spread through our culture. It may be that when enough of us hold something to be true, it becomes true for everyone. Lawrence Blair says, “When a myth is shared by large numbers of people, it becomes a reality.” I’ll happily add my one to the number sharing that notion, because it may be the only way we can ever hope to reach some sort of meaningful human consensus about the future, in the short time that now seems to be at our disposal (1979: 148).

Watson concluded *Lifetide* arguing that this and the other examined scientific and occult phenomena demonstrate,

> What we regard as ordinary physical matter is simply an idea that occupies a world frame common to all minds. The universe is literally a collective thought, and we have a very powerful say in the reality manifest on our particular sector (1979: 310).

This story spread at least as rapidly as the potato-washing monkeys. Ken Keyes, a self-help pioneer (id. 1996) explained that he learned of the story from talks given by the New Age writer Marilyn Ferguson (best known as the author of the New Age classic the *Aquarian Conspiracy*, if it is not an oxymoron to call it that) and Carl Rogers (the founder of Humanistic Psychology and arguably of the so-called Human Potential Movement). Keyes borrowed Watson’s story to promote a transformation in consciousness that would reverse our tendency to “experience people as ‘them’ – not ‘us’,” which he believed necessary to eradicate nuclear weapons and to restore our “bond with Mother Earth” (quotes from internet version [www.testament.org/testament/100thmonkey.html](http://www.testament.org/testament/100thmonkey.html), which includes additional material from Keyes 1982: 106–7).

Published with no copyright in 1982, *The Hundredth Monkey* story spread rapidly, first within the cultic milieu of Western religious and political countercultures – anti-nuclear, New Age, and environmental. Its popularity was boosted by a video by the same name in which Keyes and Rupert Sheldrake (who in his own books articulates a novel metaphysical explanation for animism) repeated and promoted the story in this medium. The story lives on at numerous internet sites and will likely do so for many years to come.

But its popularity cannot be accounted for without understanding its appeal. The *Hundredth Monkey* transmits a nature spirituality expressing metaphysics of inter-connection, namely, belief that, at least at a sub-atomic level, everything is connected to everything else. At the deepest levels of Being, therefore, there is no “us versus them,” a point which Keyes made explicitly in *Hundredth Monkey*. The metaphysical interconnection of all universal energies makes possible diverse modes of communication not observable scientifically, including telepathic pathways. They even make possible dramatic and rapid human cultural evolution that could bring social justice, peace, and environmental well-being.

It is especially noteworthy to understand the appeal of the vision when considering that those most commonly embracing it are barraged continually with the depressing environmental apocalypticism that is pervasive within the environmentalist sectors of the cultic milieu. The Hundredth Monkey suggests a metaphysical basis whereby humankind and other earthlings might evolve in such a way as to live harmoniously. This is an idea expressed in various ways within New Age enclaves and the subcultures they influence. We can see such ideas, for example, in José Argüelles’s understanding of the “Harmonic Convergence, James Redfield’s “Celestine Prophecy,” and in the idea of the “one percent effect” in Transcendental Meditation. They are also reflected in countless artifacts of material culture; for example, in bumper stickers and posters proclaiming we can “Dream back the Bison / Sing Back the Swan” and “Visualize World Peace.”

An appealing story is not necessarily accurate, of course. It is apparent to most of those who read the original scientific reports that Watson did not truly base his story on them. That he also implied that he had interviewed sources and patched together accounts from those present, an implication for which there is no evidence, also raises serious questions of his integrity and veracity. Keyes presented the story without mentioning Watson’s qualification about the uncertainty surrounding the incredible parts of the story, and did not mention that Watson himself acknowledged that he had “improvised” parts of the story. Skeptics concluded that Watson fabricated in an unscrupulous way his entire account. Some such criticisms were published in *The Skeptical Inquirer* and republished later in a book debunking this and other paranormal “phenomenon” (Admunson 1985, 1987; Frazier 1991). A later article reported that the senior scientist involved in the original studies denied observing any
spontaneous, trans-oceanic transformation in monkey-consciousness, having heard any folklore in this regard, or even having talked to Watson (Pössel and Amundson 1996). Watson’s only published response appeared in the Whole Earth Review, in which he essentially admitted that he made up the most salient points of the story.

A story need not be accurate, of course, to convey important truths. Watson and others moved by the story have offered the rejoinder that the story was never intended to be taken literally as a scientific theorem. It was, rather, an encouraging and empowering metaphor for the struggle to transform human consciousness in such a way that the Mother Earth and all denizens would be understood as sacred and coevolving toward a peaceful and harmonious future. Others within environmentalist sub-cultures who share the perception that the Earth is sacred dismiss the story as wishful New Age fantasy that distracts people from taking action in her defense. The reception of the story depends in part on what strategies for the hoped-for transformations activists find most plausible.

Bron Taylor

Further Reading
See also: Celestine Prophecy; Harmonic Convergence; Harmonic Convergence and the Spiritualization of the Biosphere; Natural Law Party; Sheldrake, Rupert; Transcendental Meditation.

Hunting and the Origins of Religion

Introduction
Recently the relationship between religion and biology has drawn increasing scholarly attention. Ranging from theories of religion being “hardwired” in the human brain as a result of the species’ genetic structure to the application of cognitive science in attempting to understand so-called religious proclivities and their history, more and more scholars such as Atran, Wilson, Ramachandran and Boyer are pursuing the links between humans, their religions, and the “natural” environment within which they function. Nature as the totality of the context within which a subject or an object exists, including all living and non-living materials, is a broad, even endless opportunity for relationships to be identified and traced. The origins and sources of particular comportments and relationships, in turn, throw light upon how those actions can be best understood. In this setting, religion can be approached as a web of relationships with an environmental framework; any attempt to grasp the origins of these relationships must, therefore, highlight that environment or the “natural” world in which those linkages take place. Among the most prominent of the pieces in this puzzle are human consciousness, human ethical behavior, and the predatory character of human interaction with the world, especially as represented in the hunt. All three concepts and activities rank at the top of any list proposing the most controversial notions of our time.

In contemporary thought, for example, ethics threatens to disappear into a general relativism. How is it possible any longer to establish values that function normatively? How, in other words, are values capable of “binding” and thus controlling the actions of members of a society? If one attempts to do that from within a given culture, one runs the danger of being charged with discrimination on the grounds of class or sexual orientation. If, on the other hand, one attempts to establish such value scales for another culture than one’s own, then, especially in the United States, one might well be tagged as chauvinistic, even a racist. What can ethical norms mean in a world where Japanese mountain climbers could struggle past dying Indian climbers near the peak of Mt. Everest in 1996 without saying a word or doing a thing to help them? Their only commentary: “Above 8,000 meters (25,000 feet) is not a place where people can afford morality” (in Krakauer 1998: 313).

Hunting, meanwhile, is being attacked from all sides. In Germany and France, for example, hunting stands have their supports sawed off and their ladders weakened; in the United States, hunting dogs are poisoned and vehicles are vandalized. In a particularly notable case in 1997, the First Amendment of the United States Constitution was applied to such an incident. Normally called upon in court actions to protect the exercise of free speech, in this case
the second part of the amendment was cited as support for the exercise of a woman’s right to religious freedom. She had attempted to interrupt a legally permitted hunt in the state of New Jersey and argued that the sacred and divine character of all living things was the core of her religious beliefs; as a result, she claimed the right to transform her belief into action, in this case the protection of the hunted animals from the hunters. Her claim was rejected by the court (1999).

Great debate has emerged over the past decade concerning the structure, the function, the meaning, and above all the origins, of human consciousness. Is, for example, as Crick has argued, human consciousness simply a huge collection of nerve cells or perhaps merely a reaction to magnetic fields, as Persinger has hinted? Or perhaps a story that we recite to ourselves, but which always remains the wrong story? Only the most rigorous defender of a divine creation as found in Christianity would still use the word “soul” to comprehend consciousness, much less speak in terms of Meister Eckhart’s “divine spark in the human being.”

The confusion surrounding these notions is probably reason enough to reflect on whether there is any relationship between them. What can it mean to be “ethically bound” while hunting or when conscious? A common distinction is often made between morality and ethics. While the latter category is typically applied to the responsibilities and duties that result from the relationship of a human being to itself, the former label refers to the duties that emerge from the relationship enjoyed by a human being to other living (and often non-living) beings. Unfortunately it is not always easy to differentiate cleanly between these sources of human responsibility or values. If, for example, one commits suicide due to unbearable pain and suffering, has one acted morally or in relationship to oneself according to Seneca’s famous dictum: “when the smoke in the room becomes too thick, then the best thing to do is to open the door and leave.” But is the relationship to the self the only such connection that one entertains? Presumably there is an extensive and complicated series of relationships maintained by every individual to other humans and to the surrounding environment to which one should pay attention or act ethically. To take our example of suicide, it turns out not to be simply a moral action but a complex event involving both moral and ethical decisions and consequences. Clearly it is difficult, and not always possible, to slip one’s responsibilities and actions neatly into the one or the other category only.

**The Hunter and the Prey**

If we turn our attention to hunting, we might ask how this action is best characterized. Obviously the hunt represents both a relationship of the actor to itself, that is, of the hunter to the hunter, as well as of the hunter to the hunted, or the prey. The main focus, however, remains concentrated on the relationship of the hunter to the hunted, and this for the simple reason that the death of the prey is the goal of the hunt. Despite Ortega y Gasset’s well-known claim that one kills in order to have hunted, it is vital to confirm that the death of the prey is a fundamental and core part of every hunt. Without the prey’s death, or at least without striving for the death of the prey pursued, there is simply no hunt. I do not wish to denigrate either the so-called camera safari or any other outwitting of another living being, whether human or animal. Yet such activities are simply not a hunt, though they often are powerful and skilled undertakings that frequently serve to confirm the power and the accomplishment of the main actor. An actual hunt, on the other hand, always must reckon with death: a hunter kills. That is why, of course, hunting is such a controversial event. Not because hunting can be viewed as a “management” or conservation tool, or even as necessary to human survival (food), but rather because hunting can be comprehended as the fulfillment of a human desire and need. Put baldly, the hunter experiences a certain pleasure in the act of killing. This fact cannot be obscured by laws and regulations, or even erased by pious wishes; at the most, we can hope to understand it. The question, therefore, to be raised in this connection is what an “ethically normative” hunt can mean under these conditions? What responsibilities and duties can be derived from the intended death of another being, above all when this act will lead inevitably to the direct and violent severing of the very relationship that provides the basis for an ethical relationship? This question can be approached from three different directions.

First, one can sustain an ethical relationship to the prey by paying strict attention to how the death is achieved. To kill through the hunt does not mean that one simply eliminates the prey; instead, the game is killed “cleanly,” which means that the animal is not destroyed but harvested. Such a death must also be inflicted as quickly and with as little suffering as possible; achieving such a death lies at the core of a hunter’s act. At the same time one employs a method of killing that allows the prey a chance to avoid death; in turn this means that the game has the opportunity to participate in its own death. Without this participation of the prey in its own death, the ethical relationship is broken.

Second, the dead animal is put to use. This means that the hunter reflects on *why* the prey died. In this way the killing of a being that is bound up with the hunter in an ethical relationship is justified. Without this justification, a death through hunting is no longer ethically constituted.

Third, the dead prey is celebrated precisely in its death. By becoming a “trophy,” a means to reflect on the game, its meaning in life, and its death, the killing of the prey is given *meaning*. Without this honoring of the slain animal and the consequent granting of meaning to it, which is to
be performed by the hunter, the ethical relationship loses all content.

In other words, an ethically determined hunt always bears the character of a “liturgy” or a “ritual.” The marks of such a performance are to be found in the fact that the prey is always killed in a particular way and not according to whim; in the special constitution of a “sacrificial act,” whereby the death has not occurred without purpose (in this way, for example, hunting is distinguished from the attempted extinction of a plague or nuisance animal); and in the perpetuation of honoring and remembering the prey and its death, which both imbue the being that has been killed with a further meaning that continues after its death. These fundamental guidelines form the basis for hunting around the world; and according to our current knowledge their beginnings reach into the Paleolithic and beyond.

Religion as a Consequence of the Hunt

If one understands hunting and its conceptual framework as here presented, then there would appear to be a direct connection between the hunt as the intentionally sought killing of another being and religion as a widely spread location for symbolic thought in general and human consciousness in particular. How can we more precisely determine this connection?

In a remarkable study of the North American pronghorn antelope, John Byers, prominent wildlife biologist, has concluded that this unique species is a survivor from a long-lost age still existing in our contemporary world. This species stands as a remaining witness to the great extinction of large mammals in North America some ten to fifteen thousand years ago. If we are fortunate, this particular antelope-like animal will always be here to “remind us of just how fast a North American cheetah could run” (1997: 244). In other words, even though the appropriate predator, the cheetah, has long since disappeared, its corresponding prey species, the pronghorn antelope, still lives and remains in possession of those characteristics that allowed it to survive its enemy. As Byers so memorably puts it, the pronghorn antelope will continue to be chased by the “ghosts of predators past” (1997: 242).

Weston La Barre, the late world-renowned anthropologist, once characterized the belief in god, indeed the construction of any religion, as a “biopsychological relationship peculiar to human biology” (1970: 20). The well-known case of Kaspar Hauser, however, shows us just how empty and unprepared for matters of religion we are upon entering this world. This so-called “child of nature” had been kept imprisoned almost all of its childhood until close to maturity without any contact whatsoever with other humans or with the natural world. After his liberation, Hauser displayed to the first observers absolutely no signs of the thoughts or insights, and certainly no acts, that might possibly have been associated with “religion.” Is it therefore possible that adaptive developments and acquisitions, evolutionary hangovers if you will, and not specific genes, build the core of those human constructions we call “religion”?

If we take Byers’ example of the North American pronghorn antelope, then we might best understand religion as a collection or assembly of particular strategies, tools and constructions by which the human species achieved the transition from being purely a prey species to being a predator species. Or to put it another way: as a point of departure, let us assume that religion is a complex and complicated set of strategies, which has as its goal the production of a value system, supported by a ritual apparatus, with which the human species can determine its origins and its final fate to be located outside of itself and its environment. The goal of such a strategy would be to cope with the experience that we as a species have changed from being prey to becoming predators, ending up in the unique position of being both prey and predator at the same time. Is it, in other words, possible that the human species is still pursued by the “ghosts of predators past” just as the American pronghorn antelope is, and that therefore the human species still displays some of the adaptations by which we once survived our most potent enemies?

The Battle for Life and Death

The heart of these reflections lies in the observation that the pursuit of prey species by predator species leads to wide-reaching changes in the pursued, for example, in herbivores such as antelopes. According to Byers and others, it is often the case that these changes and developments, such as the running speed of antelopes, reflect an adaptation that took place long ago and that does not fit the present situation in which the animal lives. Why should this not also be the case for the human species? Humans were originally herbivores; consequently, traces of these adaptations should still be available. As Byers points out, such a model of explanation would rank an historical interpretation of an ecological development peculiar to a particular species as equal to an explanation that is derived from the present-day usefulness of a particular behavior. Certainly the early experiences of the human species as prey led to survival strategies, even if our memories of these moments have long ago become faint. For example, how were decisions made about who would sleep on the edge of the fire and who next to the fire, and thus about who might well be the first one taken by a prowling predator? Even more important, how were such decisions made acceptable by those chiefly affected? The issue was, after all, a matter of life and death, just as it is for contemporary primates in portions of their African range. The main point is that some of these basic strategies that would have allowed leaders to make such decisions
about who would likely be the next prey taken from the group on the one hand, and that permitted the selected individuals to accept that decision on the other, are also found in many, many so-called religions around the globe. For example, how death can be overcome by the promise of a life after death; or the persuasion that the good of the collective is more valuable than the survival of the individual; or the value of sacrifice, especially of the self; and so on. Such belief structures can be understood without much difficulty as the result of strategies that were developed for coping with the relationship between prey and predator. As a result, such strategies have become firm components of the tool kit that the human species carries around for constant tinkering with the problems of survival. Not in the sense, of course, that Freud meant, but in an evolutionary and functional meaning.

If this theory is accurate, then the origins and the beginnings of religion would meet in a unique combination of human behavior and ideas that could be thought of as an evolutionary reaction to a prey/predator relationship existing for hundreds of thousands of years. This evolutionary hangover from an earlier development is still encountered in the human species of today. Some of our primate neighbors, above all those who go upright (for example the orang-utans, the baboons, the chimpanzees), are still frequently hunted and killed by the larger predator cats. For the human species, however, this problem has been greatly reduced by the extermination or severe reduction of such predators where humans thrive, except in a few isolated situations. The human species is among the best predators on Earth. We left the trees, went to the savannahs, and became among the world’s most efficient and successful predators. Just a very few years ago the remains of an early predecessor to the human species, Australopithecus afarensis, came to light, together with tools for butchering and bones that had been worked on. These bones and accompanying remains were dated some two and a half millions years ago! For a long, long time we were not only predators but also competitors with other predators for the same prey. And that means that at the same time we remained through many millennia also a prey species.

The result, as we have seen, was the development of the human species into a better and much more successful predator. What has remained, however, are the evolutionary traces of prey behavior that came about as a result of the prominent and very long exposure to predators. Physical traces of this development are, naturally, only few, and even they are not always obvious; the human psyche, however, betrays these remains much more clearly. When we hear noises in the middle of the night, it is not some spirit or ghost that we are afraid of, but rather it is a great predatory cat or perhaps the great cave bear, who could run faster than a horse. It is no wonder that the hair along our back stands up – or at least what is left of that hair. The chills that run up and down our spine are the result of our many back muscles that used to guide the hair formerly growing there. It was very risky, and very dangerous being a human being, and just how risky can still be seen in various parts of the world. India, for example, provides a classic example. In certain forests there that are inhabited by tigers, humans remain on the regular menu as prey for these powerful predators, and not simply the target of so-called “man-eaters” who have been driven to hunt humans because of injury or old age. Earlier, and present-day, experiences with the grizzly bears of North America together with the annual and sometimes deadly meetings with the polar bears of the far north offer further examples. And who can forget the story of John Patterson and his lions of Tsavo? He was supposed to build a bridge over the river Tsavo in British East Africa during the year 1896. Two young male lions interrupted work on the rail line and the bridge for over seven months, however, by keeping the indigenous and Indian workers on their daily menu. It took over half a year before Patterson and his colleagues were able to kill the lions. Finally, one need only turn to the constant wars that plague the human species all across the globe to experience the human being as a predator par excellence.

There is one more thing that links the hunt and religion with each other, and with human consciousness. Widely experienced is the attempt on the part of many religions to remove the handcuffs with which the pursuit of “history” has bound us. This attempt is made through religious belief, ritual, and stories to recover the past and have it live again in the fullness of its reality and effect. Though some historians have proclaimed precisely this achievement as their goal (one need only think of Leopold von Ranke), most, if not all, realize that this task can never be accomplished. Through the hunt, however, the event that has already occurred can actually be resurrected and experienced in all its plentitude. In the killing that is such an essential part of hunting, the hunter is able to break through the barriers of memory: time is no longer a prison but a source. Only in the rarest of human moments is anything remotely possible. The great goal of myths and of religions, always striven for but never gained, is the heart and soul of the hunter’s life: through the hunt one returns to the beginning. This happens, as each hunter knows, because every kill is the first kill.

Thus we return to our beginning. Hunting is anchored in the earliest origins of the human species and in the ongoing environmental context we call nature. At the same time, however, hunting is governed by norms and devices that reoccur again and again in later developments of religion and human consciousness. Every kill is the first kill...
Further Reading
Safari Times (February 1997; July 1999).
See also: Ecological Anthropology; Ecology and Religion; Evolutionary Biology, Religion, and Stewardship; Hunting Spirituality; Hunting Spirituality and Animism; Paleolithic Religions; Shepard, Paul; Wonder toward Nature.

Hunting Spirituality

“Hunting spirituality” is perhaps most readily observable among peoples to whom the phrase itself would make little practical sense – those contemporary hunter/orager societies whose lifeways are closest to those of our prehistoric forebears, and which continue to practice subsistence forms of hunting, in combination with gathering and/or small-scale horticulture. While there are many variations from one context to the next, the attitude toward nature expressed by these Aboriginal cultures is that summed up by anthropologist Richard Nelson, with reference to the Koyukon people: “Move slowly, stay quiet, watch carefully, be ever humble, show no hint of arrogance or disrespect . . . [A]pproach all life, of which humans are a part, with humility and restraint. All things are among the chosen” (Nelson 1991: 277). This attitude of reverence arises from, and in turn reinforces, a sense of mutuality between human and nonhuman beings. The twin ideas that everything that lives is holy, and that life itself comprehends a cycle of which death is a necessary part, are perhaps more comfortably at home in an animistic setting in which the dividing line between nature and human culture (as well as that between matter and spirit) is far less firmly drawn, than in the developed world.

Indeed, hunting in developed, particularly Western, societies has generally been characterized as a form of mastery over, rather than intercommunion with, nonhuman nature. From ancient Greece forward, European hunting was a pastime reserved for aristocrats, the vast majority of them men. Much of the symbolism associated with it reflected patriarchal and hierarchical values. While the situation in the United States is rather more complex in terms of class (rural subsistence hunting developed alongside the European model of hunting as the pursuit of the privileged classes), in the main here too the predominating models for hunting have been those
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described by sociologist Stephen Kellert as either “utilitarian” (meat or subsistence hunting) or “dominionistic” (competitive or trophy hunting). However, in his important research on hunters’ motivations, Kellert also isolated a third “type” of hunter, the “naturalistic” hunter, who seeks “an intense involvement with wild animals in their natural habitats,” and generally exhibits more knowledge of and affection for wild animals than hunters of the other two types (Kellert 1976). While these hunters are in the minority, and there is a certain amount of overlap among the three categories in any event, the number of naturalistic hunters appears to be growing. And the “nature hunter,” who according to Kellert confronts the paradox involved in killing an animal for which one also claims deep affection, represents an alternative view to the hierarchical conception of hunting.

Among European and American hunters, two sorts of hunting spirituality may be distinguished. The European tendency has been to ritualize some aspect of the kill – the “blooding” ceremony in British fox hunting (in which a small amount of the prey’s blood is spread on the face of the first-time hunter), and the “last bite” (a sprig of greenery placed in the newly killed stag’s mouth) in Germany are good examples – as well as to bring hunting itself within the ritual umbrella of the Christian Church. Catholic hunters throughout Europe venerate St. Hubert as their patron saint, bringing their hunting horns, hounds and falcons into church to celebrate his 3 November feast day. However, with occasional exceptions, traditions such as these, rooted as they are in culture-specific forms of Christianity and closely identified with aristocratic privilege, did not translate to North American hunting culture.

Hunting spirituality among non-Native Americans tends to arise from what Kellert called the naturalistic perspective on hunting, and its exponents appeal to native, non-Christian and pre-Christian models. Nelson, for example, was initiated into hunting by native Alaskans; while he is loath to disown his identity as a white, middle-class Protestant, he makes explicit use of the teachings of Koyukon elders to articulate his experience of reciprocity between himself as hunter and the deer that keep him alive both literally and figuratively. In a similar vein, Ted Kerasote (1993) writes of the “deep emotional, even spiritual investment” he and his Wyoming neighbors have in elk-hunting, and (drawing the metaphor from his Greek Orthodox background) remarks that “elk meat is the ‘blooding’ ceremony in British fox hunting (in which a small amount of the prey’s blood is spread on the face of the first-time hunter), and the “last bite” (a sprig of greenery placed in the newly killed stag’s mouth) in Germany are good examples – as well as to bring hunting itself within the ritual umbrella of the Christian Church. Catholic hunters throughout Europe venerate St. Hubert as their patron saint, bringing their hunting horns, hounds and falcons into church to celebrate his 3 November feast day. However, with occasional exceptions, traditions such as these, rooted as they are in culture-specific forms of Christianity and closely identified with aristocratic privilege, did not translate to North American hunting culture.

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These writers, and others who identify with the naturalistic model, all stress the initiatory importance of hunting, as a way of participating in the natural world, and reconnecting with the rhythms of the life-process from which Judeo-Christian civilization has become increasingly alienated. They tend, as a group, to be critical of urbanization and of advanced technology for its own sake, and to argue for what the late environmental philosopher Paul Shepard referred to as a movement back to the Pleistocene. This does not mean nostalgia for the past, or an attempt to appropriate other or earlier forms of hunting spirituality in any simple-minded fashion. Rather, as Max Oelschlaeger has argued – picking up where Shepard left off – the goal is a “new-old way of being,” rooted in a radical reconfiguring of the relationship between human culture and nature, which draws its insights from the best and deepest intuitions of those cultures which have lived more intimately in connection with the Earth.

Poet and environmental activist Gary Snyder eloquently sums up what might be called the credo of American hunting spirituality as follows:

The archaic religion is to kill god and eat him. Or her. The shimmering food-chain, the food-web, is the scary, beautiful condition of the biosphere.

Subsistence people live without excuses . . . A subsistence economy is a sacramental economy because it has faced up to one of the critical problems of life and death: the taking of life for food . . . Our distance from the source of our food enables us to be superficially more comfortable, and distinctly more ignorant (Snyder 1990: 184).

Mary Zeiss Stange

Further Reading


See also: Adams, Carol; Hunting and the Origins of Religion; Hunting Spirituality and Animism; Paleolithic Religions and the Future; Shepard, Paul; Snyder, Gary; Wilderness Religion; Women and Animals.

Hunting Spirituality and Animism

I’ve never really thought of myself as a “spiritual person.” Certainly not in any ecclesiastic sense of the term. Like television commentator Bill Moyers, I’m firmly of a mind that “a lot of religion gives God a bad name.”

But recently, here in the midst of my middle years, a profound spirituality has bitten into my being. And it’s all tied up with hunting. To put a name to it, borrowing from two of my literary betters, I’ve become an “Earthiest” (Edward Abbey), in that “I stand for what I stand on” (Wendell Berry). An Earthiest is simply a pragmatic neo-animist. And animism, I propose, is the ultimate spiritual reality. While nature — and therefore “nature worshipping” animism — is palpable, logical, and utterly understandable on any number of levels, “God,” by definition, is incomprehensible. Thus, any belief in God requires unquestioning faith. And faith is nothing more than blind acceptance of something whose existence lies beyond proof.

Physicist Paul Davies restates this contentious issue well when he says:

To invoke God as a blanket explanation of the unexplained, is to make God the friend of ignorance. If God is to be found, it must surely be through what we discover about the world, not what we fail to discover (Davies in Raymo 1998).

Indeed, I’ll go with my senses.

“In indigenous cultures around the world,” writes psychotherapist Ralph Metzner, offering an apt summation of what draws me spiritually to animism,

the natural is regarded as the realm of spirit and the sacred; the natural is the spiritual. From this follows an attitude of respect, a desire to maintain a balanced relationship, and an instinctive understanding of the need for considering future generations and the future health of the ecosystem — in short, sustainability. Recognizing and respecting worldviews and spiritual practices different from our own is perhaps the best antidote to the West’s fixation on the life-destroying dissociation between spirit and nature (Metzner in Oelschlaeger 1995).


According to ethnographic research, animism has always been and remains the universal cosmology of unadulterated hunting/gathering peoples worldwide (though such peoples today, following centuries of genocide, geographic displacement, ecological erosion, and cultural cooption, are scarce as fur on a fish). Likewise, neo-animism — Earthism, if you will — plays actively in the cosmologies of all *true* hunters yet today, whether they know it or not. As Aldo Leopold points out in his lyrical essay “Goose Music”:

Hunting is not merely an acquired taste: the instinct that finds delight in the sight and pursuit of game is bred into the very fiber of the race . . . The love of hunting is almost a psychological characteristic. A man may not care for golf and still be human. But the man who does not like to see, hunt, photograph, or otherwise outwit birds or animals is hardly normal. He is supercivilized, and I for one do not know how to deal with him (1990).

Nor do I, though they often are friends and family.

Various sciences concur today that our apish deep-time ancestors started down the long winding path to sapience some six million years ago. Across all that gaping void of time, we were gatherers and, increasingly, hunters; predatory omnivores; bipedal bears. By comparison, we’ve been farmers and herders for only the past ten thousand years — less than one percent of our species’ tenure by even the most modest of informed estimates.

As both genetics and biology testify, ten thousand years is by no means long enough for the human DNA pattern (genome) to have even seriously begun adapting to match the radically altered social, physical, technological and cultural environment we have wrought for ourselves in that same brief interval. Were our ancient, instinctive needs for predatory omnivory (and the lifeway and cosmology such a diet implies) not so deeply etched in our genetic being — were it merely “something we once did” along the road to becoming human, rather than what we *are* — hunting would have long ago been abandoned and forgotten.
But such is not the case. And this in spite of centuries of genocidal oppression of animistic tribalism by agricultural civilization and its various messianic religions, conspiring in a concerted effort to bring about what novelist Daniel Quinn (Ishmael and The Story of B) calls the “Great Forgetting.” Certainly, humanity’s essential animistic tendencies cannot be genetically obliterated in so short a time as ten thousand years. Yet, in all urban civilizations they are effectively sublimated. Thus is the willful destruction of wild nature – which animism could never conceive much less condone – culturally codified and morally sanctioned throughout the “civilized” Christian/Jewish/Moslem world.

Meanwhile, those few among us who would fight to protect wildness, or, more daring yet, remain active players in wildness – those of us who clearly have not forgotten how we once were, how we are meant to be – are defiled by industrial culture as “tree-huggers, environmental elitists, and troublemakers” in the first instance, “anachronisms, barbarians, and heretics” in the latter. For my part, so be it. “To embrace the mass religions or ideologies of the present,” advises Wyoming meat hunter and poet C.L. Rawlins, “we must first deny what we know naturally in our very bones: how the world works” (Rawlins in Petersen 1996).

And how the world works is through an endless sacred cycle of digestion. All things born must die, and, one way or another, be consumed. To be or not to be is not the question, but when.

The reality that all flesh feeds on fellow flesh is ineluctable, logically undeniable, even for the strictest of vegans. To trot out one of preeminent human ecologist Paul Shepard’s more colorfully cranky aphorisms:

> The human digestive system and physiology cannot be fooled by squeezing a diet from a moral. We are omnivores: our intestines and teeth attest to this fact ... Vegetarianism, like creationism, simply reinvents human biology to suit an ideology. There is no phylogenetic felicity in it (1998).

Phylogeny is the evolutionary history of a species, compressed into a common genome. Veganism is felicitous to the phylogeny of no omnivorous species, jutting like a bent spoke from the great grinding wheel of biological life. Contrarily, nothing could be more in tune with nature, thus more ultimately moral, than to follow our omnivorous instincts, needs, and “God-given” talents as what I think of as spiritual hunters, openly and gratefully acknowledging at least a few of the countless deaths that go to nourish our lives. In attempting and accomplishing such personal humility and metabolic identity with the rest of nature, I propose, a far higher percentage of hunters succeed than do vegans.

One of the most significant and subtle scenes in Richard Nelson’s award-winning Alaskan memoir The Island Within comes when a native Koyukon hunter voices the animistic conundrum: “Remember, each animal knows way more than you do” (in Nelson 1990). In addition to its instincts – the “superhuman” ability to interpret and utilize the finest intricacies of landscape, weather, its fellow creatures, and more – what every animal not only knows but also actively acknowledges is its place in the great web of life. For millions of years, humans knew this too. And a few of us still do.

Spiritual hunting has helped me not only to accept the biological necessity of life-giving death, but also to applaud its practicality and embrace it as immutably sacred. And what is sacred must be guarded for all time.

In the end, we find sacredness only where we seek it. And only if we seek it. True hunters, spiritual hunters, seek and find sacredness in aspen grove and piney wood; in mountain meadow and brushy bottom; in cold clear water and stinking elk wallow; and ultimately – necessarily, naturally – in bloodstained hands.

David Petersen

Further Reading


See also: Hunting and the Origins of Religion; Hunting Spirituality.

Huxley, Aldous (1894–1963)

Aldous Huxley, novelist, poet, literary critic, philosopher, essayist, was among the intellectual giants of the twentieth
century. Born in Surrey, England into the famous biologist family (Julian Huxley, his brother; Thomas Huxley, his grandfather) and educated at Eton and Oxford, he developed a close friendship with D.H. Lawrence when both lived in Italy in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In his subsequent novels, Lawrence served as Huxley’s primary model of the “natural man.” Huxley moved to the United States in 1937.

Huxley’s many novels included Crome Yellow (1921), Antic Hay (1923), Point Counter Point (1928), Brave New World (1932), Eyeless in Gaza (1936), After Many a Summer Dies the Swan (1939), Time Must Have a Stop (1945), Ape and Essence (1949), The Devils of Loudun (1952) and Island (1962). In 1959, the American Academy of Arts and Letters granted Huxley the Award of Merit for the Novel. The author’s non-fiction works included his anthology of mystical writing, The Perennial Philosophy (1946), as well as numerous collections of essays: Jesting Pilate (1926), Do What You Will (1929), The Olive Tree (1937), Ends and Means (1937), The Doors of Perception (1954), Heaven and Hell (1956), Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow (1956) and Brave New World Revisited (1957) among others.

In his earlier years, Huxley was critically ambivalent and agnostic toward religion. Through remaining a cynic who saw life as essentially meaningless, he exalted the Greek ideals of sexual and intellectual happiness. If these two forms of fulfillment represent polar conflicts, in his novel Eyeless in Gaza they were resolved through mysticism. In his “Seven Meditations” of 1943, Huxley declared, “Unholiness arises when we give consent to any rebellion or self-assertion by any part of our being against the totality which it is possible for us to become through union with God” (in Bridgeman 1992: 23). This more mystical outlook culminates in The Perennial Philosophy.

Already, however, in his early essay “One and Many,” Huxley concluded,

If men are ever to rise again from the depths into which they are now descending, it will only be with the aid of a new religion of life. And since life is diverse, the new religion will have to have many Gods . . . It will have to be all, in a word, that human life actually is, not merely the symbolical expression of one of its aspects (1937: 40).

Despite this affirmation of pluralism, Huxley’s mystical quest took him steadily closer to a monistic position. During the 1940s and early 1950s, he became an initiate of Prabhavananda of the Ramakrishna Order, but after his experiments with entheogens as sacramental substances, he grew away from Vedanta and closer to Zen under the influence of Jiddhu Krishnamurti “who espoused freedom from any prophet or path”(Bridgeman 1992: x). Huxley is known for arranging his consumption of LSD shortly before his death.

Huxley’s clearest understanding of nature is found in his 1956 essay “The Desert.” Here he expresses his understanding of space, silence and emptiness as “natural symbols of the divine” (1959: 19). The desert conveys the overwhelming quality of the cosmos vis-à-vis humanity. For Huxley,

By the majority the desert should be taken either dilute or, if at full strength, in small doses. Used in this way, it acts as a spiritual restorative, as an anti-hallucinant, as a de-tensioner and alternative (1959: 21).

In exalting mystics as diverse as Wordsworth, St. Bernard, Thomas Traherne and Meister Eckhart, Huxley found no antithesis between nature and spirituality. But when we do not accept nature as teacher and express charity toward her, “we try to dominate and exploit, we waste the Earth’s mineral resources, ruin its soil, ravage its forests, pour filth into its rivers and poisonous fumes into its air” (Huxley 1947: 109).

Huxley condemned the folly of humanity’s presumptuous attempt to be the master of nature “rather than her intelligently docile collaborator,” and claimed that the corollary of an immanentist doctrine is the sacredness of nature. But, he warned, “one cannot know created Nature in all its sacred beauty, unless one first unlearns the dirty devices of adult humanity” (1947: 124).

Further Reading

Hyenas – Spotted

Like lions, spotted hyenas are one of Africa’s top predators. Although their territories also face encroachment by growing human populations, spotted hyenas are still found in greater numbers than lions and many other “charismatic megafauna.” Spotted hyenas are bigger, bolder, more ubiquitous, more social, and more of a hunter
than either East Africa's other hyena, the striped hyena, or southern Africa's brown hyena. They have been subjected to the greatest symbolic elaboration. Like leopards, spotted hyenas are crepuscular and nocturnal. A number of ethnic groups in Africa place leopards and spotted hyenas among the animal families of the notorious night-witches. With spotted hyenas, few positive associations are linked to the speed and strength they share with leopards. In Africa, some ethnic groups give individuals "hyena" names (e.g., Mbiti, Ondiek, Nyang’au, Kundu) but this naming tends to have origins in negative circumstances such as a mother dying in childbirth, or a child being born alive after one or more siblings died during the birth process. In some cases, the term for hyena is a synonym for "monster." Hyenas have a place at the top of many, but not all, Africans' lists of "animal hates."

Negative views of hyenas are found around the globe. Buddhism has marked hyenas as inedible to humans for the stench associated with their carrion eating and for their predatory nature. The 1642 "Decree on the Protection of Animals and the Environment" excluded predacious hyenas from the list of animals Tibetan Buddhists were prohibited from harming. Islam has proscribed the eating of hyenas, marking hyenas as "beasts of prey" whose consumption can negatively affect a person's character. Islam's concern to slaughter animals by humane methods has been seen as antithetical to the bloody manner by which hyenas kill and consume their food. The Old Testament and Pseudepigraphical texts show ancient Israelites reviled hyenas for carrion-eating and despoiling graves to feed upon human corpses.

Reporting on Pythagoras’ teachings in his Metamorphoses, Ovid marked hyenas as anomalous for their purported practice of changing their "function" and "sex." New Testament, apocryphal, Gnostic, and other early Christian texts echo Greek attitudes. In the second century, Clement of Alexandria contended that hyenas were improperly "quite obsessed with sexual intercourse." Clement focused, as later Christian writers were to do, on what he regarded as regular hyena ‘homosexuality.’ In the same period, in his Oneirocritica, Artemidorus, a Greek mystic, declared that in a dream the hyena represented "a virago," "poison-mixer," or person "addicted" to homosexuality. The Physiologus, compiled between the second and fifth centuries C.E., and the Aberdeen Bestiary (ca. 1200 C.E.), provide further examples of Christian portrayals of hyenas as anomalous, licentious animals that were "unclean" by multiple abominations and therefore inedible. While Aristotle attempted to refute views that hyenas were anomalously "hermaphroditic" (or changed their sex annually), his was a minority position for millennia. In 1614, Sir Walter Raleigh declared that hyenas had been excluded from the Ark because God only wanted "thoroughbreds." Raleigh imagined hyenas had risen again after the Flood from the “unnatural” copulation between a cat and dog.

The Aberdeen Bestiary also displayed an attitude that has persisted longer than mistaken views of hyena intersexuality and homosexuality. Using a discourse of debasement, it applied the term hyena to human beings and declared that "the sons of Israel resemble the hyena." From the fourth century C.E. into contemporary times, some Ethiopian Christians have echoed the anti-Semitic "blood libel" canard and widespread African beliefs that hyenas are one of the animals into which humans can shape-shift. They have labeled Beta Israel Falasha Jews "The Hyena People." Right- and left-wing writing in Austria, Hungary, Peru, the United States, and elsewhere continues to use the term hyena for "international Jewry" and other enemies.

The American-based Disney Corporation has added to the large body of crosscultural references that present hyenas in a negative light in its movie The Lion King. One of the hyenas has a Swahili name, Shenzi, whose range of meanings includes "worthless bastard," "uncivilized," and "uncouth." Hyenas are emphatically excluded from the ecological paean to the "Circle of Life" overtly celebrated in the film.

Spotted hyenas' scientific name, Crocuta crocuta, derives from a comparison of their reddish brown-tan coats to the color of saffron, the expensive and sought-after spice that comes from the Crocus sativa plant. This nomenclature is where complimentary attitudes toward spotted hyenas seem, in many instances, to end. Spotted hyenas prey on a variety of animals, including pythons, puff adders, pangolins, hare, zebra, wildebeest, the calves of elephants and rhinos, domesticated dogs, sheep, and cattle. They readily devour placentas. Their preferred method of killing involves completely disemboweling animals. Hyenas’ bloody means of killing seems messier than that of other predators who commonly go for the jugular and choke prey to death, but whether it makes them "the most vicious predator" has been questioned by only a few observers. Hyenas' jaws and physiology give them the ability to devour bone, hide, hair, teeth, and hooves. Instead of the thoroughness and efficiency with which hyenas can consume almost all of an animal being regarded as ecologically sound, efficient, thrifty practice, which, even though bloody, is ultimately tidy, their manner of eating has made them a trope for the sin of gluttony. Hyenas also do not display the reverence for their dead that has been connected to elephants. They have gained a reputation for killing other hyenas and being animal cannibals.

Hyena killings of Homo sapiens and their ancestors have been documented deep into the past. Spotted hyenas figure in early human cave art. At a cave site in Monte Circeo, Italy, a Neanderthal skull that appears to have been opened up violently was first interpreted as indicating
“brain eating and cultic practices” on the part of other Neanderthals. The more recent interpretation is that the condition of the skull was caused by a hyena that had eaten the brain and spinal cord of the unfortunate Neanderthal. Hyena killings of humans, although not common, continue in the present. Elephants have long killed humans, and still do so, without acquiring the same animus against their kind in the international arena where the term “rogue hyena” seems redundant.

Spotted hyenas will consume the remains of kills that other animals, human hunters, and poachers have left behind as unfit for further use, whether these kills are fresh or moldering. Hyenas engage in coprophagy (eating excrement). Africans and others who believe in “contagious magic” seem to have regarded coprophagy less lightly when hyenas do this, as opposed to when the domesticated dog eats feces. Hyenas roll in “grossly physiological” substances like regurgitated masses of hair and bone and the blood of dead animals as well as swamp mud, and other matter humans find malodorous, to “perfume” their bodies or keep away flies. The odor their bodies emit has added to their reputation as “unclean animals” for humans around the world who do not share hyenas’ olfactory preferences. While a few peoples in Africa in the past left some corpses out for hyenas to dispose of, like the ancient Israelites and many other peoples, many African ethnic groups have regarded hyena necrophagy with revulsion. Some have used hyenas’ services as garbage collectors while continuing to view hyenas as “animal untouchables” because of their close contact with refuse. Missionaries have developed “An African Creed” which emphasizes Jesus rose from a grave without as unfit for further use, whether these kills are fresh or moldering. Hyenas engage in coprophagy (eating excrement). Africans and others who believe in “contagious magic” seem to have regarded coprophagy less lightly when hyenas do this, as opposed to when the domesticated dog eats feces. Hyenas roll in “grossly physiological” substances like regurgitated masses of hair and bone and the blood of dead animals as well as swamp mud, and other matter humans find malodorous, to “perfume” their bodies or keep away flies. The odor their bodies emit has added to their reputation as “unclean animals” for humans around the world who do not share hyenas’ olfactory preferences. While a few peoples in Africa in the past left some corpses out for hyenas to dispose of, like the ancient Israelites and many other peoples, many African ethnic groups have regarded hyena necrophagy with revulsion. Some have used hyenas’ services as garbage collectors while continuing to view hyenas as “animal untouchables” because of their close contact with refuse. Missionaries have developed “An African Creed” which emphasizes Jesus rose from a grave made secure so that “hyenas did not touch him” (Anon 1998: 4).

Hyena sociality and sexuality has begun to receive another reading from women in the West and elsewhere. Research is showing that hyenas have the mental and social skills attributed to the more “charismatic” elephants and chimpanzees. Female hyenas are physically larger than males. Hyena social life, like that of elephants, is one where female “matriarchs” head groups that have been called “matrilineal clans.” As with elephants, females stay with their natal clans; while males leave them at puberty. This means that the death of several females, by deliberate poisoning, killing, or “culling” at the hands of humans can have a devastating effect on a hyena clan’s ability to repopulate. Such deaths do not yet get the same publicity and level of protest from eco-theology and ecofeminism that the killing of elephants and apes has evoked, but this is a matter female ethologists and others are seeking to change.

While female hyenas do not seem to cooperate or form deep emotional bonds to the extent that female elephants do, their lives and psyches have not been studied as extensively. While hyenas do not yet have as many human voices speaking for them, studies have shown that hyenas’ own communicative abilities are not limited to their so-called “maniacal laughter.” Bonds among the highly social spotted hyenas are maintained by a complex repertoire of sounds, body language, olfactory communications, social defecating, play, and other communicative and social activities.

Scholars of hyenas are coming to appreciate that, as with Africa’s rock pythons, hyenas are another animal species in which forced insemination of mature females appears to be absent. Female child molestation does not occur. While female dominance among hyenas has been attributed to their high level of testosterone, other factors are being recognized. Taking the male as the norm, the female spotted hyena has been said to possess a “pseudo-penis.” However, their organ actually only superficially resembles the male hyena’s penis. Female hyenas give birth, accept semen, and urinate through this organ. They use it in greeting rituals. Recent suggestions that the female hyena’s organ should be called a “macro-clitoris” or “external vagina” are an advance on calling it a “pseudo-penis,” but they only capture some of the organ’s complex character, much as the intricacies of hyena matri-clan life have yet to be fully appreciated.

Views about hyenas must be looked at more closely to see whether they apply to hyenas in general, to male hyenas, or to females. In contemporary Kenya, as in several other parts of the world, hyenas have featured in the discourses relating to both national and sexual politics. Shortly before his death on 23 August 2000 – a death that some Kenyans believe to have been another “arranged suicide” at the hands of the regime of Daniel arap Moi, which he had criticized – Fr. John Kaiser, wrote, “I want all to know that if I disappear from the scene, because the bush is vast and hyenas many, that I am not planning any accident, nor God forbid, any self destruction” (www.johnkaiser.net). In 2001, Wangari Maathai, a Gikuyu ecofeminist, and mother of the Greenbelt Movement, used a hyena metaphor to protest the plans of Moi’s regime to “excise” (or clear) forests and put them to use for its own purpose. Maathai’s censure was harsh. She asserted that asking Moi’s government “to stop the logging . . . is like asking the hyena to give you back the goat” (Carte Blanche Interactive 28 October 2001). Maathai also used a gendered hyena metaphor to castigate the Moi regime. She observed, “In my community they say that as greedy as a hyena is, it has never eaten its own puppies. Our so-called leaders have the level of greed that surpasses that of the hyena, for they destroy their own children, take food from their mouths, and eat it” (Sunday Nation 27 January 2002). Maathai’s background as a scientist is biology, and her comment can be seen to reference female hyenas as mothers. Field biologists describe female hyenas as “wonderful mothers.” It is male hyenas
that may seek to “cannibalize” their young, an effort stymied by the larger, fiercer, mother hyenas.

As with many peoples around the world, the Luo of Kenya have associated hyenas in general with gluttony. Luo “Hare and Hyena” folktales tend to display the Hare as a clever trickster who triumphs over the Hyena, an inconsiderate glutton who thinks with its belly rather than brain. Women are the cooks in Luo society. They show agreement with the general assessment that “leopards and hyenas are ever hungry.” However, when asked what animals they used as terms of abuse against men, several women affirmed the term hyena was apt because “men eat a lot.” They added that a woman was likely to call a husband a hyena out of his hearing, recognizing that in most but not all Luo marriages dimorphism is not in women’s favor and that most women are not as large or as physically strong as their husbands.

Luo folklore contains tales in which a woman is married to a hyena at the outset of the tale, or finds out too late that a husband or paramour, who appeared to be human enough, was actually a male hyena. The tales tend to show women using their wits to escape from men who are seeking to harm the woman, her natal kin, or their children. Ayodo sees their message being about women’s “enormous inner strength” (1994: 123). Luo recognize that female hyenas also display great strength, so the tales need not be interpreted as a repudiation of all hyena qualities.

In “Marriage in the Sky,” a tale-type found in many places in Africa, Hare takes a group of animals to the Sky, where Hare is seeking the hand of the chief’s daughter. There is a test – either Hare or the other animals must refrain from eating. When Hare cannot control his appetites, and eats a ram he is not supposed to eat, Hare makes Hyena his scapegoat. Hare cleanses himself of the blood from the feast by wiping the blood on Hyena, who is punished for Hare’s transgression. Having been turned into a scapegoat, Hyena feels wronged. Kenya Luo present the spotted hyena’s vocalizations as the way hyenas are seeking “to tell the world” that Hyena “did not kill the first ram” (in Odaga 1980: 86). Hare is blamed for having given Hyena the idea to steal and eat people’s goats, sheep, and other animals. The ecological message of this etiological tale seems to be that hyenas are not to be blamed for any enmity humans have toward them.

The Luo narrative “Anyango Nyar Gwasi” (Anyango, the Daughter of Gwasi) is about a woman who turned into a hyena and ate men. Luo women were adamant that Anyango Nyar Gwasi never ate her “sister-women.” They told me the men devoured by this hyena-woman were men who had done Anyango Nyar Gwasi or another woman wrong, men who had “troubled women excessively,” men who had gone off wandering from their homes, men who were “sex crazy.” Some contended Anyango Nyar Gwasi transformed herself into a hyena through the use of indigenous medicine. Others claimed she was an emissary sent by Nyasaye (God), who had given Anyango Nyar Gwasi the power to transform herself into a female hyena to punish men. Some Luo women insisted a dream about a hyena could have nothing to do with night-witches, but rather was about getting “more power” from one of the “power animals” Luo culture presented to them.

Marilyn Zuk has contended that “human views on charisma are nothing more than biases” (2003: B13). Too many accounts of spotted hyenas have been biased against them. Some hyena figures, like Anyango Nyar Gwasi, have indeed been “charismatic megafauna” for some people.

Further Reading

See also: Animals; Bestiary; Cognitive Ethology, Social Morality, and Ethics; Disney Worlds at War; Dogs in the Abrahamic Traditions; Dogs in the Islamic Tradition; Elephants; Kenya Greenbelt Movement; Nile Perch; Ovid’s Metamorphoses; Power Animals; Snakes and the Luo of Kenya.

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