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Integrity, Ecology, and Community

The Motion of Love

How can we change the direction of our impact on the earth and begin to undo the damage we have wrought on so many species, including our own? Can we depend on technological, political, and economic solutions alone? Jennie Ratcliffe, drawing on her years of experience and reflection as a scientist and active participant in peace and ecological concerns, believes that a deeper transformation is needed. A spiritual awareness of our oneness reminds us that we live in intimate relationship and kinship with each other, the earth, and the Divine. Grounded in reciprocity, reconciliation, simplicity, and nonviolence, this awareness can guide us toward a deeper integrity, a reverence for the human and natural communities upon which we depend, and more sustainable ways of living. Discussion questions included.



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The Motion of Love

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About the Author

Jennie Ratcliffe's lifelong concern has been to make connections: between nonviolence, social justice, and ecological sustainability; between science, ecology, spirituality, and politics; and between contemplation and social action. After obtaining a Master's degree in environmental pollution studies and a doctorate in epidemiology in England, she has worked for the past thirty-five years as a research epidemiologist in environmental and occupational health, including for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and the Universities of London and North Carolina. She has also worked with the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science, Friends of the Earth, and Physicians for Social Responsibility, among other organizations, and helped found local groups engaged in fostering a peaceful and ecologically sustainable future. As a member of Durham Friends Meeting, North Carolina, she serves on the Peace and Social Concerns and Earthcare Committees, and is a member of Quaker Earthcare Witness. She was the Henry J. Cadbury Scholar at Pendle Hill in 2006, where she began work on a book about the spiritual dimension of the ecological crisis from a Quaker perspective. This essay grew out of preliminary work and discussions during her time at Pendle Hill.

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Introduction

As we enter the twenty-first century, we are facing what may be our deepest challenge as human beings—an ecological crisis which threatens our survival and that of the millions of living beings and ecosystems with which we share the earth and upon which we depend. What are the spiritual roots of our predicament? And what has the ecological crisis got to do with the Quaker testimony of integrity? How can a deeper understanding of integrity inform our communal response to this crisis?

As I reflect on my life, from my time as a student in environmental pollution studies in the early 1970s through the worlds of scholarship, public health research, and various forms of social witness, I can trace the evolution of my own attempts to answer that question. I, and many others involved in the environmentalism of the early 1970s, were confident that our diagnoses of what we saw as “the environment problem” were both accurate and sufficient. We pointed variously to

population increases, overconsumption, and the rapid depletion of nonrenewable “resources”; to pollution, the power of technocracies, agribusiness, and the military; to the avarice of large corporations; and to the ineffectiveness of governments. Our “solutions” mirrored our diagnoses: a variety of economic, technological, and political changes (which we argued over endlessly) that would fix the problem.

But what were the sources of our predicament? Eventually, I came to understand that unless we changed the underlying ways of thinking that got us here in the first place, we would simply be postponing, not resolving or transforming, a deeper and more profound predicament. I began to see that the growing ecological crisis is, ultimately, a spiritual crisis. At the heart of this crisis is a profound—yet false—belief in separation, a way of viewing the world that creates distances, dualities, polarities, oppositions, enemies, shadows, and demons; a perspective that attempts to deny, cast out, or conquer, rather than to reconcile and integrate; a view that fails to recognize that all things are part of an irreducibly interconnected, interpenetrating, and interdependent whole, a unity.

We have come to believe that there is a fundamental separation between one aspect of ourselves and another, between one human being and another, between humanity and the wider natural world, and between ourselves, the earth, and whatever we may call the ground or source of being, of truth, of life, of all that is—the Infinite Mystery, the Divine, Spirit, or God.

The breakdown or dis-integration that we see around us of both human and natural ecologies reflects our inward belief in separation. In the West, a historically dualistic way of thinking, in part of Hellenistic origin, has had a profound impact on the development of western science, on the hierarchical, human-centered, and outward-facing structure of our societies, and

on western religious development, particularly Christianity.¹ By separating the material world from “spirit,” we have often sought to sustain ourselves by bread alone or have sought to turn away from the world. By reducing nature to object, or even to enemy, we have made it easier to regard the wider natural world as the mere backdrop to the human drama and ourselves as superior, uniquely made in God’s image. Other life forms and the earth itself are seen as mere resources ordained to be used, owned, or controlled by us, rather than imbued with sacredness, numinousness, and wonder, and endowed with an independent right to exist. And, by distancing ourselves from each other and the earth, by splitting off and denying unwanted parts of ourselves, or by projecting them onto others, we have made it easier to wage wars in which we destroy each other and the natural world and harder to share the gifts of the natural world equitably with our neighbors. We have also done profound violence to ourselves.

There are myriad ways in which our social, economic, and technological systems both mirror and reinforce these beliefs and ways of thinking. In our personal and social interactions, we often insist on either-or, win-lose, up-down positions: we outsmart the competition, get to the top, win the game; we are “self-made” millionaires, rugged individualists in control of our destinies; and you are either with us or against us. Inwardly we have separated, and often overvalued, the mode of active, outward action over responsiveness, reflection, stillness, and contemplation; the masculine over the feminine; and the rational intellect over the realms of feeling, sensing, and intuition. Instead of the harmony, cooperation, and creative synthesis that are possible when we think in terms of co-arising, interconnecting, and interdependent parts of a whole, we create conditions that reflect our sense of alienation and insecurity, such as hier-

archies of power and control, oppression, and exclusion; or we energetically amass money, goods, or outward achievements, as if driven by the promise that “more is better, bigger is better, and faster is better,” or that inward happiness and security will increase in proportion to outward power, status, and accumulation. In our social structures, we have created a widening and potentially dangerous gap between the increasing scope, speed, and impact of our technological and globalized economies on the one hand and our ability to understand or feel responsible for their consequences on the other. We often do not know, nor immediately suffer the consequences, if the glue used in making our tennis shoes is poisoning an eight-year-old worker in a sweatshop in India, or if the dyes used in our plastics are killing fish in a river in Thailand, or if our car exhaust in Arizona is playing a part in melting glaciers in Greenland or in causing a drought in the Sahel. We can now bomb people and destroy ecosystems we will never know in places we have never heard of on a scale we can scarcely fit into our minds. Many of us eat food from crops planted a thousand miles away, picked by migrant laborers whose names we will never have to pronounce. Some of us work in large, complex institutions or companies in which people do not know how all the parts connect and do not feel responsible for the wider impact of our work. As a result, we are often separated from that essential act of imagination and empathy with all that we are part of and that would speak to our hearts and consciences: an act that requires things to be closer up, smaller in scale, few enough, and slow enough to take in. We need time to breathe.

If we can more easily destroy, or be indifferent toward, that which we perceive ourselves to be separate or distanced from,

or that which we have cast out or demonized, we cannot so easily destroy that which we love, that which we understand as an irreducible part of ourselves, and which we recognize as kin, as part of the body of God, and as one with ourselves. The word ecology, from the Greek *oikos*, or household, reminds us that we are not only connected, not only neighbors, but members one of another and of a unified earth community. We are intimately related, not as subject and object, but as *kin*, in what Martin Buber calls the “I-Thou”² of reciprocal relationship that lies at the foundation of our humanity and divinity. Without this fundamental sense of kinship, we cannot fully comprehend or experience the mutuality and reciprocity by which we know that we are beings-in-relationship and that what we do to another we ultimately do to ourselves.

If separation and distancing are at the heart of our ecological—and thus human—predicament, then the restoration of *integrity*, in its deeper meanings of wholeness, the unity and sacredness of life, and the oneness of all that is, lies at the heart of its healing.

But speaking of integrity as oneness and unity is easily misunderstood. Integrity does not mean the elimination of individuality or sacrificing the infinite multiplicity of the “ten thousand things” in the creation of unity; it is a unity that bears within it particularity, complexity, differentiation, and uniqueness. It means that everything, even the smallest organism or particle, evolves and revolves in dynamic interdependence and reciprocity, an interpenetrating play of elements in the cosmic dance. Wholes are parts of larger wholes, and they are held together in a bond of unity that can be called a bond of love. The work of reconciliation, integration, and hallowing, guided by the “motion of love” as the Quaker John Woolman phrased it, is perhaps the surest way we can ultimately restore

the wholeness of the earth, peaceful relationships in the human world, and a livable world for our earth community of fellow beings.

There is a well-known saying in the Jewish Talmud that whoever preserves a single person's life, it is as if that person had saved the whole world. When I meditate on this saying, I glimpse what it might be pointing to—that every being (and why not also a beetle, a rock, or a cloud?) is a microcosm of and an integral, indispensable part of all that is. Even a dim realization of such truth has often brought me to a strange state of joy and pain. The Talmud also speaks of what in Hebrew are called *tikkun ha'nefesh* and *tikkun olam*—healing the soul and healing the world. Ultimately there is no separation between them. For me, as I explore the roots of our crisis, thinking in terms of wholeness and unity—or nondualism if you prefer—is not just a philosophical or theological position that, hopefully, will help us move toward an ecologically sustainable and just world. It comes from that mystical prompting within my heart which, however falteringly, experiences a growing awareness of oneness, as the Truth, the Reality of Being, and senses the healing of one as inseparable from the healing of all.

Reciprocity and Integrity

*"He lives in wisdom, who sees himself in all and all in him."*³

Bhagavad Gita

When I say "I see the flower," what am I seeing? An object that is separate from me? A biological specimen that I can classify,

name, group? A part of myself? A part of the Mind and Body of God? And if I say "I love the flower," is this a feeling, or a knowing that it is part of me? Does the discovery that 35 percent of my DNA matches a daffodil's DNA help me to *know* that the flower is part of me? Does knowing that the green leaves release the oxygen that I need to live help me to love the flower? Is my love aesthetic? And do I love the chickweed that sprouts up in my garden as I love the daffodils that grace the spring beds? Can I say "I-Thou" as a single word to speak of me and the flower together, not I and "It"? And does the word "love" really mean the bond of unity, that little hyphen that joins the "I-Thou" of the I-flower, which could also be called "God," and upon which whole universes spin?

We are beings-in-relationship with all that is.

As we can speak of the unity of "I-Thou," or what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "interbeing," we can also speak of *reciprocity*. Reciprocity is the heart of integrity. Without reciprocity, wholeness and integrity could not exist.

The first aspect of reciprocity is that *every part of the universe is interconnected, interdependent, and co-creative*. The Buddha, and Buddhists today, speak of "mutual co-arising" or "dependent origination," meaning that everything that we know comes into being in relation to and because of everything else, as a result of myriad "causes and conditions." In this sense, nothing has an independent existence. Paradoxically, "I" becomes "I" only because of you and all else that exists. Everything affects and is affected by every other thing. From the image of Indra's Net, in which each jewel in the net reflects every other jewel, and

which existed in Hindu and Buddhist texts perhaps two thousand or more years ago, to William Blake's vision of seeing the universe in a grain of sand and knowing that we cannot pluck a flower without the trembling of a star, mystics and poets throughout the ages and from all traditions have pointed to the great truth: the universe is One. All the infinite forms of manifestation are in fact part of a single whole, a One that already, always is—and yet is always being created, always evolving and unfolding. Another way of saying this is, simply, that God is.

A number of philosophers and physicists now speak of a "holographic" model of the universe, in which each part, whether an atom, a cell, a person, or a planet, is both a whole and a part—or a "holon," to use Arthur Koestler's term.⁴ Each holon includes a previous level of component parts, and each is included in the next level of being, or level of consciousness, which both *includes and goes beyond* the previous levels of being; there is a creative, unfolding synthesis and transformation of the parts that are included in the new whole or holon. Each holon is intimately connected to every other holon, out to the farthest corners of the cosmos—just as in the image of Indra's Net. Scientists who have recognized the limitations of strictly "reductionist," "materialist," and "mechanistic" views of the world, in which wholes are somehow reducible to the parts that they are composed of, are increasingly focusing their attention on the ever-unfolding, integrating wholes that parts give rise to. This does not mean that traditional scientific methods, or the specialized knowledge that comes from understanding what the parts consist of or how they work, are wrong or should be abandoned, but rather that an integral view, in which both parts and wholes are explored in interconnec-

tion, and which embraces reverence, mystery, and humility, yields a deeper understanding of the reality of our cosmos.

A starfish, a daffodil, a forest, or an ocean is not simply a collection of elements or an aggregation of separate, individual organisms, but is also an intimately interdependent and interacting system or community exhibiting the wondrous creativity of what scientists rather flatly call "emergent properties." At the level of the smallest particles, the discoveries of quantum physics are blurring the distinction and separations between particle and wave, between "spirit" and "matter," and between "consciousness" and "material reality." These qualities seem to interpenetrate and merge into one another in an interdependent way. As Thomas Berry puts it: "There is a spiritual capacity in carbon as there is a carbon component functioning in our highest spiritual experience. If some scientists consider that all this is merely a material process, then what they call matter, I call mind, soul, spirit, or consciousness."⁵ Berry further says:

Creation . . . must now be experienced as the emergence of the universe as a psychic-spiritual as well as a material-physical reality from the beginning. We need to see ourselves as integral with this emergent process, as that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself.⁶

It is our nature to be in connection with nature.

This brings us to the second aspect of reciprocity: *its nature is love*. For many Friends and others, it is a mystical, inwardly felt experience that constitutes the conviction of unity. This experience means seeing that of God in everything—knowing with the eye of spirit that the world, and everything in it, is the

manifestation of the Divine Mind, the creation of God. Only when experienced within could this Inward Light bring forth a felt bond of unity with all creation, a bond that is known in the depths of the soul's heart and that, once fully realized, is breakable by no principality or power. Glimpses and more glimpses of this reality can give us a sense of awe, humility, wonder, and joy.

At bottom, we can say that the realization of unity is the realization of love. But I do not necessarily mean love in our usual sense of feeling or emotion. Love is not just a feeling, though feelings may be involved. It is a state of being—we do not *have* love, as we “have” feelings; we *live* in love. Love, in this universal meaning, is a state of being-in-relation, response, and responsibility. Love is not opposed to hate, or to what we call evil; it is that universal force that liberates from the dualistic cycle of love and hate, good and evil. It is the force which reconciles, which includes and transforms all in ever-widening wholes. It is the Great Attractor. Love knows that every part depends on every other part for its existence, that everything arises in mutuality, and thus that every part is radically equal—for who could say which part is less or more vital to the whole when every part depends on every other part, is *created* by every other part? Love is also the force of evolution, enabling every part to be included in larger wholes in a series of evolving “holarchies” (not hierarchies, in the old meaning of systems of dominating power): The power of love is not to dominate but to move toward wholeness—and in so doing, to liberate from opposition and disharmony. We could say that the very forces that bind atoms and that govern the planets in their orbits are expressions of this love. As long as we do not see and understand this wholeness, this reciprocity, we live in a kind of half-sighted love, a love which separates, which is capable

of hate. Such a partial love can say I love this, but hate that; I love you in this aspect but not in that aspect. A partial love acts toward what I encounter as I-It, as object, as other.⁷ Once there is separation, there can be division, hierarchy, power-over, the belief that we can destroy without destroying ourselves. There is a radical loss of reciprocity.

The third aspect of reciprocity is that, in the realm of thought, consciousness, and spirit, *like creates like*. Buddha is said to have taught that hatred will cease only in the presence of non-hatred, not from being overcome by more hatred; it is the eternal law. Violence, whether against another person, another living being, or the earth itself, creates more violence, disharmony, and suffering. Nonviolence, sooner or later, yields greater peace, greater harmony, and greater synergy. Many of us have had the experience of either escalating or defusing an argument or conflict, depending on how verbally (or physically) violent or calm we ourselves became, or of watching a child or an animal or a plant thrive when we gave them care and attention. Another aspect of this principle is that means and ends are, ultimately, the same. We cannot use deceptive means and expect to arrive at the truth, or violent means to create a lasting peace: the ends will reflect whatever means we use. And if we practice nonviolence to each other or the earth only as a tactic or expedient in order to win, gain, subdue, or control (if we “green” our economies only for profit, for example), we will ultimately get the results that reflect such goals: much of the same direct and structural violence of conflict, injustice, inequality, and ecological destruction that we see today.

In the same way, what we do to another we do, sooner or later, to ourselves. Jesus spoke of this when he told his followers: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete

it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:2), and later, Paul reminded the Galatians, "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). So when we speak of the golden rule, of doing unto others what we would have them do unto us, we are not just speaking of a moral injunction, although it is that, too. We are, in fact, making a statement of spiritual principle.

Lastly, *reciprocity imposes limits*. Many years ago, part of my studies included learning about animal embryology, and I was often awestruck by the miracles that unfold as a fertilized egg begins to divide. Governed by natural limits imposed by such factors as the diffusion rates of gases, gravity, the metabolic rates of mitochondria, and the supply of food in the surrounding environment, the organs in a healthy embryo develop in an exquisite symphony of synchronization and reciprocity—a synchrony in which each cell, each organ, and each system in the body grows as a part of an interdependent, dynamic whole in *balance, sufficiency, and proportionality*—and not only as a whole body, but as a body-in-relation to the earth and, finally, to the cosmos itself.⁸ Groups of animals and plants within a stable, healthy ecosystem must, if they are to survive, live within certain limits defined by their food supply, the territory of their habitat, and other species. There is competition, but it exists within the context of an overall reciprocity. So too, in human societies, individual freedom of action and competition must co-exist with responsiveness and responsibility if there is to be overall cooperation and stability rather than conflict and instability. Reciprocity imposes limits, or checks and balances, that are essential if harmony and balance and, indeed, the integrity of the whole are to be maintained.⁹ Despite our Promethean capabilities, humans are subject to no less than the same limits.

Paths to integrity: reconciliation, simplicity, and nonviolence

"And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral, dressed in his shroud."¹⁰

Walt Whitman

When we confront what we see as the evil of the world, whether it is excesses of our hubris, our wars, our injustices and folly, or the prospect of ecological catastrophe, there are several possible responses. The first, perhaps the most common, is to fight against whatever forces seem to be the sources and perpetrators of these evils. Another is to become cynical, to "go along" in a passive but ultimately despairing way. Yet another is to turn away from or reject the world, or to become an ascetic in a way that we often mistake for simplicity; to put the lid back on what we see as the multiple Pandora's boxes of modernity, science, and technology, and return to an age of imagined innocence in which life was simple and bucolic. None of these responses ultimately achieves its aim.

We cannot bring about a more peaceful, just, and ecologically sustainable integrated earth community simply by denying or fighting against those forces we see as responsible for the destruction and violence around us; we must go by the way of reconciliation. If the principle of reciprocity that I spoke of earlier is true, any attempt to "overcome" these forces by denial, suppression, or elimination will ultimately result in more evil and more destruction, even if in the short run our efforts appear to be successful. For example I, and many in the environmental movement who were trying to protect fragile ecological systems or to stop wasteful consumption,

felt that the only way to achieve this goal was to rely primarily on protest and opposition. But it was easy to demonize those whom we identified as the “others,” whether they were corporations, government agencies, or individuals. It was not long, however, before some of us began to see that that this approach could easily deny our common responsibility and humanity; it ultimately produced more hostility, polarization, and entrenchment and less and less understanding on both “sides.” The more difficult but necessary work is to seek the way of reconciliation and integrity. It is to answer the call to “speak truth to power,” as Friends say, yet without losing sight of the humanity of those with whom we disagree, and without denying the extent of our shared responsibility.

When Jesus spoke of overcoming evil with good, I do not believe that he meant that we should *oppose* evil by a counterforce we label “good,” but to include it and *transform* it by an all-embracing love. This is perhaps the deeper meaning of George Fox’s vision of “an infinite ocean of light and love” flowing over the ocean of darkness, or what Teilhard de Chardin was speaking of when he wrote, “Divine unity surmounts the plural by super-creation, not by substitution.”¹¹ It is also, I believe, the same motion of love that we can experience in daily life in Friends’ meetings when faced with disagreements or dissenting views. Often, by going into the silence, we can listen for the voice of the healing and transforming spirit that allows a way to open, a loving way that can somehow reconcile and transform opposing positions in a new, previously unforeseen, and often creative way.

This unifying love is stronger than hate. Within ourselves and each other we can discover original goodness (wholeness and unity) rather than original “sin” (separation) at the center of our beings. Another way of putting it is that our true heri-

tage, which we have forgotten, is our oneness with all that is. We must do the work of reconciliation, transformation, and integration inwardly if we are to overcome what we see as evil outwardly, and as we and others aspire to do the work outwardly, we grow inwardly in our capacity to love and forgive. The principle of reciprocity reminds us: as within, so without. There is, in reality, no separation.

Trying to adhere to George Fox’s exhortation to “answer that of God in everyone” is a central practice—the central practice—for most Friends. When we stop opposing our outward enemies and see them as an expression of or an integral part of the Divine rather than of the devil, then a greater mutuality, harmony, cooperation, and creativity can emerge. In the same way, when we seek to embrace nature, the body, and the material world as an expression of and inseparable from the Infinite Invisible—the divine mystery we also call God, Spirit, Brahman, or Being—we transform our mundane reality by recognizing it as indivisible and as sacred. Instead of a sin-filled world or sinful flesh, or inanimate, nonsacred matter, we reconcile and reverence ourselves, the Divine, and the wider natural world.

As it is tempting to try to overcome the problems and evils of the world by relying predominantly on force and opposition, it is also tempting to try to escape them by retiring from worldly life, perhaps to wait for an afterlife that is not, as life on this earth so often appears to be, a vale of tears. Asceticism can be a path to a deep, contemplative, and simple life. Yet renunciation of our attachments to the things of this world that seem to stand in the way of being closer to God, or to a deeper sense of unity, can lead to a denunciation of the world and of earthly

life. It can become a way of denying the "body of God" itself, as Sallie McFague has named the earth.¹²

Martin Buber has written that turning away from one's material existence may be a starting point but it is not the ending point. Describing Hasidism, a mystical religious movement that originated among eastern European Jewry in the mid-eighteenth century, Buber writes:

In most systems of belief the believer considers that he can achieve a perfect relationship to God by renouncing the world of the senses and overcoming his own natural being. Not so the hasid. Certainly, "cleaving" unto God is to him the highest aim of the human person, but to achieve it he is not required to abandon the external and internal reality of earthly being, but to affirm it in its true, God-oriented essence and thus so to transform it that he can offer it up to God.¹³

Buber also says:

Hasidic teaching . . . envisages man as a whole. . . the hasidic conception springs from the realization that the isolation of elements and partial processes from the whole hinders the comprehension of the whole, and that real transformation . . . can only be achieved by the comprehension of the whole as a whole.¹⁴

Buber is pointing out that paradoxically it is precisely our attempt to reach God, or Spirit, by renouncing the world and our earthly selves—mind, body, soul, earth, spirit, matter, nature—that prevents us from seeing the divine in them and seeing them in the divine, and obstructs the realization that all are aspects or manifestations of one whole.

What will help us heal our sense of separation from each other and the earth? And what will help us see the reality of the divinity and unity in everything we encounter? Ultimately, I believe that a reconciliation and integration has to take place in the inner, psychospiritual dimension of our being. Then, as we and others express our integrity and love into the world in whatever ways we can, it will grow yet deeper within us. Carl Jung viewed humanity's capacity for the demonization, dehumanization, and fear of the other, together with our increasing technological power over the natural world, as manifestations of the split-off nature of the psyche.¹⁵ He wrote that "all division and all antagonism are due to the splitting of opposites in the psyche. . . . The deciding factor lies with the individual man, who knows no answer to his dualism."¹⁶

For Jung, one of the primary dangers for the future survival of humanity consisted of the projection outward onto others of what he called the shadow (the unwanted contents of the psyche that are unconsciously repressed or denied) together with the repression of the feminine quality, and with what he saw as the "rational" tendency in Christianity to eschew, reject, or blame evil. To achieve psychic wholeness—both individually and for the world—he believed that it was critical for humanity to redeem the shadow by what he called the "mutual withdrawal of projections" and also to re-integrate our feminine with our masculine aspects, our reason or intellect with our feelings and instincts and, most importantly, with our souls, or the spiritual dimension of our beings.¹⁷ This, too, can be accomplished by the mysterious transforming power of love, the power of the Inward Light which guides us toward wholeness, a wholeness which, in a seeming paradox, allows for both the full expression of the individual self and the integration of being-in-relation. One is the fruit of the other.

Let us now turn to the path of simplicity. Many writers have reminded us that we need to simplify our material lives in order to tread more lightly on the earth. Outward simplicity ultimately requires inward simplicity—a condition of wholeness and integrity, a condition in which “the heart stands in perfect sincerity,”¹⁸ as John Woolman put it. It is not a simplicity in which everything is *reduced* to one thing; it is a simplicity, springing from the taproot of our lives, in which we experience unity in the midst of all that is manifest. The paradox of simplification is that we often see it, both materially and spiritually, in terms of loss or giving up things, without realizing that we can gain immeasurably, both by lessening the excessive busyness, frenzy, and complexity of our lives, and at a deeper level, by gaining the richness and serenity of a life lived in integrity. At heart, the path of simplicity—the process of simplification—is about getting rid of whatever in our minds, hearts, and souls is distracting us from being able to see the patterns and relationships between things and from experiencing unity. Buddhists refer to this path as the practice of freeing oneself from attachments. Simplification is also about relinquishment of the preconceived paradigms, worldviews, and beliefs that are interwoven with our ego-bound desires, and opening the eye of spirit. By gradually stripping away those things that block our spiritual sight, we can finally see the whole in which everything is included. Only then will we know, firsthand, the truth of our oneness.

Moving toward simplicity—both materially and in our innermost being—requires us to be willing to empty ourselves, to submit ourselves to something that we recognize is greater than ourselves; it requires patience, compassion, and a willingness to suffer, to remain teachable, and to forgive. Above all, the qualities we need are a radical humility and a radical love.

Elaine Prevallet writes that “the way to simplicity is the purifying way of love.”¹⁹ This simplifying purification, as I have said, does not demand self-denial or rejection of the material world, but a humility and love which allow us to do without those things, especially of the ego, that we imagine are necessary to our survival, but which separate us from relationship, from a realization of our interdependence. I believe that one of our most difficult challenges, yet perhaps our most vital one, is to trust that if we yield (not deny) our ego and our self will in this way, we will not be annihilated, but will be moved toward liberation and a greater joy.

While the pride of egotism may get in the way of our efforts to simplify, an even greater obstacle, in my experience, is fear and fear’s companions, despair and shame. Those of us who live in western cultures may especially dread the idea of what we believe to be the loss of our individuality, autonomy, and personal freedom. We are afraid of losing everything that gives us a sense of identity and security. We are often also afraid of, perhaps even ashamed of, being dependent on others or on an ultimately unpredictable and uncontrollable natural world. Paradoxically, it is our belief in our separateness that often gets in the way of building the communities of mutual care that could give us greater collective security and wellbeing, even as we yearn for a sense of belonging. We are afraid of austerity, yet Ivan Illich reminds us that the word “austerity” means, as it did for Thomas Aquinas, eschewing only what gets in the way of friendship, community, and relationship²⁰—not, as we often interpret it, a state of deprivation.

The state of non-attachment that Buddhists speak of is often misunderstood as indifference, or otherworldliness, or a state that requires the relinquishment of all that we hold dear. To me, it is closer to a radical acceptance of the wholeness of life,

the wisdom of knowing that joys and sorrows, life and death, like everything else, cannot be separated, and in fact do not exist without each other. Sometimes our understanding of the cycles and seasons in the wider natural world can bring about this awareness by reminding us that change, death, and rebirth are part of the mystery of existence. And even knowing that I experience joy only in relation to sorrow does not mean that I suffer *in order to* know joy; it simply means these conditions exist. Sorrow simply becomes part of my being alive, part of the woven threads that make up my experience just as it is, as unregrettable as joy.

Last, but most important, is the path of nonviolence. How is that so? Because the path to wholeness and reconciliation requires us to love, and love, in its deeper meaning that I spoke of earlier, ultimately cannot co-exist with violence. John Woolman writes of how his love for God leads him to a reverence for living things, a reverence that moves us to love, not cruelty:

As the mind was moved on an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible being, on the same principle it was moved to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world; that as by his breath the flame of life was kindled in all animal and sensitive creatures, to say we love God as unseen and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature moving by his life . . . was a contradiction in itself.²¹

Quakers, among others, have tried to understand the relationships between conflict, inequality, injustice, and what

Friends and others call the "integrity of creation." And Quakers have testified to the need for reconciliation and for the creation of communities in which right sharing and care for all life can be integrated. John Woolman, the Friend we most often associate with an ecological consciousness, also saw clearly how the exploitation of people and the attachment to wealth and possessions could be connected to what he memorably called the "seeds of war."²²

Quakers are by no means alone in understanding that nonviolence must permeate our thought, action, and practice in every aspect of our lives, if we are to live in integrity with each other and the earth. In the late 1960s, Lanza del Vasto, founder of the Ark community in France and a follower of Gandhi, wrote:

What matters is to discover whether there is such a thing as a nonviolent economy, free of all forms of pressure and closed to all forms of unfairness; whether there is such a thing as nonviolent authority, independent of force and carrying no privileges; whether there is such a thing as nonviolent justice, justice without punishment, and punishment without violence; such things as nonviolent farming, nonviolent medicine, nonviolent psychiatry, nonviolent diet.²³

For Gandhi, too, nonviolence was inseparable from his understanding of the law of truth and love; it was simply an integral aspect of *satyagraha* (truth- or soul-force), the truth of being, which was, ultimately, nonviolent love in the service of the self-realization or unity of all beings. Arne Naess, the founder of the long-range deep ecology movement, who was strongly influenced by Gandhi, put it this way: "the foundation of the technique for achieving the power of non-violence is

belief in the essential oneness of life.”²⁴ Like Gandhi, Naess also believed that violence against another living being is essentially violence against one’s own being. Self-realization, which is the realization of unity, cannot be achieved in the presence of violence.

It is easy to confuse nonviolence with a lack of or suppression of anger or rage, in the same way that people have confused pacifism with “passivity.” I have often been ashamed of my anger, tried to dampen or deny it, only to find that it comes back in distorted ways or in projections onto others. And anger is often one of the vital signs of injustice, hypocrisy, or gratuitous suffering. When heeded and transformed into creative responsiveness, it can be a powerful force for truth. Perhaps what we should fear is not our anger and rage, but our numbness, our indifference, our disconnectedness. Our willingness to let things be destroyed may have more to do with our alienation than with our hatred; often, we are not so much active destroyers as passive accomplices in great destruction.

What is the power of nonviolence? For me, it is the nonviolent power of integrity. Living in integrity is living in truth and love, and in that truth is power. And such power both demands and confers an inward simplicity, a mind centered on the unity and divinity of life. It is the incorruptible and inexhaustible power that moves the heart to openness, dissolves the pain of separation, and raises the soul to hope. Without it, we cannot sustain the necessary work of integration.

Gandhi’s life, among many others, exemplifies this power in action. Amiya Chakravarty says of Gandhi: “His power came from *Satyagraha*, the power of integral truth which overflows into correlated action; but you had to see him in order to know how simple the human personality must remain in the practice of great human virtues.”²⁵ Gandhi also understood that the

power of *swadeshi*, or self-reliance, which lay behind his programs of self-sustaining village development, did not mean reliance on the separate, autonomous self but on interdependent communities centered on love, a greater truth, or God.

Integrity, ecology, and community

*“The human exists, survives, and becomes whole only within the single great community of the planet Earth.”*²⁶

Thomas Berry

One of the reasons that the furniture and other items made and used by Shakers are attractive to many people is due, I suspect, not only to an “aesthetic” appeal, but to a discernibly spiritual quality in their work. Shaker workmanship is, for me, an act of praise and celebration; the attention paid to the simplicity of lines is an expression of a simplicity of heart and an attitude of prayerful living. The spare lines, beauty, and yet functionality and reliability of the things they made speak to me of a deep understanding of form and function, of the need for the simplest design to produce the desired working, an appreciation for the way the grain of the wood or the warp of the cloth needed to go; and of a kind of reverent mindfulness, an attention to the nature of things, a love of the work, humility, patience, a sense of proportion and sufficiency, and a necessary slowness. Such qualities, it seems to me, come ultimately from a felt sense of the unity and harmony of a life lived in God, in community, and in the world; an inward realization that yields, when fully deepened and seasoned, not only simplicity in workmanship, but a sense

of the balance between doing and resting; between sowing and reaping; between plowing and leaving fallow; between moving inward to prayer and outward to work and service; an intimate relationship with the land and its gifts; and a covenant of giving and taking as members one of another in community. As I walked years ago among the houses, barns, and fields of the old, now silent, community at Pleasant Hill in Kentucky, I felt that, at their deepest, Shaker communities, flawed as all utopian communities inevitably are, have much to tell us about communal experiments in living in integrity.

A century later and across the world, Gandhi in India, and later A.T. Ariyaratne in Sri Lanka, began to experiment with the development of village communities, grounded in the principles of integrity, simplicity, and nonviolence, whose aim was to achieve *sarvodaya*, the welfare and awakening of all. Gandhi envisaged multiple, interconnected yet independent “village republics”—small-scale, self-governed, self-reliant communities—in which essential needs could be met within a local system of mutual interdependence which would radiate outward in ever-widening circles of interconnection.²⁷ His goal was to foster communities where people were known and beholden to each other; where the dignity and freedom that came from self-reliant labor was given prominence; where the structure of governance was both participatory and distributive; where nonviolence was practiced toward all living beings; and where the wider natural world was understood both as the source of everyone’s wellbeing and as an integral part of the human community.²⁸

What kinds of communities can we create today, in the urban, technological world many of us live in, and how can they be expressions of integrity with the earth? Those of us who live in highly industrialized, technology-dependent societ-

ies may not be able to—or need to—attempt to create village republics or Shaker communities in their original form. But we can, whether we live in cities, towns, or the countryside, look to these and other such examples, including present-day experiments, to discover ways that we can create more spiritually grounded and less ecologically destructive communities and societies. One of the tragic consequences of the global reach of colonial, industrial, and technological societies over the past few hundred years has been the obliteration of many indigenous peoples and their ways of life. While the assumption that these peoples never exploited or destroyed their surrounding environment is overly simplistic, some communities and tribes have been able not only to survive but to keep or recreate some traditions that offer ways to re-establish more intimate and sustainable relationships with other living beings and with the earth itself. And, because we are globally connected, such rediscovered traditions and new experiments that we try in our local “backyards” can become examples that others can learn about almost anywhere in the world.²⁹

More importantly, perhaps, we can learn from observing the wider natural world. Ecosystems are interpenetrating, interdependent, and co-creative communities that form subsystems (or holons) embedded in the larger system of the earth. Ecological communities—of human beings, fish, snakes, algae, sunflowers, bacteria—require diversity, the exchange of nutrients and information, and the self-organizing capacities of groups and colonies, tribes, and populations, to maintain the complex and dynamic balance between competition and cooperation, between growth and decline, and between the needs of an individual organism and the needs of the community of which it is an integral part. What we are discovering is that to be sustainable, human economies and communities

must exhibit many of the same characteristics that are found in stable and healthy yet constantly changing and evolving ecosystems, and that these characteristics are, in fact, congruent with and a reflection of the spiritual principles of reciprocity and integrity.³⁰ As it is vital for us to integrate our head, heart, soul, and hand, it is now vital to integrate our science, our economics, our politics, and our technological knowledge with our spiritual awareness and wisdom, to understand ourselves and the wider ecological communities on which we depend *both* as biological systems governed by physical principles and as integral parts of a single, sacred earth community governed by the spiritual principles of unity, reciprocity, and radical love. There is, ultimately, no separation.

It often seems that we are hopelessly trapped in our Promethean project of economic growth, the scientific and technological exploitation of "resources," and endless conflict. The idea that we could create a sustainable future for ourselves and the creatures we depend upon seems naïve and frankly impossible to many. Yet the ecological crisis may in fact be a time of *kairos*, a time of transformation in which we will experience not only enormous changes in this beautiful planet we call our home, but also the "global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness" that Vaclav Havel calls for if we are to avoid a worldwide ecological or social catastrophe.³¹ Perhaps our only task is, simply, to respond to what Friends call the "promptings of love and truth in our hearts," to turn and keep turning in the direction of an integral life, and to love as best we can, knowing that we are not alone, but sustained, however mysteriously and uncertainly, by the wholeness and integrity of the earth, of God, and of all that is.

ENDNOTES

1. Critics of traditional Christian theology, such as Lyn White (see "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" in *Science* vol. 155, 1967: pp. 1203-1207), point to the emphasis on a transcendent God over and apart from the mundane natural world, together with the image of humanity as separate from and having "dominion" over the earth, as a primary cause of our ecological destructiveness. Thomas Berry has written that "we seldom notice how extensively we have lost contact with the revelation of the divine in nature. . . . The natural world is not simply object, not simply a usable thing, not an inert mode of being awaiting its destiny to be manipulated by the divine or exploited by the human" (see *Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988, p. 81). Critics of science have pointed to reductionism, materialism, and a mechanistic view of the natural world as contributing to its exploitation and destruction. We can imagine, for example, how biological sciences, devoid of what biologist Barbara McClintock calls "a feeling for the organism," can appear to reduce the natural world to a blind, inanimate, or "de-souled" mechanism. Similarly, we can see how an economics which does not take into account its negative impacts on (or as deep ecologists argue, the rights of) nature has resulted in "externalizing" the costs of ecological pollution and destruction (for example, by not including the costs of the damage to aquatic life in the costs of producing dyestuffs in factories which discharge waste into the local waterways). Lastly, ecofeminists and ecotheologians, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, have made a connection "in Western culture, and in patriarchal cultures generally, between the domination of women and the domination of nature, both culturally/symbolically and socioeconomically" ("Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism and the Bible" in *Deep Ecology and*

World Religions: New Essays on Sacred Grounds, ed. David Barnhill and Roger Gottlieb. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001, p. 229).

2. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970. (Translated by Walter Kaufmann.)
3. Eknath Easwaren, *The Bhagavad Gita for Daily Living: Commentary, Translation, and Sanskrit Text*, Chapters 1-6 (first volume). Berkeley, CA: The Blue Mountain Center of Meditation, 1975, p. 105.
4. Arthur Koestler and J.R. Smythies, *Beyond Reductionism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.
5. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*. New York: Bell Tower, 1999, p. 25.
6. Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988, p. 81.
7. It is worth examining Martin Buber further. He wrote that humans can and do relate to our world and the Divine in different ways, including what he names as the "I-It" relation—the relationship of objectivity. Such ways of relating are not wrong, bad, or to be eliminated. As Buber puts it, humanity must have I-It relationships. But, he writes, we can only live as full human beings if we are capable of "I-Thou" relationships. (See Buber, *I and Thou*, pp. 84-85.)
8. In the example of the developing embryo, the cells simultaneously divide and differentiate while being held in successive integrated and interdependent wholes—tissues, organs, and organ systems—which grow in intimate interdependence with the "external" environment of the organism. Similarly, Carl Jung has written about how the (desired) process of developing into a psychically whole person involves the process of *individuation*. This does not mean the development of an autonomous, independent, ego-dominated self, but rather the process by which we *simultaneously* develop, differentiate, and integrate all the various

parts of ourselves—hearts, minds, reason, intuition, our souls, our masculine and feminine aspects, our egos and deeper selves—both inwardly and in relation to those around us. Reciprocity is the simultaneous and continuous differentiation and integration of evolving parts and wholes, not a static state or a movement towards an undifferentiated oneness. Paradoxically, we can perhaps become most fully "ourselves" when we discover both our unique possibilities *and* realize that we do so in relation with all that is.

9. In the field of system dynamics, models of real world systems consist of complex webs of interactions and feedback loops, some reinforcing and some balancing. In the real world, there is a limit to how long the effects of a reinforcing loop can continue (e.g., more food produces bigger organisms, or economic growth produces more goods) because of constraints or limits built into any natural system. This is not the case for the effects of balancing loops (the homeostatic feedbacks that keep our body temperature within a narrow range, for example), which can continue indefinitely (until some other condition intervenes). In a stable, sustainable system, there are multiple reinforcing and balancing loops that create an overall equilibrium even though the system is internally dynamic and alive with a multitude of ever-changing, interacting parts and feedback loops. (See, for example, Donella Meadows, "The Unavoidable A Priori" in *Elements of the System Dynamics Method*, Ed. Jorgen Randers. Cambridge, MA: Productivity Press, 1980, p. 32.)
10. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*. The First Edition 1855. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1997, p. 82.
11. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future*. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1975, p. 48.
12. Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993.

13. Martin Buber, *The Way of Man: According to the Teachings of Hasidism*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill [Pamphlet 106], 1960, p. 6. (Originally published in 1950.)
14. *Ibid*, p. 22.
15. Carl Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1957, p. 85.
16. Jung, p. 101.
17. Jung, pp. 97, 102-103.
18. John Woolman, *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Ed. Phillips P. Moulton. Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1971, p. 236.
19. Elaine Prevallet, *Reflections on Simplicity*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill [Pamphlet 244], 1982, p. 22.
20. Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973, pp. xxiv-xxv.
21. Woolman, p. 28.
22. Woolman, p. 255.
23. Lanza del Vasto, *Warriors of Peace*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974, p. 49.
24. Naess, Arne, *The Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess*, Ed. Alan Drengson and Bill Devall. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2008. p. 90.
25. Amiya Chakravarty, *A Saint at Work: A View of Gandhi's Work and Message* (William Penn Lecture). Philadelphia: Young Friends Movement, 1950, p. 15.
26. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, p. 80.
27. See, for example, M.K. Gandhi, *Sarvodaya*. Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1958. See also J.C. Kumarappa, *The Economy of Permanence*, 5th Edition. Rajghat, Varanasi, India: Sarva-Seva-Sangh-Prakashan, 1984. When I went to India and Sri

- Lanka in 2007 to learn from present-day Gandhian economists and ecologists about the challenges of applying Gandhian principles, under the pressure of rapid urban and rural development, to create an ecologically sustainable future, a number of Indians I spoke with regarded Gandhi's experiments as somewhat irrelevant, if not actually against "progress." Nevertheless, there are many vibrant local movements in villages and cities that are attempting to bring forward Gandhian ideas into their twenty-first century experiments with sustainability, and in Sri Lanka the Sarvodaya movement, founded on similar principles and working in thousands of villages, is increasingly active in fostering sustainable local agriculture, energy use, and conservation.
28. As we broaden our vision from the human to the integral earth community, we are seeing the emergence, for example, of the deep ecology movement, of Thomas Berry's concept of an earth jurisprudence, and of such initiatives as the Earth Charter and the World Charter for Nature—each seeking to embody the philosophy that all life forms have a certain intrinsic right to exist and cannot simply be regarded as resources for human use and pleasure.
 29. One example in our "backyard" includes projects to "green" Friends' meeting houses using such technologies as geothermal energy, photovoltaic panels, gray water recapture, and vegetative roof gardens. (See a description on the website of Friends Center Corporation at www.friendscentercorp.org/renovating/greenDesign-GD.php?Section=Renovating.) Another example in a backyard farther away is the practice of "natural farming" (a nonviolent form of farming that uses no plowing, tilling, weeding, or pesticides) developed by Masanobu Fukuoka in Japan. This method was brought to the small Friends Rural Center at Rasulia in Madhya Pradesh, India, by Indian Friends who had learned of it firsthand from its originator. Volunteer workers

and local farmers experimented with this form of farming on the Center's land and in surrounding villages. The Center also published an Indian edition of Fukuoka's book on this approach called "The One-Straw Revolution," and helped to have it translated into several Indian languages.

30. For example, as there is an optimum size range for a healthy organism, a colony, or a stable ecosystem, so there may turn out to be a similar optimal size range for many sustainable human communities. In the 1970s, in England, E.F. Schumacher argued that local economies and small, mostly self-reliant, human-scale communities, interconnected with other such communities, would be more likely to be economically and ecologically sustainable in the long run than ever-larger urban communities and growth-dominated global economies. Today, we see an upsurge in small-scale, local movements such as community-supported agriculture, local currencies and farmers' markets, intentional community living arrangements, voluntary simplicity movements, and gardening cooperatives, as people experiment with types and sizes of economies conceived as if they and the earth really mattered.
31. Vaclav Havel, Speech to a Joint Session of the U.S. Congress, Washington, D.C., February 21, 1990.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What are the factors in your life that affect your awareness of underlying unity in the world? How do your relationships with people help or hinder your sense of connectedness? How do the economics of your life help or hinder your sense of connectedness?
2. Have you taken action on a concern for the environment? What methods have you used (if any)? What has made the most difference? How have you felt about your efforts?
3. How do you understand "integrity" and "reciprocity" in your life as parts of the wholeness of creation? The author speaks of reconciliation, simplicity, and nonviolence as "paths to integrity." What connections do you see between these paths and care for ourselves and the wider natural earth? What is your experience with these or other paths?
4. What would Lanza del Vasto's "nonviolent economy, . . . nonviolent justice, . . . nonviolent farming, nonviolent medicine, nonviolent psychiatry, nonviolent diet" look like? [See p. 23.]
5. How do you experience sacredness? What have you been taught and what have you discovered (what has been "opened" to you) about sacredness? How does your understanding of what is sacred affect how you live your life?