

Integral Ecology: Loving the Planet

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As catastrophic events occur on our planet on a regular basis, the conversation about global warming and climate change heats up to new levels. As these worldwide changes occur, conversations are intensifying on the state of our planet and its suffering. In response, a multitude of tangible, man-made solutions have spawned, including most recently the Green New Deal. As the planet deteriorates, many are inclined to admit that a major extinction era may once again be upon us.

It is a historical time that affects each one of us, and the onslaught of negative stories can create a sense of despair that often paralyze ongoing, meaningful action. Perhaps we can take an integral approach to battling climate change, not through the incentive of fear, but with love. Reminded of ITP's ninth commitment, "I am dedicated to finding ways of reaching out and offering help to those in need. I understand that an important part of Integral Transformative Practice® is to help ameliorate the unnecessary waste and suffering in the world and advance the evolution of our species and society to a more balanced, more peaceful, more joyful condition," it is possible to change our approach from "fighting" environmental degradation to "nurturing" our planet and global populations.

This is a process that requires ongoing practice and deep listening, not just to the planet's needs but also to our diverse, global population. In the uneven transition from an industrial society to the information age, we find whole cultures caught in flux between these two worlds. In a way, we can examine this interplay as a global eco-system, co-evolving together. Nature has provided us with a template for this co-existence in the way animals, plants and insects create balance despite their individual drive to thrive.

Part of our ability to adjust and survive is born from the creation of concrete solutions, as well as subtle adaptations in the way we think and perceive. Perhaps it would help to seek a deeper understanding of the term ecology and its integral nature. As defined in the dictionary, ecology is the study of relationships between plants, animals, people and their environment. The study also explores



the balances between these relationships.

In the evolutionary scale of time, it is only recently that life forms, primarily homo sapiens, have had such a significant impact on the earth's evolution and its devolution. Man-made phenomena – war, famine, pollution, population migration, climate change - to name a few - have had a major role in reshaping the earth. Humans have also served as loving and compassionate healers and caregivers to the earth.

Native American traditions and many indigenous tribes have long-held traditions in finding a compassionate balance, but it can be easy to get weighed down by the destruction caused by the Industrial era and its “better way of life.” There is no denying the unchecked and unregulated exploitation of our natural resources, leading to the effects of global warming and climate change that has been caused by consumerism, but there is also hope in restoration.

The Information era and emerging integral movements offer an awakening of new ideas and greater understanding, moving from ego-centric thinking to a more world-centric approach and embracing the concept that humanity and all life forms and the earth are undeniably connected. In this shift, botanist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer offers hope in our ability to heal our planet.

Restoration is imperative for healing the earth, but reciprocity is imperative for long-lasting, successful restoration. Like other mindful practices, ecological restoration can be viewed as an act of reciprocity in which humans exercise their caregiving responsibility for the ecosystems that sustain them. We restore the land, and the land restores us...Here is where our most challenging and most rewarding work lies, in restoring a relationship of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. And love.

Embracing the notion of Integral Ecology can support this shift in perspective toward one of compassion and reciprocity within the environmental movements. This philosophy is the understanding and inner knowing of the interdependence of all things with each other. Accepting this notion that the human race and nature are intertwined, broadens our idea of the ITP commitment to opening our heart to service to not just a community or cause, but also to the planet and the thread that ties both people and planet in balance.

Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest and Earth scholar, championed these new perspectives and suggests that rather than relating to humanity as a division of different races, religions and cultures, we relate to ourselves as one whole species. Concurrently, we can feel into the earth not as a collection of continents, oceans, countries or states, but rather as one whole integrated living entity, one of the miracles of the universe, in a way similar to Berry's suggestion of viewing humankind.

In so doing, the arc of Integral Ecology extends beyond the earth itself to an embrace of our connection with the cosmos. O' Sensei, the founder of Aikido, is famous for saying, “I am the Universe,” not as an egoistic statement, but rather as a recognition of our interstellar origins.

This shift in consciousness can help us usher in the greater understanding that we are all part of a larger vision, playing a key role in the planet's ongoing health and evolution. This approach is fueled both by the challenges facing the earth and a revolution of consciousness where we adopt a new

worldview and inner wisdom to guide us to a deeper understanding of reality.

Brian Swimm describes the evolution of the planet and its first primordial life-forms, which were blind, deaf and devoid of most of today's senses and organs. For survival, these life-forms developed a variety of sensing organs including eyes, ears and skin. This evolutionary process also involved the development of a more complex brain, a further advanced limbic and sympathetic nervous system, allowing these life-forms to live and thrive in the world.

Humans began developing the ability to activate new forms of intelligence in order to sense into a larger reality. We are becoming a more sensing, more feeling, more heartfelt and more intuitive species, once again evolving into a new body with a heightened sensitivity than can feel into the direct experience of our planet with a deeper wisdom and knowing. Through consistent, transformative practice, we are becoming more sentient. Without these new levels of sensitivity, we are once again blind and deaf to the larger earth and the damage we are inflicting on our planet.

This new sensitivity to the needs of the planet could very well be an extraordinary capacity that can flourish within each of us through our ITP practice. The ongoing fostering of an enhanced awareness and sense of presence, as well as a variety of subtle senses such as intuition, imagination, empathy and compassion and pre-cognition are valuable tools in our work to love and heal the environment.

ITP co-founder, Michael Murphy, refers to the importance of a transformative practice in developing "the emerging limbs and organs of our latent super nature." Could it be possible that humanity also has the potential to birth a new body, acutely sensitive and more responsive to the new era of ecology? Perhaps it will be through this evolving form of embodiment that we can join the Earth and Nature in a radically different way, to see, hear, feel, smell and listen to it and love it.