

the WPM and nature

Nature and the environment are a central concern of the World Pantheist Movement. Our view of nature is explained in this clause of statement of principles:

We are an integral part of Nature, which we should cherish, revere and preserve in all its magnificent beauty and diversity. We should strive to live in harmony with Nature locally and globally. We acknowledge the inherent value of all life, human and nonhuman, and strive to treat all living beings with compassion and respect.

As in all matters of ethics, we leave it up to the individual to decide how to apply these principles. For example, many of our members are vegetarians, but many are not: the choice is yours. What we probably all have in common is a concern for compassionate farming, where animals are allowed to lead lives that are as natural as possible.

Our local groups often meet in natural areas, when the weather permits, for hikes and picnics and star-watching parties. Our magazine Pan often focuses on green issues – a recent issue was entirely devoted to sustainable living. Our general mailing lists often discuss environmental concerns and appreciation for nature. We also have two specialized mailing lists of interest: a list for vegetarians, and an environmental action



list which sends out alerts from the major environmental organizations. We have bought the domain www.wildkids.org, where we plan to create an action, fun and information-oriented nature site for children and young people.

We don't just talk about caring for nature, we provide a framework for members' action. Our programs have so far saved 100 acres of natural habitat. Under our wildlife habitat scheme, interested members pledge that they will manage their land or gardens sustainably, with native plants and animals in mind. Our promotions with EcologyFund directly sponsor conservation organizations such as the World Parks Endowment and the Nature Conservancy, saving wild lands in developing and developed countries. We are also the largest religious group saving habitat at EcologyFund by daily clicking, exceeding the total of all Christian groups combined.

If you have a deep reverence and concern for nature, and would like to find a spiritual expression for this that does not involve turning your back on reason and evidence, then the World Pantheist Movement may be the right place for you.

Nature *and* *Spirituality*

WORLD PANTHEISM

Check us out or join us on the Web at <http://www.pantheism.net>
or email us at info@pantheism.net. For current mailing address see the link "Contact Us."

planetary crisis

The human impact on earth has reached a critical scale. We have become a force of nature comparable, to volcanoes or to cyclical variations in the earth's orbit, and a force of evolution, consigning many species to extinction, and creating new species through genetic engineering.

Some 484 animal and 654 plant species have been officially recorded as extinct since 1600, but this is only the pinnacle of a massive iceberg. Extinction rates are running at least 1000 times higher than the natural background rate.

We have transformed around half the land on earth for our own uses for farming, forestry, pasture, housing, industry, services, and transport. Each decade we are losing an area or forest twice the size of France.

We already use more than half of the easily accessible freshwater on earth. We have regulated the flow of perhaps two thirds of all rivers on earth, altering the ecology of lakes and estuaries.

The oceans make up seven tenths of our blue planet's surface. Yet we have fished up to the limits or beyond of two thirds of marine fisheries. During this century we have destroyed perhaps half of all coastal mangrove forests and irrevocably degraded 10 per cent of coral reefs.

We have thinned the ozone layer that protects life on earth from harmful

ultraviolet radiation. We have the biggest ozone hole ever, three times the size of the USA.

We contribute 50% more to the nitrogen cycle than all natural sources combined. We have increased the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere by 30 per cent over preindustrial levels, and the concentration is now higher than at any time in the last 20 million years.

Global temperatures have already risen by 0.5°C over the last century, and are projected to rise by up to 6°C by 2100. This will result in further melting of glaciers and icecaps and may raise sea level by 15-90 centimetres.

In the early years of the third millennium the destiny of the planet is in our hands as never before. We are modifying ecosystems and global systems faster than we can understand the changes. In relation to the scale and growth of the challenge, we are slow in changing our institutions and our technologies, and reluctant to change our ways of life.

The Gaia system is adaptive, but right now we are close to reaching the limit of the planet's ability to adjust to what we do without catastrophic change. In the crisis we face, we need not only practical solutions, but the spiritual motivation to give them the highest priority. We need a new spirituality in which nature takes the central place.

nature and spirituality

People of every religion are striving to find a theological basis for environmental concern. The oriental religions have traditionally placed strong emphasis on harmony with nature. In Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism respect is accorded to living creatures because they may be incarnations of dead humans. In Taoism living simply, in accordance with nature, is the highest goal.

The West has had a much tougher task in finding a religious grounding for concern about nature. The Old Testament vision is that nature is created primarily for humans to have dominion over and to use. The New Testament, the core scripture of Christianity, focuses on ethics towards other humans and shows no concern with duties towards animals or nature.

All three main Western/Middle Eastern religions see our life on this earth as secondary to an afterlife in heaven. Indeed all three have an apocalyptic vision of the Last Judgement in which God himself destroys the earth and every living thing on it.

Pantheism is one of the oldest religious traditions, and reserves its deepest reverence for Nature and the Universe. Nature is central, sacred, and demands to be treated with respect, love and care.

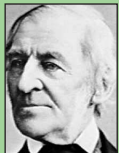
One of pantheism's basic tenets is the unity of all things. The whole universe is a

unity that was born together in the same instant. Nature on earth is also a unity of all living beings. We all had a single origin and we share many of the same genetic codes.

Living things do not exist in isolation but in ecological communities, in which all the members have evolved together into a fine balance of interdependence. The planet itself is one vast ecosystem in which life deeply affects, and is affected by, the atmosphere, the oceans, and even the solid crust. Human actions have seriously disrupted local and planetary ecosystems. Our task now is to restore the lost balances.

Pantheists do not believe in an afterlife in heaven. This earth is our only home, we can't hope that God will provide us with a new earth if we wreck this one. The responsibility lies on our shoulders alone.

Pantheism has a deep respect for animal rights. In pantheism all animals are equal centres of awareness of the Universe, and as such they demand equal respect. Respect does not mean we cannot use nature and her products, but it does mean we must use them sparingly, wisely, and with deep compassion, creating a minimum of suffering, and always remaining aware of the impact our actions may have on other living beings and natural communities.



In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life - no disgrace, no calamity, which nature cannot repair.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Everything is fruit to me which thy seasons bring, o nature; from thee are all things, in thee are all things, to thee all things return.

Marcus Aurelius

