

Journeying to Become Ever Greener

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Today, greenness refers to good things as well as to envy or decomposition. Greenness can include beautification with foliage or degrees of freshness in a drought-stricken landscape. In very recent time, "green" refers to how we see, speak and act in relation to our environment. Just as there are hues to the color green, so with our environmental awareness -- and the ever deepening of our consciousness about the world around us. Reflecting on this is part of our sacred journey of life.

The first level of environmental awareness is more reminiscent of the world four decades ago during that First Earth Day celebration in 1970. People were becoming aware that air was fouled, rivers were catching fire, deforestation was occurring at an ever quickening pace, and the bald eagle egg shells were so thin they would break before the hatchling came to full term. The bad effects of pollution were exposed; if steps were not taken immediately, our life on Earth would be imperiled. It was a matter of salvation and thus nations and sub-groups such as our own federal government enacted specific laws to curb air and water pollution and to control the use of dangerous pesticides that caused the threat to various species on this planet. In general, this basic level of greenness was accepted as urgent by the vast majority of people, for few wanted to tolerate dirty air and polluted water. Actions on this level have continued down through the years and, in fact, the global warming or climate change discussions are a continuation of earlier insights.

A second level of greenness emerged soon after the first; this involves us as individuals who realize that a deeper level of greenness consists in looking beyond distant culprits, whether profit-driven industries or negligent governmental agencies. We are humbled to discover that we are all partly to blame, in our use of resources for a host of consumer products that we find convenient. It is our use of goods that takes resources and accounts for almost two-thirds of the American economy. Such immense consumption patterns result in a heavy demand for non-renewable energy-based electricity and transportation; these take resources to replace the many items created, produced and promoted through a subtle process of planned obsolescence, i.e., rapid changes in what is fashionable. Under these circumstances, greenness goes beyond recognizing dirty air and water; it involves consumer choices that have much to do with the current economy. Being green and saving our Earth involve turning off unused lights or equipment, installing fluorescent bulbs, driving more energy efficient vehicles and doing less driving of them, growing part of our own food, and a host of simple living techniques and consumer practices that are being talked about today.

However, attending to simple lifestyle practices, though

requiring much attention and effort, is not the deepest green level. We need a certain solidarity with our fragile Earth, a treating of this beautiful planet as a close relative -- for thus it is. Green folks are able to express this relationship in song, poetry, prayer, dance or other artistic and spiritual ways. In fact, this deeper level may not be primarily a natural sequel to the first two levels, but rather a major ingredient in the relationship of primitive and nature-loving people to their Earth.

A spirituality is involved and is expressed in many ways by talented individuals. The problem in our modern world is that the eco-spiritual expression of these people may not directly speak to a particular person living in a different environment from the communicators. Our local encounters with flora and fauna will color our unique experiences of environment according to our own time (including seasons and times of day and night) and place (rivers, lakes, plains, mountains, deserts, seashores, etc.).

However deep the feelings at this third level, more still has to be considered, for we live in a world that has harmed the environment. For better or worse, as members of this community we share responsibility for the harm done by our consumer culture. It is not enough to experience the depths of solidarity with Earth and to avoid modern harmful practices. We do not live in isolation; we are involved in social intercourse with colleagues and significant friends. To shut ourselves off in ever-shrinking natural wilderness areas is not a true awareness of green, but a form of selfishness where green fades quickly. We abandon our part in the "consumer" culture, but share in its benefits -- and risks.

Our practices or lack of involvement becomes a matter of urgent review when we consider that consumption of resources is not being reduced; rather, consumption is increasing as developing nations with large populations such as China and India are acquiring an appetite for more consumer goods. Today, the Earth, threatened by climate changes with serious ramifications for the world's poor, cries out for help. True solidarity hears the cry of the poor -- yes, poor people and poor Earth. At this deepest level of environmental involvement, the emphasis is on social justice. What are the causes of the increased consumption of goods and can this practice be countered with a more service-based economy? Can an alternative way of acting involve attention to proper diet, housing, education and health benefits for all, not just for the privileged few? This way concerns more than corporate and individual misdeeds; it is a critique of the system itself -- and such a reflection is daunting.

In this deepest level of greenness we see more plainly the horizons of our sacred journey as experienced by fellow travelers on this fragile Earth. Here and now, we reassert our common resources as belonging to all, not just to the privileged few. Moving to this level of greenness requires prayer and measured action-- and it requires a common belief in a future for our planet as expressed in word and deed. For suggestions on what to

do see "Reclaiming the Commons" on our website
<earthhealing.info>.