

Deep Ecology Training

Deep ecology is a new philosophy of nature which is based on the belief in the interconnectedness of all beings and which wants to encourage action for social change on behalf of nature. John Seed's training courses aim to empower participants through deep experiential learning, starting with the rediscovery one's own connection with nature.

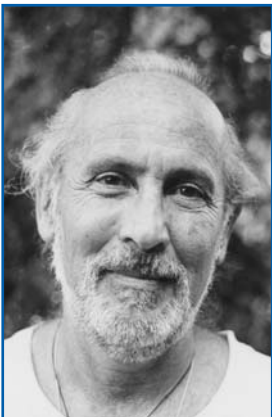
Deep Ecology is the name of a new philosophy of nature that has been exerting a profound effect on environmentalism for the last 20 years. To deep ecology the world is seen not as a pyramid with humans on top, but as a web. We humans are but one strand in that web and as we destroy other strands, we destroy ourselves.

Deep ecology concerns the interconnectedness of all things, the way that all beings - plant, animal and human - are part of a larger organism, sometimes called "Gaia" (named after the ancient Greek goddess of Earth). To deep ecology, we are all cells in the vast body of the Earth and, if we forget this, there is a danger that we may become cancerous cells, growing at the expense of the body within which we ourselves have our existence.

I like James Lovelock's way of putting it. (James Lovelock is the British Scientist who proposed the "Gaia Hypothesis": that the earth itself is a living organism rather than just a lump of rock with organisms growing on it). He says the way that modern humans behave towards nature is as if the brain decided it was the most important organ in the body and started mining the liver. That's not to say that the brain isn't as miraculous as the liver. It's just that both brain and liver are part of a body and the brain has no existence outside that body. To start mining the liver doesn't show what a powerful brain it is, it shows what a stupid brain it is.

If we look at indigenous cultures, we may notice that, without exception, ritual and ceremony play a central role in the lives of these societies affirming and nurturing the sense of interconnectedness between people and nature. This suggests that we modern people can't just think our way out of this fix, we must involve deeper levels of our being than merely our cognition to make the vast changes in our personalities and institutions necessary for our survival and that of complex life itself.

by John Seed



The Council of All Beings

It is for such reasons that Joanna Macy and I developed the experiential deep ecology trainings called "The Council of All Beings". These trainings help end the sense of alienation from the living Earth that most of us feel, and connect us with new sources of joy, commitment and inspiration that follow from union with Gaia.

While many people now *intellectually* realise that we are inseparable from Nature and that the sense of separation that we feel is illusory, nonetheless we feel separate. These rituals enable us to deeply *experience* our connection with Nature, in our hearts and our bodies.

After getting to know each other, the Council of All Beings begins with a mourning ritual. Only if we will allow ourselves to feel the pain of the Earth, can we be effective in Her healing. Then we remember our rootedness in nature. Using guided visualisation and

movement/dance we recapitulate our entire evolutionary journey and release the memories locked in our DNA. We experience the fact that every cell in our body is descended in an unbroken chain 4 billion years old, through fish that learned to walk the land, reptiles whose scales turned to fur and became mammals, evolving through to the present.

We further extend our sense of identity in the Council of All Beings itself where we step aside from our solely human identification and let other life forms speak through us. We go on a "vision quest" to find an ally in the non-human world (an animal or plant or feature of the landscape), make a mask to represent that ally, and lend our voices to the animals and plants. We are shocked at the very different view of the world that emerges from their dialogue. Creative suggestions for human actions emerge and we invoke the powers and knowledge of these other life forms to empower us in our lives.

Through personal sharing and experiential deep

ecology exercises, we explore the depths of our concern and love for our planet in this time of crisis. Rediscovering our interconnectedness with all beings - we find empowerment as agents of healing change. Typically these workshops give participants a deep sense of connection with the natural world and empower us to act more strongly on behalf of nature. All workshop fees go to supporting volunteers working on rainforest conservation projects in Ecuador.

Interested?

If you are interested in joining John Seed in a deep ecology training course, then you will have the opportunity in April 2002 in Amsterdam. For more details, contact John directly or access the web site of the Rainforest Information Centre www.forests.org/ric/ which includes a deep ecology section with writings by John Seed and others and John Seed's workshop schedule. This web site also includes news and action alerts to save the rainforests and information about Rainforest Information Centre volunteers in Ecuador, Papua New Guinea and India.

John Seed, Joanna Macy, Arne Naess and Pat Fleming wrote a book "Thinking Like a Mountain - Towards a Council of All Beings" (New Society Publishers 1988). It functions as an instruction manual for conducting Councils of All Beings and has been translated into eight languages.

Also supporting rainforest conservation in Ecuador is a new project we have developed: the Rainforest Jukebox.

(www.rainforestjukebox.org)

A wide range of Australian artists have donated their CD's and tapes to the jukebox which streams 40 music tracks that you can listen to for free. Funds from the sale of these

recordings go to rainforest conservation projects in Ecuador. The jukebox includes CD's from some of Australia's most creative and passionate environmental musicians who have been empowering, harmonising and funding the Australian environmental movement since 1979. There is also a number of great aboriginal artists. Every visitor to the site results in each of our sponsors donating enough money to buy 2 square feet of threatened rainforest.

For more information, workshop schedules or copies of "Thinking like a mountain", you can write to John Seed, Rainforest Information Centre, Box 368 Lismore 2480, Australia. Email:

johnseed@ozemail.com.au, tel: 61 (0)2 66213294.

If you would like to get an overview of different kinds of environmental training, have a look at Coyote's last issue (#4, June 2001) at www.training-youth.net. In his article on Values, Training and the Environment, Stefan Bužarovski proposes a categorisation of different forms of environmental education based on its values related to the environment, society and intended change. We take this occasion to apologise for some mistakes in the lay-out of the text of his article in the printed version of the magazine.

