

## **Nature worship for tolerance and harmony**

daya dissanayake

I wish to propose today that Nature Worship could be the solution to the present day conflicts and violence, sometimes aggravated by religious conflicts. I do not call it pantheism or any other -ism, because it is all the -isms in the world that have divided people, in the same way that democracy has divided people.

We can worship nature, not in the way it was interpreted by our early anthropologists, but the way we worship our parents and our gurus. Then we can still adhere to our faith, be it Buddha Dhamma, Hindu Dhamma, Christianity or Islam, without any conflict within ourselves.

In the beginning there would have been only nature worship, with Mother Earth as the Mother Goddess. The Great Mother was the Mother of all life in our solar system. There could be other mothers in a possible multiverse. By the term Multiverse we are considering the possibility there is more than one universe.

On Mother Earth, human beings would have been totally non-violent, as they would have gathered their fruits and vegetables without hurting any living creature. Since the female was the life giving principle, and because the female human gathered the food for her family and was closer to nature, they worshipped the feminine. It is only when at some time in history man tasted carrion, probably during a famine, that he got a liking for it and began to kill animals for his food. The killing brought out the violence and sadistic nature in man. When he became the provider, he also took control of the family, and with his aggressive nature, he set aside the passive, non-violent female deities with powerful, violent aggressive male deities.

This probably was when man began to molest and abuse Mother Earth. When we hold all nature as sacred and we respect her, we would never think of violating her. When we worship a tree, we would never think of cutting it down. When we worship a river and hold her sacred, we would never think of polluting her. When we hold a mountain as sacred we would never think of destroying her forest cover and use the earth and the rock to earn filthy lucre.

The new male dominated religions, even though all of them professed peace and co-existence, and the gods were all said to be benevolent, they created conflicts and competition, and the ruling classes exploited them to gain more and more power and wealth, by inciting brother against brother for the love of god.

It is time to go back to worship of our environment. When we worship the sky, the

sun, the moon and the stars, when we worship rain and the rivers, the trees and the mountains, we do not have to fight with each other because all nature belongs to all of us and we belong to nature. We are all children of Mother Earth, in addition to being the children of God, or Brahma, if we wish to believe.

The water flowing down a river does not discriminate between man and animal, or among men of different races, creeds or castes. The light from the sun falls down on all of us. None of us can claim the sun belongs to us, and not to other people on earth. Then there would not be any necessity to fight each other for the possession of our sacred object. There would not be any necessity to convert a person from one form of worship to another.

Deep Ecology, promoted by Arne Naess, the ecosophist is also talking about this, but in a different way.

"Well, you have in Buddhism and Taoism a lot of what they would call nearness to nature and humbleness toward nature, so that you do not feel superior, as a kind of ubermensch. There is nothing in those traditions where humans are looked upon as masters. But you have that also in the Western countries, not only in the Indian, Chinese and Japanese cultures. You have wonderful expressions of nearness to nature [in the West]. The deep ecology movement has profited immensely from Buddhism, Taoism and Ghandism, and I hope that it will continue to. On the other hand, we in the West are never going to be Buddhist or Taoist. We have to find roots in our own traditions. In the last couple of years, we' ve had a revival of old Christian thinking, and not only the St. Francis of Assisi movement. But within Catholicism and the many groups of Christians there is now a saying that we have sinned against the creation and that we must change society and ourselves, our way of living - everything - in order to make good again what we have sinned against. Arne Naess<sup>1</sup>

Through deep ecology we learn to respect all diverse forms we find in nature. Which itself reminds us that nature, our stable ecosystem survives because of diversity. We see that in the disruption of the ecosystem done by monoculture. The best example we see in our country is the tea plantations, created by uprooting all the diverse natural habitat in our hill country, and planting only tea. We are committed to respect the intrinsic values of richness and diversity. Complexity and symbiosis are conditions for maximum diversity.

Humanity too needs diversity to survive, to maintain a balance. Just as nothing else would grow, or be allowed to grow, in a tea or rubber plantation, or worse still, in a palm oil or tobacco plantation, when people in a country or a region accept one

---

1

religious belief, or use one language, there is no room for their own brothers, worshipping the same god by another name, or speaking in another tongue. Just like the monoculture plantation destroys the entire ecosystem, erodes the soil, kills the birds and the bees and the earthworms, a religious or ethnic majority disrupts the delicate social balance. Just like a monoculture is very susceptible to invasions by pests, or infestation by diseases, a religious majority is susceptible to invasions by extremists, infestation by hate speech, incitement with jealousy and anger.

We have become so desperate today, that we have to talk about tolerance. But Swami Vivekananda, said

"Toleration is not enough, for so-called toleration is often blasphemy. I believe in acceptance. Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that I think you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live....I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedans; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhist temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of everyone." This is not a statement by a politician trying to win the votes of people of all creeds. This was stated by a great man who was a very faithful Hindu, respected by not only Indians, but people in Sri Lanka and people all over the world of all races and faiths.

Sometimes we have to recognize special situations which demand special actions, formation of action groups. Our country faced it for the past 2000 years to fight against the attempts by Indian invaders to colonize this country, and our ancient chroniclers had to rally the native population against the invaders. For this they used the slogan, Country, Nation, Religion. Then much later, when we had to first get rid of the European invaders, the slogan took a new turn, Country and Nation only, because the natives of different religions gathered together to fight. After we managed to get rid of the Europeans, who left us enslaved by their language, the new slogan became Country, Nation, Language, while some others picked up Country, Language and Religion, bringing down the close unity we had enjoyed for a brief period against the common enemy.

All world religions developed over two thousand years ago. Their vision, philosophy, theology developed within the culture and concepts and the way of life at the time. The culture, concepts and the way of life are so different today, than what it was then. We have to realize that, accept that, and rethink about our religions, and consider reforms, to be acceptable to people living in a global village, where nation, race, creed, or caste barriers are fast coming down.

One thing we have to be very careful is never to let nature worship be institutionalized. This could once again lead to allegiances, loyalties, conflicts,

divisions, and we could get back full circle to a new segment involved in religious conflict.



One more reason we have to go back to nature worship, specially the worship of Mother Earth, is because it has now been accepted by many scientists, that Mother Earth is a living goddess.

Gaia was the name given by the Greeks to Mother Earth, and the name was suggested by William Golding to James Lovelock. It is not a new concept, and even though Lovelock brought it forth fifty three years ago, people are still reluctant to accept that Earth Mother could be a living organism, because then they have to accept that they are molesting, violating, abusing and torturing someone alive.

"The name of the living planet, Gaia, is not a synonym for the biosphere-that part of the Earth where living things are seen normally to exist. Still less is Gaia the same as the biota, which is simply the collection of all individual living organisms. The biota and the biosphere taken together form a part but not all of Gaia. Just as the shell is part of the snail, so the rocks, the air, and the oceans are part of Gaia. Gaia, as we shall see, has continuity with the past back to the origins of life, and in the future as long as life persists. Gaia, as a total planetary being, has properties that are not necessarily discernible by just knowing individual species or populations of organisms living together... Specifically, the Gaia hypothesis says that the temperature, oxidation state, acidity, and certain aspects of the rocks and waters are kept constant, and that this homeostasis is maintained by active feedback processes operated automatically and unconsciously by the biota." James Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia*.

That is why Lynn Margulis said, "Gaia is a tough bitch — a system that has worked for over three billion years without people. This planet's surface and its atmosphere and environment will continue to evolve long after people and prejudice are gone."

Gaia, will definitely get rid of mankind. Because man is only killing each other, but also killing all life on earth and doing his best to destroy Mother Earth herself. Gaia is sick, and dying. She would have self diagnosed the sickness as cancer. It would be in her interest and instinct for survival to destroy and eliminate the cancer cells completely. The cancer cells are mankind, which are spreading all over the world, destroying all other living organisms.

Either man has to control himself, and stop all destruction, beginning with destroying his own species, or let Gaia destroy the entire human race. The only way to stop this destruction is by worshipping Gaia as we would our own mother, and worshipping all other natural forces.

In "God, Gaia, and Biophilia", Dorian Sagan and Lynn Margulis says that "our evolution has brought us beyond a point of no return." They continue to explain that, "Gaia is Darwin's natural selector. All of these organisms have a tendency for

population explosion. That this enormous population potential fails to be reached is Darwin's lesson. There are checks upon growth at all times throughout the life cycles of all organisms. Gaia, the sum of the interacting organisms of the biosphere, checks growth and therefore acts as the natural selector."

When we look at Gaia as a living organism, and as a tiny planet in a multiverse, then man is probably like a single celled creature in the mighty ocean. Or in reality we are parasites, feeding on the skin of Mother earth, like the ticks on the skin of a cow. Yet in our arrogance we believe that we own the area of skin where we live. That is why we fight for such patches, the ticks on the tail, calling it their motherland or homeland, and trying to invade a leg or the belly, trying to occupy it and claim it is their territory. But the ticks can always jump off to another cow, when the cow dies of tick fever. But if Gaia dies, we have nowhere else to jump to.

Man in his arrogance has been trying to defy Gaia, defy nature, and that is one more reason for Gaia to hit back, to regain control and eliminate the threat.

Recent biology textbooks include reference to Lynn Margulis' theory of endosymbiosis, the majority of them put it forward as the most likely explanation of the origin and evolution of life on the planet we know as Earth. We have to get out of our anthropocentric mindset, that man is superior to all other life and we are the masters of the universe. In reality, we do not exist as separate entities, but we only co-exist with around 30 billion other life forms including the bacteria and virus forms. Margulis had been asked at a public lecture when human life had begun. She had answered, that human life began, as all life did, at least three and a half billion years ago.

Biophilia was a concept introduced by Edward O. Wilson in his book of the same title, claiming a human dependence on nature that extends far beyond the simple issues of material and physical sustenance to encompass as well the human craving for aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive, and even spiritual meaning and satisfaction. That is probably what we need, to save mankind and Mother Earth.

We do not know if Lovelock and Margulis had studied the teachings on Paticca Samuppada, or the Law of Dependent Origination. "The causal interdependence applies to all things from the natural environment, which is an external, physical condition, to the events of human society, ethical principles, life events and the happiness and suffering which manifest in our own minds." - Ven. Prayudh Payutto.<sup>2</sup>

Stephen Miller has summarised it thus. "The idea of Gaia may facilitate the task of

converting destructive human activities to constructive and cooperative behavior. It is an idea which deeply startles us, and in the process, may help us as a species to make the necessary jump to planetary awareness."

Our theme at this conference today is Religious Tolerance and harmony. We need to talk of tolerance today because we are even unable to tolerate other religions. But let us continue this discussion, after we leave this conference, let us continue to meet in cyberspace, let us plan our next conference, with the theme Religious Acceptance and harmony.

Bergen Evans' *Dictionary of Mythology*, on Janus "It was a peculiarity of this god that the doors of his temple were kept open in time of war and closed in time of universal peace. They were rarely closed."

Let us get together to close and seal the doors of the Janus temple forever, so that it will crumble into dust and disappear from the face Mother Earth someday. Why I am not suggesting that we destroy the Janus temple is because it would be another act of violence, and we need not resort to violence even against any person or object, for nature and time will take care of it.

