



Prelude

*Earth, which has seemed so large must now be seen in its smallness.
We live in a closed system, absolutely dependent on Earth
and on each other for our lives and those of succeeding generations.
The many things that divide us are therefore of infinitely less importance
than the interdependence and danger that unite us.*

—From a message to the world by six
biologists at an international meeting¹

From the author's perspective, this book will:

- Affirm what you are already doing to help save the planet for future generations. The book says a ringing Yes! to your present earth-caring concern and action, with the expectation that it will enhance both of these.
- Shed light on humankind's most serious health challenge ever: how to save our precious planet as a clean, viable habitat for all the children of the human family and all other species.
- Describe how psychotherapists, pastoral counselors, teachers, medical healers, parents, and other earth-caring persons can use our strategic opportunities to cope constructively, even creatively, with this unprecedented challenge.
- Explore an expanded, ecologically grounded theory of personality development, the widely ignored earthy dimensions in understanding human identity formation. Finding this lost sense of our groundedness is the theoretical foundation for the educational and therapeutic approaches described.
- Outline basic principles of a model for doing ecologically oriented psychotherapy, counseling, medical healing, teaching, parenting, and community action.
- Offer a variety of methodologies for helping yourself and your clients, patients, students, or family become more nurtured by nature, thereby strengthening both motivation and energy for nurturing nature more caringly.

- Describe six life-saving perspectives on human-earth relatedness, orientations that can help people make their lifestyle more earth-caring as well as earth-nurtured.

- Demonstrate why the keys to effective ecotherapy and ecoeducation include hope, humor, and, most important, wise love. This includes love of ourselves, other people, the place where we live, the divine Spirit, the earth, and the biosphere. In short, all these loves are a part of the *love of life*.

- Suggest ways to use these earthy approaches in a variety of social contexts and cultures.

You may be wondering whether this book is about the well-being of persons, the well-being of the earth, or an earth-grounded understanding of human personality. It is about all three and their dynamic interrelationships.

When I began researching this book a decade and a half ago, I planned to write only for counselors, psychotherapists (including pastoral psychotherapists), and personality theorists, all of whom have crucial roles in creating a greener, cleaner planet. As my own thinking and teaching evolved in earth-grounded directions and I talked with ecologically aware teachers, the parameters of this book enlarged. It became clear that teachers have crucial roles in preventing earth alienation and facilitating earth bonding in learners. Ecoeducation emerged as complementary to ecotherapy. Subsequently, as I engaged in dialogue with various health professionals, I saw that they also have strategic roles in resolving their planet's environmental health crisis. They possess the expertise and status to motivate and guide community action to clean up health-damaging toxicity in our air, water, soil, workplaces, and homes. Health professionals also need to be aware of the interdependence of body alienation and nature alienation, interacting factors that often prevent patients from caring for their bodies as well as for the earth.

Therapeutic insights and educational methods are not the exclusive property of professionals (fortunately). They are vital human resources that belong to everyone. Thus the light dawned that I had neglected the most influential group of teachers: parents, grandparents, and other adult family members. They have the most vital and profound opportunities to shape earth-caring attitudes, values, priorities, and lifestyles in the younger generations. Ecoparenting can enhance family life and transmit earth literacy via everyday experiences. Fortunately, many of the principles and methods of ecoeducation and ecotherapy can be utilized by nonprofessionals in their personal life and with their families.

Readers accustomed to more "objective" books on scientific issues, including health, may be puzzled by the personal and passionate tone they will encounter at places in these pages. This tone is intentional and seems appropriate. If saving a viable planet is truly a life-and-death issue, it is essential to integrate the passions we feel with solid scientific data that shed light on the crisis.

The Author's Roots—A Personal Earth Story

Knowing something about an author's life journey often sheds light on a book's perspectives. And, as you will discover later, telling your earth story is an essential part of both ecotherapy and ecoeducation. For these reasons I will share some crucial parts of my earth story. I do this not because my story is in any sense normative, but because I know it well and it is a deep part of myself. Your earth story undoubtedly includes many comparably vivid but very different nature memories. These experiences helped shape your sense of self-in-the-world and your degree of bonding or alienation with nature. As you read my autobiographical accounts, I hope you will be reminded of your own earthy memories, whether you were raised in a city, a village, or on a farm. I hope that these earth memories will bring to life for you the theories being discussed throughout this book.

I invite you now to meet Junior, the little boy inside Howard. Junior embodies the old adage, "You can take the boy out of the farm, but you can't take the farm out of the boy." I grew up as a city boy in the midwestern community of Springfield, Illinois, with a population of about 80,000, but my parents were roots-in-the-soil people, both having been raised on Illinois farms. My dad's university degree was in agriculture. He worked in farm-related jobs most of his adult life. My folks transformed the four city lots on which our old frame home was located into a veritable mini-farm. Combining know-how and hard work, they grew a wonderful variety of delicious vegetables, beautiful flowers, and succulent fruit. During the economic disaster of the Great Depression, the garden was much more than an avocation. It was a major source of food, without which our family undoubtedly would have been hungry at times. I can still savor the juicy red raspberries and the large kettles of tomatoes and peaches being cooked for canning. I have memory pictures of shelf after shelf of multicolored glass jars in the cool basement at summer's end, preserving some of the earth bounty for the cold winters.

Mom and Dad made sure that Junior and his siblings spent time, in spite of our protestations, working alongside them in the large garden. In retrospect, I am aware that these experiences gave me precious gifts. These included an appreciation for the importance of cooperating with the powerful growth energies of nature and the ongoing earth cycles—preparing the soil, planting seeds, cultivating and harvesting the food, and then waiting while the often-frozen soil rested under a blanket of snow. In spring's rebirthing, I remember an aching back from working the rich, black prairie soil and spading under the plants left there to regenerate the soil for the new crop.

I learned how generous nature can be when she is respected and cared for. But any temptation to wax romantic about the earth's beauty and productivity is curbed by the occasional grief that accompanies depending on nature

for sustenance. I recall my parents' grief when a winter freeze killed the peach trees. I remember the never-ending fight to deter an army of voracious insects, as well as the endless struggle to control the ubiquitous weeds that always seemed to grow much faster than the vegetables and flowers.

I have poignant and painful memories from one summer during my early adolescence. The Depression was fierce for our family, and I could find no job even though I desperately needed one. So Dad thoughtfully arranged with a farmer friend for me to plant several acres of popcorn just outside the city. I sweltered in the heat and humidity all that Illinois summer, faithfully cultivating and weeding the corn. Then, just as the ears were beginning to fill with kernels, tragedy struck. Early one August morning, I rode my bike to my popcorn field full of hope. I was devastated to discover that a "twister" (a small tornado that occasionally accompanies midwestern thunderstorms) had leveled most of my precious crop. My dreams of selling a bountiful harvest and using the money for a more functional bicycle for use in selling magazines had been obliterated by what probably was less than a minute of violent wind.

During most summers in my childhood and early teens, I spent considerable time on my grandparents' farm five miles from Kinmundy, a tiny southern Illinois farmers' shopping village of a few hundred souls. Grandma's loving care of her grandson and Grandpa's simple but powerful religious faith had a powerful impact on my early life. His faith was a gift to me, in spite of his nightly reading of a long, boring Bible chapter by the flickering light of a coal-oil lamp, followed by uncomfortable kneeling on the wood floor during his fervent but interminable prayers.

Only since the environmental awakening began in the 1990s have I sensed how deeply I was shaped by learning to garden and farm when horses were the primary power. In my olfactory memory bank, I can still smell freshly plowed fields and the sweat of the horses pulling the corn cultivator as I rode behind them back and forth along endless rows. I can smell the newly mown redtop hay as I drove a team pulling the mower and then the rake back and forth. I still can feel aching muscles from pitching endless wheat and oat bundles onto a hayrack, followed by the exhilaration of riding high on the load as the horses pulled it for storage in the haymow.

I also can relive the imprinted experiences of the cycles of growing animals—the sexual stimulation of watching chickens and ducks and large farm animals copulate. This was my first, less-than-adequate sex education. I can recall the excitement of riding bareback on a huge galloping draft horse down the muddy dirt road, followed by the humiliation of falling off and having to walk home coated with mud from my matted hair to my bare feet. I remember the oral satisfactions of the wild blackberries picked in fencerows, followed by the agony of scratching the bites in unmentionable places from the chiggers that infested those berry patches. Feeling-laden memories include

playing in the rushing, rain-swollen "crick," excitement mixed with fear of the large snapping turtles who lived in it. My bodily memories include the discomfort of the frigid outhouse seat on frosty mornings and the pain of sitting on a bee there in the summer, as well as the year-round discomfort of using old Sears and Roebuck catalog pages in lieu of toilet tissue.

I can still savor the boyish triumph of finally mastering the art of milking cows by hand. My memories include the butchering of hogs, a bloody whole-family ritual, and the anticipated enjoyment of later eating delectable ham cured in brine and the smokehouse.² Delicious food memories include the aroma of the bread and breakfast biscuits baking in the wood-burning oven, and the feasts prepared for holidays and on days when male neighbors came to help Grandpa with the threshing while the women contributed their favorite dishes. I remember walking with Grandpa in the watermelon patch with a large knife. He would thump melons until he found one he liked. Then we would sit on the ground and enjoy the delicious melon heart. The rest was thrown over the fence to be consumed by the pigs, accompanied by their noisy, competitive grunting and jostling.

My parents loved to fish and my dad was an avid hunter.³ Our summer vacations usually were fishing trips to rivers and lakes in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. I have memories of choice family experiences on fishing excursions. These include the excitement of landing a large northern pike or a plump crappie, together with the scary rush of adrenaline of being in the middle of a huge lake when a violent wind from a thunderstorm arose unexpectedly. Dad also took me hunting for ducks, rabbits, and quail—hoping, I am sure, that I would acquire his passion. To his disappointment, hunting never "took" with me because I tended to identify with the animals. But I cherish the memories of precious times spent with him in the woods, fields, and river bottoms.

In my teens, a high school buddy and I took several float trips down the Sangamon River, the stream up which Abraham Lincoln had tried in vain to navigate a small steamboat to New Salem, his young-adult hometown. Once we were carelessly floating with the current when suddenly, in a narrow, swift place in the river, our double-bowed skiff hit a log that dumped us into the swirling water. We struggled mightily trying to catch the boat and save the oars and the few pieces of our camping gear that floated. So obsessed was I that I continued fighting the current until I was far beyond exhaustion. Just when my strength was so spent that I could barely stay afloat, one of the oars came within my reach in the turbulent stream, probably saving my life. This near-death experience gave me a scary awareness of the deadly potential of the natural world when it is treated carelessly.

Connectedness with nature was enhanced in my adult years. The miraculous struggles of human birth and growth came alive as wonderful gifts as

our three children joined us. During their growing-up years, our family often camped and hiked in spectacular mountain ranges—first in New England's White Mountains, later in the Colorado Rockies, and then in California's magnificent Sierra Nevada. As I write, I am reliving cherished memories of backpacking in the high country and car camping with our family. In my later mid-years, the small men's sharing and support group I was in purchased a sailboat. The challenge of learning to sail on the ocean was rewarded bountifully during three sailing tours of the five wild, wondrous islands of the Channel Islands National Park (I can now see on clear days from our home). All these are parts of a continuing love affair with mountains and the sea.

I feel lucky as well as blessed that my connections with nature in the early years and beyond had such earthy intensity. Spiritual highs during summer youth camps in inspiring natural settings (mingled with sexual surges) had a profound impact in helping to shape my spiritual development,⁴ my life orientation, and my vocational choice. When the current environmental movement was dawning, I wondered why I was resonating like an old-fashioned tuning fork. It felt so right and so important. Gradually it dawned on me how profoundly nature experiences had imprinted my sense of self, including feelings about our species and the earth, life and death, and many other things. I also saw why I feel so ungrounded when I do not make space in my schedule for reconnecting with the natural world. During these all-too-frequent times, I experience ecoalienation, the dim awareness that I have cut myself off from being nurtured by nature. When I succumb to this part of my male programming, I overfocus on *doing*, controlling and succeeding. I neglect just *being* by slowing down enough to experience nature and people in more depth.

In spite of my struggles with distancing from nature through the years (or could it be *because* of them?) I have gravitated toward growth and wholeness in developing cognitive maps to guide practice. During the pressure-cooker years of graduate education and personal psychotherapy in young adulthood, nature images came spontaneously to my mind as I worked therapeutically with myself and then with growth-blocked clients. As a revised model for pastoral care and counseling began to develop in my practice, it was no accident that the label "growth counseling" came to mind. Through several decades of graduate teaching, I have found that for numerous counseling students, struggling to develop their own professional therapeutic skills, the growth orientation is empowering. It was exciting and heart-warming to witness these bright young people from some twenty-five diverse cultures awaken to their own growth potentialities. To walk alongside them as they learned to facilitate growth toward wholeness in others, brought rewards that far outweighed the frustrating times in teaching.

Clarification of Terms

A variety of terms are being utilized currently to refer to healing interrelationships of humans and the rest of the biosphere. Let me clarify some words used in these pages. *Ecotherapy* refers to both the healing and the growth that is nurtured by healthy interaction with the earth. *Ecoeducation* is this growth-stimulating process. Terms that are comparable to ecotherapy include *green therapy*, *earth-centered therapy*, and *global therapy*. *Ecopsychology* and *psychoecology* refer to what is called the "greening of psychology" and the psychologizing of ecology respectively. I have used *ecotherapy* rather than a word like *ecopsychology* for two reasons. The focus of this healing and growth work encompasses the total mind-body-spirit-relationship organism, not just the psyche. Furthermore, my approach is on the application of ecopsychology but also ecobiology and ecospirituality in therapy and education. The term *biophilia* means, as defined by Harvard zoologist Edward O. Wilson, the innate, genetically rooted affiliation of humans to other animals and living organisms. *Biophobia* is fear of nature. Ecotherapy aims at incorporating biophilia into healing and growth practices and thus at utilizing the healing energies of nature. I use the terms *wholeness*, *wellness*, *well-being*, and *holistic health* interchangeably, and biophilia is regarded as an essential dimension of all such health.

An Invitation to Network

The concepts and methods in these pages are rooted in vivid experiences of nature. They have evolved over the years and continue to do so. As I experiment with earth-based methods in my teaching and therapy, and savor enlivening interaction with nature myself, critical reflections generate continuing changes in both theory and methods. It is encouraging that numerous other clinicians and teachers have described their experimentation with earth-grounded methods. As I had completed all but the final revisions of this volume, a significant book appeared—*Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, edited by Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner. I am pleased that several papers in that volume affirm the healing efficacy of earthy methods in the clinical work of mental health professionals, mainly psychologists.⁵ As I read these papers eagerly, I felt less lonely, less like a voice crying in the ecological wilderness. The validity of much of what you will find in these pages is undergirded by my own clinical work. It is heartening that clinical and experimental testing by several authors of those papers seems to confirm many of the theories found in these pages.

From a scientific perspective, however, the testing by myself and others provides mainly anecdotal evidence. Theories often go beyond the empirical

experiences that stimulated their creation. Although empirical support is increasing with encouraging alacrity, many of the ecotherapeutic formulations in this book must be regarded as tentative and speculative until they are tested by “hard” controlled research as well as by much more practice-oriented applied research.

In any area so inviting of continuing research, it is vital to share learnings as widely as possible. I hope this book will stimulate such professional dialogue. To raise issues, share comments and criticism about how the ecotherapy-ecoeducation model relates to your personal or professional experiences, write me at the address below.⁶ Tell me if your work as a therapist, educator, health professional, or parent contradicts, confirms, or causes you to modify what is presented here. Such dialogue will expedite the needed refining of approaches to this crucial aspect of our lives and work and world.

Researching and writing this book gave me an unexpected but very welcome gift for which I feel deeply grateful. It changed my life in significant ways, more than anything I had written before. It did this by deepening my awareness of who I am and what is most important in my remaining days or weeks or years. It helped me rediscover the earthy roots of myself and gain increased passion for loving this good earth in personal as well as professional ways.

Any book has a life of its own quite beyond the author's control after it is written. As this one is launched, my passionate hope is that you and others will find in this book fresh ways to open more fully to the joys of being intentionally nurtured by nature, while you further the wholeness of persons by furthering the healing of Mother-Father Earth and its wondrous network of living creatures.⁷ As you read, may the health of our earth home be enhanced as you create new ways to be a responsive and responsible member of the blossoming biosphere. May this book be an instrument to help you heal persons by healing the earth—and vice-versa!

Notes

1. Meeting in Menton, France, in May 1970.
2. All this was long before anyone was aware of the dietary hazards of high salt and cholesterol intake.
3. On a farm near the Illinois River, these activities combined both favorite recreation and a welcome source of a variety of protein in the diet.
4. Hymns celebrating the wonders of nature were favorites in the pietistic religious life of my childhood family and in the youth camps.
5. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995.
6. 2990 Kenmore Place, Santa Barbara, CA 93105, USA; fax 805-682-2816.
7. I have chosen the term *Mother-Father Earth* for two reasons. The obvious reason is that creating new life usually takes two. I also want to avoid the age-old dualistic sexist put-downs of women resulting from associating their gender with “Mother Earth,” bodies, sexuality, and emotions whereas men often have been associated with the sky and with other “elevated” things like the mind, rationality, philosophy, and science.



Introduction: Using the Ecological Circle for Self-Care, Earth-Care, and Soul-Care

Teach your children what we have taught our children, the earth is our mother. . . . This we know. The earth does not belong to humans; humans belong to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. . . . Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth. People did not weave the web of life, they are merely a strand of it. Whatever they do to the web, they do to themselves.

—attributed to Native American Chief Sealth (Seattle), 1854¹

The most serious, most dangerous health challenge all of us in the human family face is to reverse the planet's continuing ecological deterioration. It is the most profound health issue of *all* times, from a historical perspective. Why? For the first time in the long human story, our species faces a health challenge that if not resolved will foreclose opportunities to solve humankind's countless other problems, including a multiplicity of health problems. The human species now must be included on the endangered species list. This is the bottom-line health challenge we all face.

For the first time ever, one species—with the questionable self-label the “wise humans”—has the awesome power to threaten the health, perhaps even the survival, of all species.² Using our superb intellectual endowment, this species has created and misused technology, squandered limited natural resources, and multiplied in unrestrained ways so that the earth's biosphere is being depleted more rapidly than it can repair itself by natural processes. In a real sense, the earth's autoimmune system is threatened with irreparable damage. Unless we humans devise effective, nonviolent ways to resolve

these planetwide threats to the life-nurturing environment, the whole human family and all the animals, birds, and plants have a very problematic future. Therefore, there is no more urgent health issue for all of us to learn to live in earth-friendly ways as earth-carers and peacemakers. Only in this way can we help save the planet as a healthy place for ourselves and for all other living creatures, today and tomorrow.

But, before we are overcome with gloom and doom, remember that this environmental health crisis is also an unprecedented opportunity. Now, as never before in history, the whole human family has the most urgent demand to cooperate across the plethora of social, cultural, political, and language barriers that divide us. The challenge is to turn this global crisis into what philosopher-psychologist William James once called “a moral equivalent for war.” He used this phrase in discussing the remarkable ways that a struggle to defend against a common external enemy unifies and empowers internally conflicted nations. He declared that humanity needs a constructive equivalent for the intense but genocidal commitment fostered by the planet-destroying war system.

Today the human family has unprecedented, potentially unifying or divisive common enemies—global violence, overpopulation, economic injustice, suppression of freedom, and the deadly destruction of the environment. All these problems transcend national, ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic, and racial boundaries. They can only be solved by international collaboration. In our postmodern world, how these problems impact any country ultimately influences all other countries on our shrinking planet. As the Earth Summit and the follow-up meetings in Cairo and Beijing illustrate so hopefully, it is possible for the leaders of most of the nations as well as countless NGOs (nongovernmental people’s organizations) to join forces in devising and implementing effective solutions to the root causes of the planet’s pain.

Why is it crucial that those of us in the healing, teaching, and helping professions, along with parents, understand the complex interrelationships of personal health and sickness with the wholeness and brokenness of the biosphere, and all the people-serving institutions that impact our personal well-being day by day? Doing everything we can to maximize individual and family health obviously is very important. But to focus only on maintaining personal health while ignoring the social causes of much illness in today’s world, is increasingly inadequate. Maintaining high levels of individual health already is a precarious, privatized goal—the luxury of a shrinking minority of those of us who live in affluent countries. It will become increasingly so unless we approach health problems socially, even globally, and work “like miners under a landslide”³ to heal both the individuals and the socioeconomic and cultural causes that breed pandemic sickness around the world.⁴

It is now prudent for all of us to recognize that as Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry declare:

the well being of the ecosystem of the planet is a prior condition for the well being of humans. We cannot have well being on a sick planet, not even with our medical science. So long as we continue to generate more toxins than the planet can absorb and transform, the members of the Earth community will become ill. Human health is derivative. Planetary health is primary.⁵

How can we motivate people to make the difficult lifestyle changes that will be needed to save the biosphere? One key is to awaken widespread awareness of the heavy price our lifestyles are costing us in terms of personal health as well as the environment. These costs will continue to soar until increasing numbers of us change our lifestyles drastically in ways that are simultaneously self-caring and planet-caring. An ecologically aware physician and an environmentalist highlight this point in their book *Well Body, Well Earth*:

The best measure we have for designing our future technologies is human health. There is nothing that seems more immediate and important than personal health, our own and that of our loved ones. It is here that we feel the greatest urgency to solve problems of environmental pollution, and it is here that the consequences of our actions are the most dramatically demonstrated. . . . Like radio buoys guiding a ship at sea, disease and health can guide our lives. Steering our course by these signals not only leads to a life relatively free of disease. It can also guide us to the upper limits of personal fulfillment. Again, because of our interconnectedness, the fulfillment of any single individual or system ultimately benefits all systems around it. Guided by disease and health, Gaia, the living Earth, benefits from every person’s human fulfillment.⁶

We humans display blatantly contradictory attitudes and behaviors in our individual health practices and in the ways we treat the environment. In many circles, interest in these interdependent dimensions of health is high, but we continue to send mixed messages by our behavior. For example, Americans are reported to jog twenty-seven million miles each day for their health, but eat three billion gallons of ice cream (mainly fat and sugar), and produce one and a half million tons of toxic waste. Around the world, parents long passionately for children’s well-being, yet collectively we have made wellness impossible for millions of children by doubling the planet’s population twice in the twentieth century.

Awakening to the Ecological Circle

An effective methodology in both ecotherapy and ecoeducation is to offer participants opportunities to *tell their ecological story*. This means inviting them to recall and verbalize imprinting experiences with the earth, from their childhoods as well as more recent years. This usually involves experiencing and expressing their thoughts, images, and feelings about the earth,

including any awareness they have of the perils confronting it. I told a little of my earth story in the preface to stimulate your own recall. Here is an experience I had a few years ago that intensified my awareness of the earth's pain.

A few years ago, while giving lectures in five South American countries, I arranged to spend a few days at two different places along the Amazon River in northern Brazil. I planned this to provide a relaxed mini-vacation in a hectic schedule as well as to provide a firsthand look at the troubled rainforests. Quite unexpectedly the experience shook me to my depths and had an impact on me as a person searching for some light in the ominous shadows of the global environmental crisis.

Before the visit, I had read extensively about the perilous plight of rainforests around the equator. My "head-level" information came to life vividly during this visit. It was a rude but invaluable awakening to the interdependent agonies of ravished nature and oppressed peoples. Gestalt therapy often uses the technique of asking people to describe incidents and dreams in the present tense; I will use this approach in describing these experiences in Amazonia.

My plane is circling the airport of a city some fifty miles from the Amazon's mouth. I watch eagerly for my first glimpse of the river and the jungle. It is early evening, but so near the equator, there is plenty of light for a good look. As the plane descends, I feel a wave of disappointment. I can barely see the forest or the river. Everything is shrouded by a pall of smoke from the burning forests.

The next day I am having my first close encounter with the majestic river. As the medium-sized paddlewheel boat traverses the enormous channel, I recall hearing that this river carries eleven times the water that flows in the Mississippi, my country's largest river. The lush vegetation is nearer and nearer to our boat as we now chug up a tributary into the heart of the rainforest. I fear for the small, brown-skinned boys who are risking their lives swimming to our slow-moving boat and climbing aboard. They try to sell us trinkets they have made from forest materials and ask for handouts. I buy a little box made of palm leaves from a boy who looks about seven or eight.

The crew is tying up our boat at a small dock made from rough wooden planks. We get into a sizable canoe propelled by an outboard motor. Our group of seven, plus a trilingual guide, motors up a small, narrowing creek. We must duck the hanging vines. The beauty and aliveness of the forest is breathtaking. I hear strange birdcalls. The canoe pulls in at a tiny crude dock. Our guide says he will lead us along a path through the rainforest, joking that we are lucky that this is the dry season so we can walk rather than swim.

My excitement rises as the guide takes us deeper into the forest, commenting on exotic plants, flowers, vines, trees, and birds along the trail. After a half-hour walk, we reach a clearing where the trees have been slashed and burned to make a soccer field near a tiny school. We walk to the middle

of the field. The guide suggests that we have a close look at the "soil" under our feet. I am shocked as I pick up a handful of dirty sand with almost no topsoil in it.

Our guide is aware of the ecological plight of his rainforest. He comments matter-of-factly: "When the trees and other plants are stripped away and their roots lost, the shallow rainforest topsoil is quickly leached away by the torrential rains that fall almost nonstop for several months each year." The result? Within four years the topsoil is too depleted to grow any type of food crops. In about seven years it is reduced to almost pure sand like that under our feet. It can no longer grow even enough grass to pasture cattle.

The suffering of the raped earth is real. What I know in my head comes alive in my whole being, as I hear the sound of the earth crying. My male eyes are dry but I feel inner tears—tears of anger, shame, and grief. Something I have read comes back: The desperate poor from the slums of the cities of northeastern Brazil are pushed into the rainforest to slash and burn them. Why? To produce cheap beef for export to the fast food chains in affluent Northern Hemisphere countries like mine. An unwelcome memory picture intrudes: I see myself buying a hamburger at a fast-food chain that profits from using inexpensive imported beef. With each such hamburger, I see myself causing a magnificent, towering tree to come crashing down. I feel a tightening in my chest as I remember that 40 percent of the oxygen produced on the earth comes from plants in the rainforests. Cutting down the rainforest is like amputating 40 percent of the "lungs of the planet" on which all other living things, including myself and my loved ones, depend for survival.

Now we are returning along the forest trail to our canoe. The jabbering tourists in our party are strangely silent. I can hear the subtle sounds of the forest—the wind swaying the trees and the music from the canopy a hundred feet above our heads, unfamiliar, haunting bird songs. The relative quiet creates space in my consciousness for reflecting on what I have just experienced. I remember why rainforests around the globe are being decimated at the rate of a football-field-sized area every minute of every day. It is not because the people who live there are evil or stupid. They are not. It is because they are very, very poor and trying desperately to raise the level of their families' well-being.

Now we are back in our canoe going down the widening forest stream. I see the rickety houses on stilts along the banks where the half-Portuguese/half-Indian residents live. I realize why the little boys risk swimming out to the paddlewheel boat. They are from these homes where everyone must do all he or she can to help the family survive. It is no wonder the average child only makes it to the fourth grade in the little schools the government provides.

As my mind struggles to process what I am experiencing, I remember more about why the poor are pushed from the slums into the rainforests. Their government is unwilling to bite the bullet of land reform, redistributing to

the urban superpoor some of the good farming land that is held in huge tracts by a tiny oligarchy of wealthy families. The government is also motivated by their “debt trap”—a gigantic debt to the World Bank and other transnational Northern Hemisphere banking institutions. The income the government derives from exporting cheap beef is a vain effort to make a dent in this astronomical debt. But the debt is an impossible trap, so huge that the payments cannot even pay the spiraling interest. If all the vast rainforests of Brazil, the largest in the world, are turned into deserts, their national debt will probably be at least as overwhelming as it is today. An insightful Brazilian leader of laboring people is said to have observed that, if the Amazon is the lungs of the world, then the debt is its pneumonia.

This human and ecological tragedy is compounded by the economic insanity of this exercise in global frustration. When the rainforests in all the countries along the Amazon are gone, the ex-slum dwellers and native peoples who manage to survive will be even more destitute. Why? Because they will no longer be able to harvest nature’s bounty—food crops as well as rubber, Brazil nuts, and coconuts that bring some income to forest dwellers. Through many centuries the native peoples learned to live well in the heart of the rainforests. The average per acre income from harvesting the living forest’s rich, renewable supply of products is around seventy-five dollars (U.S.) a year. In contrast, the average yearly income from an acre of stripped rainforest land is only around thirty-five or forty dollars—during the short time the topsoil lasts.

As our boat passes numerous families in little clearings or on the narrow decks around the front of their stilt homes, I remember that when Europeans first invaded the Amazon basin some four centuries ago, an estimated eight million native people lived here in harmony with nature. Now, as a result of Western diseases and the destruction of their forest habitat, fewer than 300,000 are left. Furthermore, the well-being of many of these tribal peoples is threatened in unprecedented ways by Northern Hemisphere lumbering, oil, and mining companies. The fish on which native peoples depend for food have become dangerous to eat because of the massive pollution of the streams from gold mining and oil exploitation. It is becoming clear why native peoples around the world refuse to celebrate their “discovery” by European invaders (like Columbus) who stole their land and its abundant resources while “Christianizing them to save their souls.”

We are back on the larger paddlewheel boat bucking the Amazon’s mighty flow as we recross it. As I sit alone near the bow, my mind makes a leap to my home. I see the smog damage to millions of trees in the forests above the Los Angeles basin. And I know that, if I had been more aware, I could have had a comparable awakening in many less exotic places closer to home—even in my own back yard. The problems of the Brazilian rainforests are, in different ways, also the problem of the Los Angeles basin where I lived

for three decades. I see the Sequoia Gigantia, probably grown from seeds of one of the 2,000-year-old giants in Yosemite or Sequoia National Park. I remember planting it as a four-foot “child” in our front yard, after it had served as our live Christmas tree for several years. As the years passed, it grew to more than forty feet. To adorn it with colored lights for the holidays required stretching our extension ladder each year. It became a member of our family. As it gradually turned brown and died in spite of our efforts to revive it, we experienced growing grief. I knew that its demise probably resulted from the yellowish smog that often poisoned the air.⁷ I wonder whether the dirty air back home had discolored the lungs of all our family. Then I think of the poor ethnic minorities who can only afford to live in the most polluted inner city. And I remember the people in the terribly poisoned air enveloping the poverty-wracked megacities I have visited in developing countries, the victims of poverty-driven ecological oppression. As the boat docks in its home port, my heart is heavy with the experiences of an unforgettable day.

My awakening during those days by the Amazon was actually a dramatic reawakening of an awareness that had been developing over the years, but often forgotten. I knew again that this awareness must influence the way I function in my personal lifestyle as well as my professional world. The conviction was reinforced that privatized counseling, therapy, and education that ignores the social and environmental contexts of people’s lives will no longer fly in my professional life.⁸



Exploring the Ecological Circle's Meaning

Those unforgettable days in the rainforest made me aware of the need to implement in my life and work what I came to call the ecological circle. Simultaneously, I got in touch with three realities that together constitute the ecological circle. I experienced the awesome aliveness of nature and the delicious taste of being nurtured by this vital life energy. I got in touch with the transcending source of nature's healing energy, the divine Spirit. These two experiences triggered enhanced motivation to nurture nature caringly in whatever setting I am in. A closer look at each of these is now in order. (It will be helpful to keep in mind the diagram of the ecological circle above.)

Few people are aware of how utterly dependent our lives are on being continually nurtured by nature. Every breath we take, each bite of food we eat, every drop of water we drink is a silent, usually unrecognized expression of this dependence. We usually take these abundant gifts for granted. But if we stop to reflect, it is obvious that we cannot be healthy, or even survive, without the continuing, minute-by-minute renewal of these bountiful gifts from nature. Being "nurtured by nature," as the phrase is used in this book, means flinging wide our inner windows of grateful awareness of these gifts of life and deepening our intimate interaction with the natural world in ways that are both healing and enlivening. Intentionally deepening this openness to this life-sustaining nurturance by nature is the foundational experience of implementing the ecological circle.

The second experiential dimension of the circle occurs for many people when they pause, while being intimate with nature, to enjoy the experience of the creative source of all life that many of us call God. The creation mystics in various religious traditions through the centuries have tuned in on this spiritual reality in nature. For many people, it is like cool, refreshing water from an underground spring on a hot, dry day. Whether people think of these experiences by using religious concepts or think of them as marvels of nature explicated by science, is not the heart of the matter. What is important for empowering the ecological circle is to open oneself to the self-transcending reality immanent in the awesome creative power in nature. Whether one understands the transcending reality in nature in religious or secular terms or both, connecting with this reality can bring multiple benefits. Experiencing this enlivening energy can enhance people's love for the natural world, deepen positive bonding with the earth, and add an earthy grounding to their spirituality. In other words, it can bring all of life down to earth.

Concerning the spiritual reality in nature, Martin Buber observed:

Creation is not a hurdle on the road to God, it is the road itself. We are created along with one another and directed to a life with one another. . . . To look away

from the world, or to stare at it, does not help a man to reach God; but he who sees the world in Him, stands in His presence. . . . If you hallow this life, you meet the living God.⁹

The third experiential dimension of the ecological circle flows from one or both of the first two. Feeling a loving connection with nature can energize motivation to respond by nurturing the earth more caringly. The circle is completed only when people reach out in earth-nurturing action. For many people, including some who describe themselves as nonreligious, the motivation to nurture nature is enhanced when the experience of being nurtured by nature is deepened by a transcending, spiritual reality in that experience.

Whether or not people sense a spiritual dimension in nature, informed caring for the earth is really enlightened self-interest. Simultaneously, it can heal persons and heal the living environment that is in them as they are in it. By completing the circle, people participate in re-creating nature, including themselves.

Each of the three interdependent dimensions of the ecological circle experience is valuable in itself as part of ecotherapy and ecoeducation. Each is needed if the human family is to learn to become more earth-caring by learning to live more lightly on the earth. All three can contribute in different ways to the goal of learning to live healthier lifestyles.

To summarize, the three dimensions could be called *inreach*, *upreach*, and *outreach*. In relation to the environment, *inreach* means opening ourselves to be more intentionally nurtured by nature. *Upreach* refers to the energizing spiritual awareness that can motivate and empower us to engage in the often difficult tasks of *outreach*. *Outreach* means participating with others in action that will help save the planet, action that is an essential aspect of the holistic, contextualized therapy and education described in these pages. Furthermore, earth-caring and people-caring are two sides of the same process in that together they may enhance wellness in ourselves, in other people, and in our living environment.

Case Illustrations of the Ecological Circle

The following cases illuminate the three dimensions of the ecological circle. The childhood experiences of Gloria Johnson, a pastoral psychologist and counselor, helped equip her to implement the ecological circle in her adult life and work. She recalls: "As an African American born and raised in the South, I was taught that the earth will take care of you but you must respect it, listen to it, and relate to it. As a child my entertainment, my toys came from nature. We braided plugs of tall grass in the earth. This is how we learned to braid hair. We had dolls that we made from corncobs and corn silk. The medicines that my parents used often were from the herbs and roots

my father collected during his hunting trips. We played in the light rain. It was exhilarating, warm and nurturing. Emulating our parents, we children had small garden plots of our own to have "hands-on," personal relations with nature." These nurturing experiences brought her what she describes as a deep respect, deep love, and appreciation for the wonders and beauty of nature. She recalls: "I have cultivated the ability to communicate with nature, to experience its aliveness, and to realize how essential nature is to my well-being. The most profound memory I have from my childhood is lying on the grass in our front yard, talking to God, taking in the beauty of the trees, the clouds, the sun, while I talked. This memory is a place of safety and security for me. The memory is where I still go now for security."

Johnson reflects on how her professional functioning has been influenced by relating lovingly with nature: "My sense of being related to nature has helped me be more accepting of people in counseling and education, less judgmental, because I now am able to see myself in others. My ability to be more with people has been facilitated by having been so communal with things in nature. I am more respectful and inclusive in my teaching and counseling. I am being taught and counseled as I teach and counsel. I participate in life's cycle."¹⁰

The counseling case that follows also illustrates the three dimensions of the ecological circle.¹¹ This family's experience raised my consciousness about the importance of social context issues in counseling and therapy. Several years ago, at the height of the cold war, a school psychologist referred a student I will call Bill (not his real name) to the pastoral counseling and growth center where I was the clinical codirector. Bill's presenting problem was his parents' extreme frustration and dismay that he was failing miserably in his high school courses. He had been a good student until a couple of years before. The crisis had produced a painful breakdown of communication within the family system.

The pastoral psychotherapist who was to see Bill wisely asked the school psychologist for Bill's test results. She was amazed to discover that his IQ was around 150. Being trained in family systems theory and therapy, she knew that when one member of a family is suffering self-sabotaging dysfunction like Bill's, the whole family is feeling pain. So her second wise move therapeutically was to invite the young man's parents and two younger siblings to come with him to the first session.

When they arrived, Bill took a chair as far from the rest of the family as he could get and sat looking at the floor dejectedly. Suspecting that he was depressed but also angry about being brought by his parents, the therapist asked each family member, "How do you feel about being here?" Bill: "It's a bummer." Therapist (in a nonjudgmental tone): "It sounds like you'd really rather not be here. I can understand how you might feel upset about having to come here." This brief interchange let Bill express some of his angry resis-

tance and, equally important, let him know that the therapist had some awareness of his negative feelings.

After further interaction to strengthen rapport with the family, the therapist said, "Bill, you must have some reasons why you're not cracking your books. I'd be interested to know what your thinking is on that." Bill shrugged his shoulders dejectedly and shook his head. Therapist: "What do you mean by this [shrugging her shoulders]?" Bill: blurted out with pained intensity: "Why bother when the world's going to hell in a basket?" Therapist: "Things look terribly hopeless to you." Bill: "Yeah, it sucks!"

Bill's despair about the world situation (psychiatrist Robert Lifton calls this "radical futurelessness") came as a total surprise to his family, who had never discussed their feelings about this.¹² Toward the end of the second or third session, a turning point came in the family's communication when Bill's father leveled with him: "The mess in the world worries me, too, Bill."

During the next few months, Bill and his family did hard work therapeutically in conjoint family sessions, interspersed with individual sessions with Bill and the therapist. Opening up about their previously undisclosed fears about the future proved to be a major key to unlocking their communication. Their frozen emotional climate warmed up as they communicated their fears about the world situation. As this gradually happened, Bill's angst-driven depression lifted. He began to study and in short order pulled himself out of his self-defeating emotional tailspin of despair. Not surprisingly, his grades improved.

As conjoint family therapy continued, realistic concerns about the world situation continued to come up. After about three months, the therapist made what turned out to be a particularly strategic intervention. She asked if they had considered getting involved in some group working in the area of their shared worries about the world. Bill's mother responded that their church sponsored a group called Pax Christi, which did peacemaking work. The therapist asked how each person felt about getting involved to see if it was for them. One of the most therapeutic actions that Bill and his family took was to become involved in that peace-with-justice study/action group. Encouraging such involvement often proves, as it did for Bill and his family, to be among the most valuable channels of self-healing of feelings of hopelessness and helplessness about society's huge problems.

Clinical and teaching experience has shown that encouraging clients and students to become involved in peacemaking and environmental action often is a no-lose strategy. Putting some time, energy, and funds into working for ecological sanity can pay important dividends. Engaging in such volunteer activities often enhances individuals' sense of purpose in life and thus increases their mental health. It may also result in some degree of constructive changes in their community and world. Thus, earth-caring outreach can be an investment in one's own future and perhaps also in the future of the world.

Therapists' and Teachers' Crucial Roles

Why should professionals in the healing and teaching fields implement the ecological circle in their work? Why is it important for us in these professions to help our clients, patients, and students become more open to be nurtured by nature and thereby to increase their caring concern for the environment? The evidence is mounting that what is at stake in this crisis is the survival of the planet. As the caption of the drawing early in this book puts it, "Children ask the world of us." Therefore, persons in all academic disciplines and professional groups have an obvious responsibility to use their expertise to do all they can to give future generations a viable planet home. Persons in the "people professions" have special contributions to make to help resolve this unprecedented crisis facing the human family. And those of us trained in both the psychosocial sciences and the therapeutic disciplines have the capacity to make unique and much-needed contributions to both earth-caring and peacemaking.

Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry frame their call for professional involvement in terms of the scientific story of the universe's origins and continuing unfolding: "The human professions all need to recognize their prototype and their primary resource in the integral functioning of the Earth community. The natural world itself is the primary economic reality, the primary educator, the primary governance, the primary technologist, the primary healer, the primary presence of the sacred, the primary moral value."¹³

Counselors, psychotherapists, health professionals, teachers, clergy, and parents share a common concern for developing whole persons and enhancing the good life. Any definition of the good life that makes sense in our world must include protecting the good earth on which our wellness depends. Awareness of the rootage of the human mind-body-spirit organism in the natural world impacts all aspects of our work with people in subtle but important ways. However the good life is defined in particular ethical or religious systems, there is no doubt that the ethical challenge of the ecological crises towers like a moral Mount Everest over our differences and over the lofty peaks of other critical ethical issues facing our species.

Healers (including therapists, health professionals, and clergy) and teachers (including parents, the most important teachers) have strategic opportunities to help reflect and shape the attitudes and values of their culture. These values guide individuals in their lifestyles and institutions in their policy decisions. These persons are therefore key agents of transformation in influencing change toward earth-friendly lifestyles and policies. Forming and transforming values, attitudes, and behaviors to make them more ecologically constructive is an essential aspect of all truly holistic education and therapy.

Consider the common shared interests of therapists and teachers in preventing and healing human alienations. Healing alienation from our bodies

and their self-healing immune systems is an objective of both health professionals and body therapists. Healing inner alienations from repressed parts of the mind is the objective of intrapsychically focused psychotherapists. Overcoming alienations from other persons is the objective of relationship-oriented therapists. Preventing alienations from parts of our personalities and bodies, as well as from other persons, is a key objective of wholeness-oriented teaching. Preventing or healing inner alienation from the divine Spirit is a central objective of religious education and pastoral counseling.

To all these interdependent alienations must now be added the twofold alienation from nature—from our own inner "wildness" and from organic bonding with nature. This alienation is a bottom-line cause of violent behavior toward nature, toward our bodies, and toward others perceived as "wild." Healing and preventing this violence involves healing the earth-alienation that is at their roots. Helping people learn to open themselves to be nurtured more deeply and often by nature is one crucial focus of holistic healing, teaching, and parenting.

We healers and teachers should utilize our skills to help people implement the ecological circle in their everyday lives because the brokenness and toxicity of the planet affect our clients, patients, and students (whether or not they are aware of it), as well as ourselves and our children. Most of us Westerners suffer from some degree of alienation from our deep rootedness in nature. This alienation impacts the total body-mind-spirit organism in wholeness-diminishing ways.

The brokenness and toxicity of the planet diminish our relationships with the people we serve in our professions. The health of relating with family and friends also is diminished by earth-distancing lifestyles. Emotional need deprivation in intimate relationships is exacerbated by ecological deprivation and toxicity. Conversely, relationships often are enriched when people share experiences in natural settings. Earth bonding and people bonding are complementary needs that, when satisfied, are mutually reinforcing. Enjoying intimate connectedness with the natural world sometimes opens people's whole organism to deepening emotional and bodily intimacy, including sexual intimacy with others.¹⁴

For those of us whose major interest is mental and emotional health, it is important to recognize that many of those we serve are suffering from conscious or subconscious ecological angst. This often includes anticipatory anxiety and grief about what they fear is the impending fate of the natural world. Our methods must deal with this anxiety along with other anxieties and worries that constrict living. In my experience, anxiety about the biosphere is more likely to surface in teaching-learning contexts than in therapy. It is often present in psychotherapy or medical contexts but not articulated because persons do not perceive these as appropriate settings to raise such issues. Therefore, it is important for counselors, therapists, nurses, and physi-

cians to invite discussion by asking an appropriate question, such as "Is your problem related in any way to the situation in the world?"

Therapists and other healers deal with both the light and the dark sides of life. The latter includes the intrusions of pain, frustration, disappointments, heartache, injustice, oppression, and death that come, sooner or later. By encouraging clients, students, or patients to open themselves to experiencing the healing power of nature, we can enable them to discover an invaluable source of both healing and growth. When people connect with the healing energies of the cycles of life, death, and rebirth inherent in nature, they often discover that they view death from a different perspective. It is still profoundly sad but not devastating.

Those in the counseling and psychotherapy professions are trained to respond actively when we identify or suspect the threat of suicide in our work. In the wider context the issue is now environmental suicide prevention. The challenge confronting all healers is to make preventing ecosuicide an integral part of both ecotherapy and ecoeducation.

John Seed, a pioneer Australian ecologist, has written a moving essay entitled "To Hear within Ourselves the Sound of the Earth Crying." Persons trained to do counseling, psychotherapy, or creative teaching have developed special sensitivities and skills as listeners. We know that real listening involves hearing what people say but also what is "between the lines," unspoken because it is too painful. We are also aware that such listening is tremendously important to the healing, growth-nurturing relationships we seek to develop with our clients, patients, or students. Many teachers and therapists also have discovered that to be most healing, listening needs to have a quality aptly described by theologian Paul Tillich as "loving listening." This means listening with caring as well as understanding, listening responsively and without judging. To make the vital, unique contributions needed to help resolve the ecological crisis, counselors, therapists, teachers, parents, and health professionals must learn to practice a new dimension of listening—*responsive and loving listening to the earth*. Unless more and more of our species learn to listen with love and caring to the anguished cries of our earth as well as its shouts of joy when it celebrates its creativity, it is doubtful that our planet will survive as a healthy place for unborn generations to come.

But there is a catch in the admonition to listen to the earth. To the degree that people suffer inner alienation from their inherent bonding with nature, the earth's crying will be muted or in a strange language they will not understand. Pioneer feminist theologian Nelle Morton discusses communication issues among women. She observes that women's voices have been ignored so long that many no longer dare to speak what they really think and feel. Nelle declares that what women need, therefore, is to be "heard into speech" by other women. Ecotherapy and ecoeducation often involve teaching nature-alienated persons to hear themselves and the earth into speech so that they

can hear the earth's often subtle messages of both joy and suffering. For all the above reasons, healing and enhancing relationships with the natural as well as the human environment are essential goals in our counseling and therapy, our healing and teaching.

The unprecedented ground swell of concern around the globe for saving the planet is an expression of a profound rediscovery: that our personal and species survival depends on learning to love and respect the wonderful web of living things. At some level, more and more people are becoming aware that preserving a livable planet for all the children of the human family, and for all other species, is a paramount survival issue facing humankind.

Exploratory Survey of Therapists and Teachers

As part of the preparation for writing this book, a survey was conducted to sample the ecological views and experiences of a variety of psychotherapists and teachers. A total of sixty-two usable survey forms were returned. Because this survey was designed to be only exploratory, the sample was not selected randomly.¹⁵ Its findings can only be suggestive, not definitive. It is my hope that the validity of the findings will be checked out by the use of random survey samples of the professional groups represented. I must emphasize, however, that when viewed in the context of the early stages of knowledge in the fields of ecotherapy and ecoeducation, the findings of this survey are illuminating as preliminary indications of potentially useful data.

The primary professional identities of the survey respondents:

- Pastoral psychologists/ psychotherapists 17
- Clergy generalists who do counseling in congregations 13
- Psychotherapists (secular) 12
- Teachers 10
- Medical professionals 8

It is noteworthy that many counselors and psychotherapists, both clergy and secular, equated "environment" with the human environment. For those in medical professions, "environmental issues" tended to be limited to toxicity in the home and work settings.

Following are the survey questions with a summary of the responses (not everyone responded to all questions):

In what setting were you raised? Large city—23; Town—24; Farm—15.

Were your childhood experiences with nature such that you learned to enjoy and respect the natural world and let yourself be nurtured by it? Yes—54; No—5 (included one person raised in an urban ghetto).

Do you have a close, nurturing relationship with nature now? Yes—40; No—13. Several respondents expressed regret that their busy schedules prevented them from spending more time enjoying natural settings.

Does your relationship with nature (in childhood and now) influence the ways you do counseling, therapy, or education? Yes—45; No—11. Here are samples of the “Yes” responders’ descriptions of how their professional functioning is influenced:

- “The images I will pick up on when clients speak.”
- “Illustrations from nature—seeds, balance in life, mutual dependence on our environment.”
- “The bountifulness of nature, the goodness, beauty and infinite variety . . . provide images of hope and trust, of a seed growing in dark earth, a huge eggplant that will feed the hungry (this came from a dream I once had).”
- “I believe in nature’s thrust to heal what is broken.”
- “I use nature to demonstrate relaxation and re-creation, as opposed to wreck-creation.”
- “I’m convinced there is a healing power in nature. I cherish it for my counselees.”
- “I use nature metaphors, for example, that mature plants take three years to develop adequate root systems after being transplanted.”
- “I wonder if the cycles of nature and the experience (on the farm) that things can, do, and will change, help me be a little more relaxed when counseling people who can’t see any way out of their current predicaments.”
- “My relationship with nature includes an acceptance of death as a part of the life cycle” (this from an oncology nurse who herself had a life-threatening struggle with cancer).

Do your goals as a therapist or educator include healing or enhancing relationships with the natural environment? Yes—35; No—12. A physician respondent added this comment after his “No”: “A bizarre question.” One of the “Yes” responders commented: “A person’s well-being must include the relationship with non-human nature. Otherwise we are only working with a part of who one is.”

Is it appropriate to ask clients or patients (who do not bring this up) whether environmental issues are contributing factors to the problems that bring them to counseling or therapy? Yes—20; Yes, but I haven’t done so—1; No—0.

Do you understand environmental, peace, and justice problems in our world as contributing to the problems of living of some of your clients, students, or patients? Yes—35; No—10.

If yes, what were the prevalent feelings expressed about these social context issues? Among feelings mentioned, many of them repeatedly, were: powerlessness, helplessness, apathy, resignation, outrage, betrayal, despair, anxiety, fear, guilt, grief, fear about drinking the tap water, concern for the health of themselves and/or their children, and hope (mentioned only twice).

Do you routinely inquire of clients, patients, or students about the health or toxicity of their home and work environment? Yes—23; No—11. Several therapists

who said “No” added that they thought this was a good idea and they would implement it.

Do you regard it as potentially healing or empowering to encourage clients, patients, or students to become involved in environmental, peace, and justice work? Yes—49; No—1. This almost unanimous affirmation of the therapeutic and educational values of outreach in action was unexpected. One psychologist commented: “I believe that it is good for individuals to become pro-active, to ‘empower themselves,’ to believe that ‘I can make a difference, as an individual, on this planet, as well as in my family and work situation.’”

Do you regard issues of meaning, value, or spirituality as important factors in determining people’s lifestyles including how they treat the environment? Yes—42; No—0. (This perspective will be explored in chapter 4.)

Do you have evidence that, in forming their identity, people internalize the natural environments—toxic or healthy—within which they grew up? Yes—15; No—8. (This theory will be explored in chapter 2.) One pastoral psychotherapist commented: “Most people speak of family and extended family as formative. The absence of the natural environment is itself striking.”

Experiencing the Ecological Circle

The purpose of this right-brain exercise is to experience the three aspects of the ecological circle. Put in other terms, the experience may highlight the joy of being nurtured by nature, the urgency of the ecological crisis, and the energy-for-action of a transformed future. Reflection on the experience may then encourage envisioning actions required to move toward the future visualized. I am indebted to Joanna Macy for the heart of this exercise.¹⁶ The greatly modified version below has evolved in my practice as I have experimented with it in numerous ecology and peacemaking workshops over the years. If you teach, you may decide to use it in your work.

Instructions: When you come to this mark / stop and do what has been suggested.

Sit in a quiet place with a piece of paper within easy reach. / Tightening all your muscles, hold them in tension for five seconds and then relax them for five seconds. Repeat this several times, continuing to breathe deeply through the cycles. Do this (or other full-body relaxation methods that work for you) until your body-mind organism is deeply relaxed but very alert. /

Using one of your many creative abilities, form a mental picture of the most beautiful place in nature you know, on a warm sunny day. / Be in that place now. / Let your body, mind, and spirit—your whole self—enjoy its beauty and its serenity. Feel its pulsing aliveness in your body. Let its life energy touch every cell from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet. / Focus this healing energy on those

places in your body that are tense or feeling some discomfort. / Continue to experience being warmly nurtured by nature as long as you wish. / As you enjoy all this, discover how what you are experiencing touches the heart of your spiritual life. In your own way, be open to experiencing the loving Spirit present as the creative source of the beauty and order, the peace and power, of this lovely setting. /

Now, imagine that it is thirty years in the future and you are in the same place outdoors in nature. Imagine that the destructive environmental forces and population explosion of the 1990s continued to escalate over the next thirty years. Pollution has increased tremendously as the world's population soared from just under six billion to nearly ten billion. Literally thousands of species have been wiped out forever. Look around you and see the devastating impact of all this on the natural setting. Stay in touch with your feelings. /

Now, shift your mental gears and imagine a radically different scenario. It is thirty years hence, and you are again sitting in your favorite place outdoors. But imagine that sometime back in the mid-1990s people like you in your community and all over your country, as well as in many other countries, decided to really protect and love the earth. As a long-term result of the Earth Summit, they decided to make caring for the global environment a top priority both personally and politically. They did this to make sure their children and grandchildren would have a clean, healthy planet on which to live. They organized politically to make sure their own governments and the United Nations enforced wise environmental and population policies and ended the insanely wasteful arms race, destroying all the chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons of mass destruction. Let yourself enjoy how it feels to be in a sane, healthy, safe world with an international peacekeeping and earth-caring force, a world where children everywhere are insured enough food, housing, health care, and education to develop fully their unique capacities. / Look around you and enjoy this place that now is much cleaner and even more beautiful and alive than it was thirty years ago.

You notice that a child is approaching you, a little girl of eight or nine. She seems shy but obviously very curious. She has read something in school about the way the world was thirty years ago. She comes up to you and begins to ask questions. Carry on a conversation now, being aware of your feelings as the two of you chat. Listen to your responses to her questions about the old days as she asks, "What was it like back then? / Were there really bombs so big that they could blow up the whole world? / Was there really pollution that poisoned the air and the water so people and animals were getting sick? / Is it true that there were millions of children like me who were poor and hungry and sick, because governments were spending so much on things to kill people? / Wasn't it scary then? / What did you do to get through such a scary and discouraging time? / How did you keep feeling hope so you could help make the world like it is today? / What did you do to help give us children our beautiful, peaceful world?" /

The little girl spontaneously flings her arms around your neck and gives you a hug of gratitude. You feel her tears of joy as she whispers with deep feeling, "Thank

you! Thank you! Thank you!" Then, a little embarrassed, she leaves you. You close your eyes and think about the whole experience. / What did you feel when you realized you were in a safe, sane world without massive weapons and environmental degradation? Perhaps your heart felt like a heavy weight had been lifted. Or did you find it so hard to believe that you could not let yourself really experience such a world? / How did you feel when she asked you what you did to help give children like her such a wonderful world? / Continue to process your trip into a healthy future. You may want to ask yourself questions; for example, Do I need to do more ecology, peace, and justice work? What do I need to do to be more involved in helping heal the planet for my own children or for children like the little girl I met in the future? How can I use my professional or parenting skills in this healing process? / When you are ready, open your eyes and make notes to remind yourself of important things you discovered and what you plan to do as a result of imagining a transformed world. /

If you were surprised at how much better you felt when you imagined that wonderful changes had occurred, you now have some valuable awareness of the heavy load of chronic ecological anxiety that environmentally aware people are carrying like subconscious packs on their psychological backs, every hour of every day. How useful this awareness proves to be, of course, depends on what you do with it. If you felt some discomfort when the little girl asked you what you had done (as I often feel when I do the exercise), commend yourself for awakening some healthy feelings of personal responsibility that can motivate you to get more involved in loving and saving the wonderful living network that makes all life possible.

Notes

1. This statement recently was discovered to have been written in its present form in the last few years by a media writer. It may well reflect the spirit of what Chief Seattle said, however, and it certainly rings true to the Native American world view and reverence for nature.

2. Some opposition to environmental concerns stems from the view that the very assumption that our species can damage the earth irreparably in a few years or even centuries is arrogant and fallacious, in light of the earth's profound wisdom developed over some five million years. Actually this assumption is supported by mounting evidence from the earth sciences that our age of high-tech and chemical revolutions has given humans the dangerous capacity to damage the earth in unprecedented and irreparable ways.

3. A phrase by a well-known mid-twentieth-century preacher and teacher, Halford Luccock.

4. The runaway AIDS epidemic provides a deadly illustration of this point. It confronts the whole human family with massive, unprecedented medical, economic, educational, sexual, ethical, and public policy problems. This epidemic is potentially a threat to everyone's well-being, even survival. This global health crisis illustrates the necessity of developing innovative, transnational solutions to an escalating epidemic.

5. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era, A Celebration of the Unfolding Cosmos* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 237.

6. Mike Samuels and Hal Zina Bennett, *Well Body, Well Earth*, (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1983), 92, 94.

7. Our giant sequoia was but one representative of the beautiful pine forests on the slopes of the mountains towering above Claremont. When we hiked there, it was obvious that the health of millions of trees was being damaged by air pollution. This aerial poison comes mainly from millions of cars driven by nine million people in this overpopulated area where a temperature inversion traps the garbage in the air. The crisis of a poisoned environment is reducing health around the entire planet—including, in all probability, the place you call home and the place where you practice your healing, teaching, or parenting skills.

8. As I reflect on this Amazon experience, I remember several previous experiences in which a similar awareness hit me around different problems in society. One was the day more than two decades ago when I marched with thousands of others into Montgomery, Alabama, on the final day of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, march from Selma. On that muggy day we walked, protected by rows of heavily armed national guard troops, through the streets singing. We repeated "We Shall Overcome" again and again as we walked through the African American ghetto of Montgomery. A few of the less intimidated black residents cheered from their porches. Angry whites watched with taunts and obvious rage behind the rows of troops lining the streets. We knew who the likely targets would be of the violence the troops were there to prevent. Exhausted by the time we reached the open square in front of the capitol, we sat on the pavement for an hour or more as King delivered a powerful, inspiring message from the steps of the capitol with the confederate flag above it. Five-gallon apple juice jugs were passed along the rows of parched marchers sitting in the square. The jugs were filled with tap water from the spigot in the little Baptist church across from the capitol, the church once pastored by King. No experience of communion ever approached the depth of meaning for me of drinking from that common jug. I knew that day that I could no longer practice privatized counseling or teaching that ignored the social malignancy of white racism.

9. Quoted on a plaque at the Star of the North Retreat Center, St. Albert, Canada. About the animals, Buber says, "Creatures are placed in my way so that I, their fellow creature, by means of them and with them, find the way to God. A God reached by their exclusion would not be the God of lives, in whom all life is fulfilled."

10. I appreciate Gloria Johnson's willingness to share her earth story with us.

11. This case also was described briefly in Howard Clinebell, *Well Being: A Personal Plan for Exploring and Enriching the Seven Dimensions of Life* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 186–87. It is presented here in somewhat more detail for professional readers.

12. The nuclear issue was part of their "family secret," things a family subconsciously agrees not to talk about.

13. *The Universe Story*, 255. To respond to the challenge, professional horizons must be expanded and professional identities made more inclusive. We must come to include the healing and wholeness of the biosphere as an essential part of healing individuals and families in the context of a world on the brink of geosucide. There is a double reward from stretching our horizons of concern and identity. It can increase

the healing-helping-growing power of our professional skills. Equally important, it can also enable us to make small but valuable contributions to saving the planet.

14. What about the self-isolated hermitlike people who choose to live alone in secluded, often wild natural settings? Those who have been deeply hurt in early relationships with humans often feel safer and more at home in the organic world of nature than with people. For them, nature is a haven from the fear of having old, unhealed wounds deepened by further hurts in human relations. In the same vein, I remember talking with a nature-aware occupational therapist who had long experience in working in mental hospitals. She reported that some of her patients, in the process of treatment, do gardening and other earthy experiences long before they will risk relating to people or talking about feelings and interpersonal issues.

15. Many respondents were individuals known to the author, which increased the possibility that respondents had a pro-environment bias. The sample was heavily weighted by counselors, therapists, and teachers whose primary professional identity is as clergy. This factor makes it likely that respondents who linked the ecological crisis with spiritual and ethical issues were considerably overrepresented. It is encouraging that most of the clergy responses reflected considerable insight and informed concern about ecological issues.

16. Macy's original version is found in *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1983), Exercises 32 and 33, pp. 140–41. A version of this exercise, as I have modified it, is in my book *Well Being*, 203–4.