

Satinder Dhiman · Joan Marques
Editors

Spirituality and Sustainability

New Horizons and Exemplary
Approaches

With Foreword by Dr. Ian I. Mitroff

 Springer

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Foreword

“*Spirituality and Sustainability: New Horizons and Exemplary Approaches*” is to be applauded for its ambitious scope. It is must reading for anyone concerned with the environment.

Since I work in the philosophical tradition of pragmatism, let me note how the book is compatible with a pragmatist definition of truth: *Truth is that which makes a positive ethical difference in the quality of one’s life*. Thus, according to pragmatism, no matter to which school of ethics one gives one’s allegiance, truth, and ethics are inseparable. But so are truth and aesthetics since the word “quality” is a stand-in for aesthetics. If in addition one adds the word spirit, then the definition reads: *Truth is that which makes a positive ethical difference in the spirit and quality of one’s life*. Thus, in pragmatism, “aesthetics,” “ethics,” “spirituality,” and “truth” are inseparable. Thus, this book is in alignment with pragmatism.

But pragmatism goes even further. The seemingly simple, small word “makes” is all important. It says that in pragmatism, we don’t have “truth” until we have the ethical implementation of our ideas. That is, until they make a positive difference. According to this severe criterion, this book urges (begs) us to make its propositions become true through their being implemented. In other words, it is a call to ethical action.

Notice also that while a pragmatist definition of truth is the product of Western thinking, it is not confined to it. It is perfectly compatible with and willing to learn from Eastern philosophy.

Let me approach the matter from another perspective as well. Russell L. Ackoff was the first to appropriate the word “mess” to stand for a *whole system* of problems that were so interdependent, and thus highly interconnected, such that one could not take any single problem out of the mess of which it was apart and attempt to study it independently of all the other problems to which it was connected without doing irreparable damage to the nature of the problem and the entire mess. In other words, there are no such things as independent, self-standing problems any longer, if there ever really were.

The point is, everywhere from which one approaches it, the environment is a mess. The thing that this book brings front and center is that spirituality is one of the prime components of all messes. This is certainly true of the environmental mess. But then so are ethics and philosophy.

The challenge with which we are left is that at the present we don't have an adequate ethics and philosophy to grapple with the environmental mess, but these essays are a promising start.

Oakland, USA

Ian I. Mitroff

Contents

1	The Case for Eco-spirituality: Everybody Can Do Something	1
	Satinder Dhiman	
2	Sustaining the Cosmic Wheel of Creation: Journey from Consumer to Contributor.	17
	Satinder Dhiman	
3	Moral Underpinnings of Sustainability	33
	Joan Marques	
4	The Environment is a Moral and Spiritual Issue	49
	John E. Carroll	
5	Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility for Spirituality and Sustainability	73
	Raghavan (Ram) Ramanan and Harold (Hal) Taback	
6	Spiritual Capabilities: Keys to Successful Sustainable Strategic Management	89
	Jean Garner Stead and W. Edward Stead	
7	The Spiritual Roots of Economic Sustainability	105
	John Ikerd	
8	Higher Consciousness for Sustainability-as-Flourishing	121
	Dennis Heaton	
9	Formless Meditation and Sustainability.	139
	Michael Carroll	
10	Spirituality, Sustainability and Happiness: A Quantum-Neuroscientific Perspective.	155
	Rohana Ulluwishewa	
11	Case Studies: Spirituality and Sustainability	169
	Elizabeth F.R. Gingerich	

**12 Putting Glam into Green: A Case for Sustainable
Luxury Fashion 183**
Xenya Cherny-Scanlon

**13 Global Warming Calls for an Inner Climate Change:
The Transformative Power of Worldview Reflection
for Sustainability 199**
Annick de Witt

14 Un-fathoming the Spirit of Sustainability 215
Will McConnell

15 Epilogue: The Ethics and Spirituality of Sustainability 235
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The Case for Eco-spirituality: Everybody Can Do Something

1

Satinder Dhiman

Future generations? Why should I care about future generations? What have they ever done for me?

—Groucho Marx

A Man came into a Wood one day with an axe in his hand and begged all the Trees to give him a small branch which he wanted for a particular purpose. The Trees were good-natured and gave him one of their branches. What did the Man do but fix it into the axe head, and soon set to work cutting down tree after tree. Then the Trees saw how foolish they had been in giving their enemy the means of destroying themselves.

—Aesop's Fables. (A new translation by Laura Gibbs. Oxford University Press, World's Classics: Oxford, 2008)

Abstract

Have contemporary approaches to economic and social development failed to address what many believe to be humankind's abiding need for spiritual growth? Can material advancement be more sustainable when spiritual development is seen as an integral part of the human development algorithm? Since our societies are human nature writ large, can it be argued that the solution to many of the current challenges faced by both the civilization and the environment lies in connecting sustainable practices with our spiritual awareness? While arguments can be made that the choice we face is between conscious change and chaotic annihilation, could each one of us begin to make a difference by integrating spirituality and sustainability as a way of life? This introductory chapter relies on the spiritual power of individuals to heal themselves and the environment. When we change our orientation from 'I' to 'We,' we transition from *illness* to *wellness—individually and collectively*. Accordingly, sustainability is no longer seen just as a scientific or political problem; it becomes a matter of individual moral choice, with profound spiritual significance.

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Conquest and Control: Disempowering Approaches

A Man and a Lion were discussing the relative strength of men and lions in general. The Man contended that he and his fellows were stronger than lions by reason of their greater intelligence. “Come now with me,” he cried, “and I will soon prove that I am right.” So he took him into the public gardens and showed him a statue of Hercules overcoming the Lion and tearing his mouth in two.

“That is all very well,” said the Lion, “but proves nothing, for it was a man who made the statue.”¹

Ever since the dawn of Industrial Revolution, our primary approach toward nature has consistently been that of the conquest and control rather than harmony and coexistence. The horrific consequences of this disempowering stance are too evident to recount. We believe that the most important eco-spirituality struggles will be won or lost during the current and the next decade. While the policy makers and governments can play their respective role, each one of us has to consciously adopt spirituality and sustainability as a way of life. Only an individual life rooted in the continuous harmony with nature—a life based on moral and spiritual awareness—can preserve the sanctity of the planet in the long run. When we change our orientation from “self-centeredness” to “other-centeredness and nature-centeredness,” we transition from *illness* to *wellness*—individually and collectively.

Sensitive minds have always recognized that the most important issues confronting organizations and society at large are so profound and pervasive that they can only be resolved at the fundamental level of the human spirit—at the level of one’s authentic self. The following chapters will share the working hypothesis that wisdom, compassion, abundance, equity, equality, contribution, synergy, wakefulness, selflessness, and happiness can serve as the key drivers in healing our planet through spirituality.

Sustainability and Spirituality: An Interdisciplinary Approach

This book approaches the topic of sustainability in a broad interdisciplinary fashion—in the possible manner of our *total footprint* on the planet, not just our *carbon footprint*. It proposes to bring together the two allied areas of sustainability and spirituality in a dialectical manner, with ethics acting as a balancing force and spirituality playing the role of the proverbial invisible hand guiding our quest for

¹Source: *Aesop’s Fables*. A new translation by Laura Gibbs. Oxford University Press, World’s Classics: Oxford, 2008. Moral of Aesop’s Fable: We can easily represent things as we wish them to be.

sustainability. It takes the view that, in essence, spirituality and sustainability are vitally interlinked and that *there is no sustainability without spirituality*.

We believe that the broad interdisciplinary approach proposed in this book is critical in addressing the multifaceted issues of environmental sustainability and in mapping our plenary future. We propose to integrate a number of disciplinary perspectives in science, marine biology, energy harvesting and conservation, environmental policy, cultural studies, psychology, philosophy, spirituality, socio-scientific framings of biodiversity issues, ecological economics and ethics across disciplines to address the environmental sustainability issues. As interdisciplinary researchers, we propose to re-examine the current (and long-standing) relations of disciplinary boundaries. We believe that the current disciplinary knowledge production more often obscures rather than fosters solutions to the most pressing, intractable problems which deepen, rather than eliminate, the environmental damage.

Everybody Can Do Something

This book explores the inherent relationship between sustainability and spirituality, and the role of ethical leadership in honoring and maintaining this interconnect-edness. We believe that unless people's moral and spiritual qualities are nurtured and developed, the best of sustainability efforts will not work. Our political and economic thinking needs to be attuned to spirituality rather than materialism, for no economics is any good that does not make sense in terms of our shared humanity and morality. We need to refuse to treat economics and politics as if people do not matter. After all, we are "Homo moralis" and not "Homo economicus." We believe that the way to achieve sustainable, harmonious living in all spheres is through *lived* morality and spirituality at the personal level.

Likewise at the managerial level, we need to start viewing our organizations as "living systems" rather than as "machines for producing money."² Research shows that long-lived companies are supremely sensitive to their environment. Thus, true sustainability is not possible without a deep change of *values* and commitment to a *lifestyle* at the *individual* and *organizational* level. It cannot be achieved simply as an expression of economic functionality or legislative contrivance. Therefore, to the question, "How to improve the state of the Planet?" we reply: "Everybody can do something!"³

²Arie de Gues, *The Living Company: Habits for Survival in a Turbulent Business Environment* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 91, 176.

³David Biello, State of the Earth: Still Seeking Plan A for Sustainability? How to improve the state of the planet: "everybody can do something." *Scientific American*, Oct. 12, 2012. Retrieved July 31, 2015: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/book/planet-seeks-plan-for-sustainability/>.

When everyone contributes their respective share in the cosmic scheme of things, it unexpectedly brings about the intended change in the entire world. The task may appear to be daunting at first, as the following story⁴ illustrates, but it can only start one step at a time.

Saving the world, one starfish at time!

Once thousands of starfish got washed to the shore and due to lack of water they were almost dying. One person, who was taking a stroll along the beach, noticed this. Out of compassion, he picked them up one at a time and started throwing back into the ocean so that it can survive.

A passerby saw this and remarked, "But, sir, don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it! You can't possibly save them all, you can't even save one-tenth of them.

In response, the person picked up another starfish and threw it back into the sea and said – "Well, it made a difference for that one!"

The story brings home an important point: Do what you can to make a change and leave the rest to higher intelligence. If we want the universe to be a better, a safer place, then we all have to work together for it by inspiring others by way of example.

Defining Sustainability

Definitions of sustainability abound. The most frequently quoted definition is from *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report, published in 1987 by the United Nations' World Commission on Environment and Development: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."⁵

⁴Attributed to Loren Eiseley. Retrieved December 2, 2015: https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/56782.Loren_Eiseley.

⁵For further details, see the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: *Our Common Future*. Retrieved August 20, 2015: <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>.

There has been a growing realization in national governments and multifaceted institutions that it is impossible to separate economic development issues from environment issues. For example, poverty is the major cause as well as effect of global environmental problems. It is therefore futile to attempt to deal with environmental problems without a broader perspective that encompasses the factors underlying world poverty and international inequality.⁶

In simple terms, sustainability means utilizing natural resources in manner that we do not end up, during the process, destroying the setup. In its most practical aspect, sustainability is about understanding the interconnections among environment, society, and economy. According to US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), “Sustainability is based on a simple principle: Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on our natural environment. Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations.”⁷

Need for Spiritual Transformation

Our premise in this book is that in order for sustainability to be sustainable, a profound spiritual transformation has to take place, root branch and all, at the individual level. Our experience with various forms of political governments and legislative laws have taught us that such mechanisms are only as good as the individual and that constitutions are nothing but human nature writ at large. While various social and political initiatives for sustainability are welcome, one cannot really enact sustainability into legislative laws. Something has to change fundamentally at the level of a common person in the street. Unless our sustainability efforts are informed by a clear understanding of the spiritual nature of all existence, they will not get beyond mere cosmetic quick fixes.

Accordingly, a spiritual transformation is necessary in terms of how we view and live our lives as members of the society. It entails asking some tough questions: Do we approach our life as a gift of nature or as a personal entitlement? Do we want to befriend nature or conquer nature? How do we look at our *total* footprint, and not just *carbon* footprint? We have to start at the very beginning, right at the point of our ends and goals that we pursue that in turn determine our needs and wants. While we are all born as consumers, true to our self-preservation instinct, becoming a contributor takes a certain measure of objectivity and maturation.

⁶Ibid, p. 12.

⁷What is Sustainability? United States Environmental Protection Agency. Retrieved August 20, 2015: <http://www.epa.gov/sustainability/basicinfo.htm>.

Philosophy of Universalism

In these two opening chapters, we will approach the issue of spirituality–sustainability from the standpoint of the Vedas (particularly *Upaniṣads*) and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The Vedas are the source books of India’s spiritual wisdom. They are revealed scriptures⁸ that propound the principle of oneness and unity of the ultimate reality (*Brahman*) with our innermost self (*Ātman*). A scripture is a text that has a universal message of lasting value.⁹ Huston Smith, the great American scholar of comparative religion, speaks about the importance of approaching scriptural teachings with a certain preparation and orientation to imbibe their subtle truth as follows:

Scripture is merely a key to the infinite storehouse of knowledge that lies within every human soul. And as for philosophy, its object is to enable the student to see the Truth—to realize it in direct experience. Hence certain moral and spiritual disciplines are necessary in order to create the right mood for study of both philosophy and the scriptures. Hinduism lays down such disciplines: discrimination between the Real and the unreal and renunciation of the unreal; and acquisition of the six virtues (control of the mind, control of the senses, restraining the mind from being distracted by worldly objects, faith in the scriptures and the words of the teacher, mental concentration, and lastly, the longing for liberation). Inwardness of spirit, cultivated through self-control and contemplation, enables the student of the scriptures to grasp their subtle meaning, which otherwise remains hidden from the merely intelligent reader.¹⁰

The purpose of all the great scriptures of the world is to teach “right knowledge” flowering into “right conduct.” “The goal of spiritual life,” says Huston Smith elsewhere, “is not altered states, but altered traits.”¹¹ It starts with our moral responsibility. The very first word of the *Gītā* is *dharma* (moral duty) and the last word is *mama* (my or mine). Literally, therefore, the first and last words of the *Gītā* denote “my moral duty,” my *dharma*.

The *Gītā* begins with the most fundamental leadership question: What is the right thing for me to do in any given situation? *Dharma* is the province of the entire *Gītā*! The *Gītā* (chapter 1, verse 1, hereafter BG 1.1) begins with word *dharma-kṣetre kurukṣetre*: *kurukṣetre* literally means “the field of actions” and *dharma-kṣetre* means “that field of moral order which sustains everything.” So, the *Gītā* deals with the domain of our actions, actions guided by the moral law or principle that sustains everything within the cosmic sphere. In order to understand the true

⁸The Sanskrit word for scripture is “*Shashtra*.” *Shasti ca trayate ca iti shastram*: That which rules and protects is a *shastra*.

⁹Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *Bhagavad Gita: Home Study Course* (Chennai: Arsha Vidya Research and Publication Trust, 2011), Multimedia edition, vol. 2, p. 1077. From Essay, “Why study the Gita,” by Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Retrieved July 25, 2015: <http://www.arshavidya.org/Study-Gita.html>.

¹⁰Foreword by Huston Smith. In Winthrop Sargeant, trans., *The Bhagavad Gītā*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Albany, New York: State Press of New York Press, 2009), 12.

¹¹Huston Smith, “Encountering God.” In Huston Smith, Phil Cousineau, *The Way Things Are: Conversations With Huston Smith on the Spiritual Life* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2003), 97.

import of the message of the Gītā, it is very important to understand the correct meaning of the word “*dharma*.”

Understanding *Dharma*, *ṛtaṃ*, the Cosmic Order

Dharma is the most important and pivotal concept in the spiritual tradition of India. Etymologically, the word *dharma* comes from the root *dhṛ* which means “to bear, to support, to uphold,”—*dhārayate uddhāryateva iti dharma*—that which “supports, sustains, and uplifts” is *dharma*. There is another Vedic concept which is closely related to *dharma*, called *ṛta*. *Ṛta* is the *order* behind the manifest world, the harmony among all aspects of manifestation, each of which obeys its own truth, scale and order. There is physical order, biological order, and psychological order.

Everything in the universe follows its own inner order, *ṛtaṃ*. Actually, *dharma* is conceived as an immanent aspect of *Ṛta*. As John Warne explains in his editorial preface to *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, “*Ṛta* is the universal norm identified with truth which, when brought to the level of humanity, become known as *dharma*, the righteous order here on earth.”¹² Indian seers and sages maintain that one should fulfill one’s desires (*kāma*) or pursue wealth and security (*artha*) within the framework of *dharma*, which ensures the good of everyone.¹³

In Indian philosophy and religion, *dharma*¹⁴ has multiple meanings such as religion, duty, virtue, moral order, righteousness, law, intrinsic nature, cosmic order, and nonviolence (*ahiṃsā paramo dharmah*¹⁵). *Dharma* also means the invariable, intrinsic nature of a thing (*svadharmā*) from which it cannot deviate, like there cannot be a cold fire. In the realm of ethics and spirituality, *dharma* denotes

¹²See: *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* by Swami Dayananda Saraswati (Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania: Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, 2005), transcribed and edited by John Warne, iv.

¹³Bangalore Kuppaswamy, *Dharma and Society: A Study in Social Values* (Columbia, Mo: South Asia Books, 1977).

¹⁴There is no single word in any Western language that can capture the multiple dimensions and subtle nuances of the word *dharma*. Like the words *karma* and *yoga*, it has been left untranslated in this chapter for the most part, with its contextual meaning presented in the parentheses where necessary. These words have found wide currency and familiarity in the Western culture. Similar confusion also exists regarding the meaning of the word *yoga*, as used in the Bhagavad Gītā. According to the preeminent Sanskrit scholar, J.A.B. van Buitenen, “The word *yoga* and cognates of it occur close to 150 times in the Gītā, and it needs attention.” See: J.A.B. van Buitenen, ed. and trans., *The Bhagavad Gītā in the Mahābhārata: A Bilingual Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 17. Etymologically, the word *yoga* comes from the Sanskrit root “*yuj*,” which is cognate with the word “yoke.” The *yoga*, “yoking,” that is intended in the Gītā is the union of individual self, *jivātmā*, with the Supreme Self, *Paramātmā*.

¹⁵ *ahiṃsā paramo dharmah, ahiṃsā paramo tapah*||
ahiṃsā paramo satyaṃ yato dharmah pravartate||
ahiṃsā paramo dharmah, ahiṃsā paramo damah||
ahiṃsā parama dānaṃ, ahiṃsā parama tapah||
ahiṃsā parama yajñah ahiṃsā paramo phalam||
ahiṃsā paramaṃ mitraḥ ahiṃsā paramaṃ sukham||

~ *Mahābhārata/Anuśāsana Parva* (115-23/116-28-29)

conduct that is in accord with the cosmic order, the order that makes life and creation possible. When our actions are in harmony with the cosmic order, *Rta*, and in accord with the dictates of inner law of our being, *dharma*, they are naturally and spontaneously good and sustaining. Alexander Pope was right: “He can’t be wrong, whose life is in the right.”

The Context: The Current State of the Planet

Human activities are changing the climate in dangerous ways. Levels of carbon dioxide which heat up our atmosphere are higher than they have been in 800,000 years. 2014 was planet’s warmest year on record. And we have been setting several records in terms of warmest years over the last decade. One year does not make a trend but 14 out of 15 warmest years on record have fallen within the first 15 years of this century.

Climate change is no longer just about the future we are predicting for our children or grandchildren. It is about the reality we are living with every day, right now. While we cannot say any single weather event is entirely caused by climate change, we have seen stronger storms, deeper droughts, longer wild fire seasons. Shrinking ice caps forced National Geographic to make the biggest change in its atlas since the Soviet Union broke apart.¹⁶

Environmentalists continue to point out that the current state of our planet is alarming—from the standpoint of economic development, social justice, or the global environment—and that sustainable development has hardly moved beyond rhetoric since it was first used in the 1980s. It is fairly evident to anyone who has a nodding acquaintance with the world affairs that humanity is hardly closer to eradicating extreme poverty, respecting the dignity and rights of all peoples or resolving environmental challenges, climate change or the extinction of plants and animals.¹⁷ And to add insult to the injury, strangely, we find ourselves in an era of “sustainababble” marked by wildly proliferating claims of sustainability. Even as adjectives such as “low-carbon,” “climate-neutral,” “environment-friendly,” and “green” abound, there is a remarkable absence of meaningful tests for whether particular governmental and corporate actions actually merit such description.¹⁸

For many experts, the increasing level of carbon dioxide in the environment is the most worrisome. The Emissions Database for Global Atmospheric Research, EDGAR, a database created by European Commission and Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, released its recent estimates, providing global past and present-day anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases and air pollutants by

¹⁶Climate Change and President Obama’s Action Plan. Video retrieved on August 3, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=182&v=r4ITx56WBv0>.

¹⁷David Biello, State of the Earth: Still Seeking Plan A for Sustainability?

¹⁸Robert Engelman cited in Michael Renner, “The Seeds of Modern Threats,” in *World Watch Institute State of the World 2015: Confronting Hidden Threats to Sustainability* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2013), 2.

country. According to these estimates, USA has the second highest CO₂ emissions, trailing behind China, and one of the highest CO₂ emissions per capita.¹⁹

According to a recent report by NASA, “Despite increasing awareness of climate change, our emissions of greenhouse gases continue on a relentless rise. In 2013, the daily level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere surpassed 400 parts per million for the first time in human history. The last time levels were that high was about three to five million years ago, during the Pliocene era.”²⁰

This alarming situation calls for creative solutions at both the collective and the individual level. At the same time, we cannot wait for and rely on legislative measures alone; something fundamental needs to change in terms of how we live and view the world. According to the NASA report, responding to climate change involves a two-pronged approach involving mitigation and adaptation:

1. Reducing emissions of and stabilizing the levels of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere (“mitigation”);
2. Adapting to the climate change (“adaptation”).²¹

The spiritual traditions of the world also offer some practical solutions. The Theravada Buddhist monk, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, underscores the environmental urgency and suggests an effective solution:

Today we face not merely a climate emergency but a single multidimensional crisis whose diverse facets—environmental, social, political, and economic—intersect and reinforce each other with dizzying complexity. ...The realization that human activity is altering the earth’s climate assigns to human beings the gravest moral responsibility we have ever faced. *It puts the destiny of the planet squarely in our own hands* just at a time when we are inflicting near-lethal wounds on its surface and seas and instigating what has been called “the sixth great extinction.”²²

It is believed that the five mass extinctions recorded in the last six hundred million years were precipitated by natural causes. According to some scientists, we may have just one more generation before everything collapses. In fact, in a recently published research article titled *Accelerated modern human-induced species losses: Entering the sixth mass extinction*,²³ Ceballos et al. state, unequivocally, that the planet has officially entered its sixth mass extinction event. The study

¹⁹EDGAR: Trends in global CO₂ emissions: 2014 report. Retrieved August 1, 2015: http://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/news_docs/jrc-2014-trends-in-global-co2-emissions-2014-report-93171.pdf.

²⁰NASA: *Global Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet*. Retrieved August 19, 2015: <http://climate.nasa.gov/solutions/adaptation-mitigation/>.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Climate Change as a Moral Call to Social Transformation*. The Buddhist Global Relief. Retrieved January 28, 2016: <http://buddhistglobalrelief.me/2015/12/02/climate-change-as-a-moral-call-to-social-transformation/> [emphasis added].

²³Gerardo Ceballos, Paul R. Ehrlich, Anthony D. Barnosky, Andrés García, Robert M. Pringle, Todd M. Palmer, “Accelerated modern human-induced species losses: Entering the sixth mass extinction,” *Environmental Sciences* June, 19, 2015, 1–5. Retrieved July 10, 2015: <http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/advances/1/5/e1400253.full.pdf>.

shows that species are already being killed off at rates much faster than they were during the other five extinction events, and warns ominously that humans could very likely be among the first wave of species to go extinct.²⁴

Real Ecology: Rub Not and Be Not Rubbed

In his masterly essay entitled *Ecology and the Bhagavad Gītā*, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, a preeminent Vedantic scholar and teacher, opines that the real ecology means learning to avoid rubbing against the environment.²⁵ This requires living in harmony with the whole environment, nurturing reverence for life by treating all life as sacred, and developing “big picture awareness”—a cosmic vision where our environment extends from our neighborhoods to the state, the country, the continent, the globe, the galaxy, and the universe.

This vision calls for a certain awareness and a worldview that is predicated on our understanding of the universe as being a manifestation of the transcendent Divinity. The Bhagavad Gītā and the Upaniṣads regard this entire world, *jagat*, as the manifestation of the Lord. This thinking invests all existence with a deeper moral basis and a higher spiritual significance. When this vision dawns, we understand the true meaning of such terms as compassion, contribution, and harmony.

A Case in Point: Crown of Creation or Bane of Creation?

“If all the insects were to disappear from the earth, within 50 years all life on earth would end. If all human beings disappeared from the earth, within 50 years all forms of life would flourish.”²⁶

As humans we always pride ourselves to be the crown of creation, as the most evolved of all creatures. Let’s say, somehow, chimpanzees come to know about this contention. They will probably say, ‘If being evolved means destroying our own kind, mindlessly plundering the planet, and upsetting the very setup that supports us, we are happy being the less evolved species.’

Objective analysis and a little reflection tell us that the universe was not created for humans alone. In the grand scheme of things, all forms of life are equally precious and so are their needs. The bounties of the planet are meant for all species to share equally since the earth belongs to all. And let’s not forget

²⁴For further details, also see: Dahr Jamail, Mass Extinction: It’s the End of the World as We Know It. Retrieved July 10, 2015: <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/31661-mass-extinction-it-s-the-end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it>.

²⁵Swami Dayananda Saraswati, *Ecology and the Bhagavad Gītā*. Retrieved October 15, 2015: http://www.avgsatsang.org/hhpsds/pdf/Ecology_and_Bhagavad_Gita.pdf.

²⁶A quote widely attributable to Jonas Salk. Sir Ken Robinson in his famous 2006 Ted talk titled “Do Schools Kill Creativity,” also attributes it to Jonas Salk. Transcript retrieved September 10, 2015: http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity/transcript?language=en.

that rest of the creation does not take without first contributing their share. The bee that robs the flower fertilizes it too. One wonders how we the humans have come to regard ourselves to be an exception to this universal rule.

A coconut plant, when young, can sustain on just waste water during initial years. After 5–6 years, it develops the ability to offer nutritiously sweet water. It carries that sweet water, safely stored in a shell over its head, as its gift to the universe, faithfully offering 50–75 coconuts for the next 50–60 years. Consider a tree: every part of its existence is useful to the universe. World’s forests, acting as green lungs, absorb almost 40 % of man-made CO₂, according to a 2011 University of Leeds research.

It is a matter of great disgrace that as humans we have come to be the least sustainable of all species to be called the “Crown of Creation?” In view of the opening quote (“If all the worms were to disappear...”) and considering our eco-record, perhaps, “Bane of Creation” may be a more fitting epithet for humanity.

*As the intelligent members of the bio family, we should be the caretakers of planet’s resources and its infrastructure. Based on all the available evidence regarding how human activities are affecting the climate in dangerous ways, it becomes evident how careless we have been in discharging our duties as caretakers. One of the cardinal principles of sustainability is that we should not **upset** the very **setup** carelessly in the process of meeting our needs. As the opening Aesop’s fable indicates, one understands how we acquired the dubious skill of cutting the very branch on which we are sitting!*

Our dignity as humans should lie in protecting those who are weaker than us. Those who have more power ought to be more kind to those who are weak.

Reflection: Points to Ponder

1. How have we come to be in an adversarial relationship with Mother Nature?
2. Do you agree with the opening quote attributable to Jonas Salk?
3. As intelligent beings, do you believe that it is our bounden duty to act as caretakers of the planet’s precious resources?
4. In some ancient cultures, there was a custom to plant five trees for every tree that was cut for timber. Learning from this custom, how can we ensure that we contribute to the well-being of planet at least equal to what we plan to consume?
5. Is it more gratifying to enjoy the satisfaction of a contented mind or to constantly want more—a more expensive car, name-brand clothes, or a luxurious house? How can we overcome this syndrome of “more-ism?”