

The Cortesian Bond

Part IV: Reverencing the Earth

by
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In his private journal, George Sarton, the distinguished Belgian-American historian made a tragic-comic observation about his life:

I have now discovered that the first of August is the saint's day of the Spaniard Raymond Nonnatus (1200-1240). He was called Nonnatus because he was "not-born," but removed from his mother's womb after her death. My own fate was not very different than his, because my mother died soon after my birth and I never knew her . . . Many of my shortcomings are due to the fact I had no mother, and that my good father had no time to bother much about me. I am indeed *un ours mal leche*, "an unlicked bear."

I find an ironic visual and psychical image in the concept of an unlicked bear. The French phrase *un ours mal leche*, is often used to describe an ill-mannered person or one who is awkward or boorish in his/her relations with others. The roots of its use, however, refer to the observation that some young animals, like the bear cub, have to be literally licked into shape at birth by the mother. Thus is the importance of the mother's gentle ministrations in the development of what Ashley Montagu calls "relatability."

There is some insightful primal power in the above metaphor. For, it is both a statement about the need to bond the awakening new ego-self of the infant to its initial matrix, the mother; but, it is also a statement about the archtypal need we human beings, ourselves mere infants in the creation drama, have to bond to the most important overarching matrix in life: Mother Earth/Nature. We now know that previous to the last 5000 years of primarily androcratic (male-dominating) rule, there appeared to be a significantly high level of relatability with the maternal, and Goddess nature of our Grand Earth Matrix. That is, humanity, had a profound bond with Earth/Nature and had unique human expressions such as myth, magic, ritual and ceremony, and psychical expressions such as nurturance, intuition, trust, obedience, heart-emotion, surrender, and creativity literally licked into shape for thousands of years. And all of this, as pointed out in Part III of this series, was predicated by a necessary relationship and illumination between the body of Nature and the new bodily nature of woman and man, vis a vis the soul's ***eye of flesh***.

But over the past 5000 years we have gradually forgotten our bond with Earth/Nature. The soul's ***eye of reason***, while having splendidly developed cultures of logic, law, power, science, and religious ideology by use of symbols, language, and orientation to time --- this eye of reason has fanatically dis-membered and exploited the very womb of existence for all life on Earth. In an ironic gesture of disrespect for relationship, humanity has truly become the ill-mannered and boorish animal which the French allude to in their *un ours mal leche*.

Throughout this series I have attempted to outline a perennially re-emerging consciousness which, through the illuminating ***eye of contemplation***, allows a new vision and voice to be seen and heard in the human soul and the soul of Earth/Nature. To empower Eknath Easwaran's suggestion, the compassionate plea of this era in Earth consciousness seems to be this: "I want an Earth that is healthy, a world at peace, and a heart filled with love. I want my life and every life to count. How can I serve toward this end?"

I want to suggest that such a heart-felt plea stems from a deep desire to restore a sense of dignity to oneself and our human relationship and connection to Earth/Nature and other beings. Like boorish "unlicked bears" who have merely forgotten our bond with our Earth Mother, we are questioning our manners of living and conduct. So, how can one serve to enhance the dignity of life on Earth? The key truly lies within thoughts and deeds founded upon ***respect, courtesy, and reverence***. These are the ideals which form a re-unified vision of life on Earth, and which speak to us as the voice of our soul: ***Cortesía***. As more thoroughly explored in previous essays, this ancient French word means ***noble courtesy***, or a deep sense of ***respect*** and ***reverence*** for another, especially as seen in the reciprocal nature of an abiding relationship.

To reverence the soul is to love and own its awakening vision to the forms of creation, the consciousness of creation, and the indwelling spirit. But the integrity of ***Cortesian consciousness***, and ultimately the ***Cortesian bond***, is to humbly revere, respect, and give courtesy to the form (body/flesh), consciousness (mind/reason), and spirit of all other beings. This is what I call reverencing the Earth. For, the work of reverence is service beyond the limited human self, and the question is not one of "How can I serve?" but "What can I do to serve more reverently this Earth and all Her children?"

Falling in Love Anew

We are witnessing a literal explosion of interest in calling up a perennial wisdom of reverence. It does not matter if we use terms like deep ecology, the ecological self, ecofeminism, process theology, neo-Christian spirituality, theosophy, transpersonal psychology, and so on. Whether we call it by the original Jain concept of *ahimsa* (nonviolence, non-harming), by the Chinese-Buddhist *wu-wei* (nonaggression and letting be), or by the ancient Vedic concept of *rta* (respect for the underlying order and reciprocal purposefulness of natural phenomena); whether we describe it within the Aboriginal sense of Dreamtime, the Buddhist metaphor of the interconnected and interreflective Jeweled Net of Indra, or the sacred Hoop of the Navajo; whether we call it in Paul's term of "putting on the mind of God," or Brother Lawrence's idea of "practicing the presence of God" (not to exempt in any way the myriad numbers of Goddess orientations) --- the wisdom within our "thinking heart" (as Rudolf Steiner calls it) tells us that to touch and be touched (dare I say to be licked?) by the sacredness of life, in whatever form that

sacredness shows itself, and in whatever scientific, technological, and artistic way we wish to interpret it, is a profound expression within a reciprocal **covenant of reverence**.

This reverential covenant is perhaps the most essential bond to life, and appears to be at its core a **Cortesian** quest symbolically similar to the quest for the holy Grail which formed the basis of Arthurian legend. But the only way the power of the Grail (or as Riane Eisler would say, the Chalice) can be discovered (ironically, the quest and discovery symbolically had to be one stemming from the dominating yet now noble intentions of the male persona) is by openly questioning with the heart of one's conscience every and any external rule of behavior. And the revealing questions must ask, "What ails this Earth or person?" "Whom or what does this behavior or action serve?" and "How does it serve the sovereignty of life?" My contention is that in a **Cortesian Earthview/Lifeview** our motives can only be noble ones which pour forth out of a deep sense of reciprocal courtesy, respect, adoration, and overarching reverence. Indeed, nobility of purpose must be backed by nobility of self. And reverence may be the nurturing and nourishing nectar of life which allows humans to bond and truly fall in love anew with Earth/Nature and all Her inhabitants.

To see Nature each day through the eyes of reverence is to strive to see it anew --- to envision it with the awe and wonder of a child, to surrender to its wisdom with the humility of a sage. Always, reverence is seeing not with yesterday's eyes, but with the sincere intention of today's love, devotion, and respect. Unfortunately, we have labelled, categorized, and analyzed everything about life. In creating a scientific, violent, technological, and rational culture, humanity has created the illusion of a scientific, wild, mechanized, and deterministic Nature. Everything we observe we have created. Now, we have the opportunity and will to create once again a compassionate humanity, and thus witness the result of our re-creation --- the true inner nature of a compassionate Nature. None of this would be possible if we did not try to see life anew. This reverential revelation, we are learning, is what has lain at the very core of native cultures: seeing each flower, tree, rock, insect, animal as though it were being seen for the first time, and showing noble courtesy, respect and honor through ritual, ceremony, artistry, and kindness.

When I think about falling in love anew with Nature, I am reminded of Kabir's suggestion concerning the mystical Guest-within: "When the Guest is being searched for, it is the intensity of the longing for the Guest that does all the work." Similarly, the individual will have to want it bad enough, to peer behind Nature's veil, in order to know what is the essence of a tree, flower, rock, dew drop, butterfly's existence. S/he will have to desire this wisdom like a lover aching for the heart of his/her beloved, like a drowning man grasping for air, like a mother groping in the dark night for her crying child. For in fact, Nature *is* our Beloved, and She *is* our breathy tether to life, and She *is* the inner child we long to touch, not because we are human apart from Nature, but because we *are* Nature, a part of which is human.

Reverencing the Earth, therefore, is about giving Nature a face, a voice, a form, a consciousness, and a soul. It is about discovering each day a new love for oneself --- for we came out of this Earth. And it is about discovering each day that as a human being we are meaningless to this Earth if we cannot take love and give it away, as reverence, to every other being we meet. This idea is echoed in Article 7 of the United Nations' recent Declaration of Human Responsibilities for Peace and Sustainable Development, in that "Of all living creatures, human beings have the unique capacity to decide consciously whether they are protecting or harming the quality and conditions of life on Earth."

What I call giving Nature a face is a gesture of the human soul's illuminating ***eye of contemplation***. It allows the human being to commune with a tree being, a rock being, a flower being, a cloud being, a particular animal being. It is not about "looking at" or longing for something. It is about perceiving and seeing into another being and feeling the reciprocal exchange wherein nature is humanized and human is naturalized. This relationship alone is worthy of reverence, for as Rilke so beautifully put it, "love must be that as two solitudes, we protect, border, and salute each other."

When we give Nature a form, we cease to objectify any of Her species. Our soul's wiser ***eye of flesh*** is able to peer into the subjective intent of creation: to create function, aestheticness, economy of purpose, and to yoke these expressions of form to the primacy of place. As humans, if we do not heed Nature's model of relationship to place --- interconnection to place, rootedness to place, devotion and surrender to place --- we will forever remain vagabonds on this stage of life, and our incessant roaming eyes will always peer at this world with longing and desiring to belong. It is thus that our human legs must become like psychic roots for our heart and mind, and finally lead our shallow vision to a harbor of place: beside Nature, amongst Nature, within Nature. A ***Cortesian*** ethic can only be the result of giving Nature a form worth honoring, for then the reverential intent becomes one of respecting and saving both form and place.

When we give Nature a voice, we no longer simply hear something removed from humanness. Instead, we open up a knowing that is of a deeper listening: the voice of our conscience, the voice of a common spirit. By giving Nature a voice, we give ourselves a new gift for feeling. Personally speaking, I do not want to know that this world is held together by a science without feeling. For if I cannot feel a tree or flower or cloud or fly or child's essence, then I have denied myself the most basic function of the heart and the highest value of intelligence: the privilege to peer into the equation of life with love and reverence.

Finally, when we give Nature a soul and consciousness, we give Her perhaps the ultimate expression of our own humanness: a teleological purpose, intelligence, and desire to realize our (Her) actualizing potential as a *being*. It has been said that we are all spiritual beings on Earth learning how to be human beings, tree beings, flower beings, etc. If this is so, and as my personal

communion with Nature has taught me, then when we gaze with reverence we are surrendering the vision of our human ego and seeking instead a bonding of common spirits with common soul qualities and dilemmas. It does not matter what being we are, or that we all age uniquely with the passing of Earthly seasons. Each of us is shaped and sculpted by the common bond of courage, hope, surrender, yielding, and compassion. Reverential vision allows us to see through our own human woundedness and despair and that of Earth/Nature; it allows us to embrace courage, hope, surrender, yielding, and compassion as necessary autonomous and co-adaptive functions of Beingness which must be fostered and respected. For, as Peter Matthiessen notes: "Respect for nature is respect for oneself; to revere it is self-respecting, since (hu)man and nature, though not the same thing, are not different." Such, it may be said, is the eternal bond between the Earth Mother and Her child. And if we are willing to awaken to this reciprocal bond, as humans we will find a reason to fall in love anew with Nature each day. For surely, to fall in love daily is to rise up anew in the power of our wisdom and the grace of our joy. It is to serve the real purpose of our heart: to be an instrument of peace, a spark of Divine love, a chalice of reverence.

If Only to Try

Mother Theresa states: "We cannot do great things in life; we can only do small things with great love." Underlying this beautiful message is what Zuzuki suggests as being the expression of our true nature: trying. Everyday we are trying to do something, to attain something, to change something. The meaning in this trying, however big or small its intended outcome, lies in the effort itself, and we should find out the meaning of our effort before we attain something. This is what led Dogen to say, "We should attain enlightenment before we attain enlightenment." That is, it is not after attaining enlightenment that we find its true meaning. The trying to do something in itself is enlightenment.

The meaning of reverence is in the effort itself. Truly, we must attain the *attitude of reverence*, the willingness to try to see and relate to life with integrity, respect, and courtesy, before we can expect to fully understand its true meaning, power, and effect. The joy of reverence is to find some meaning in our effort to see and relate to some being, if but one moment out of the whole day, with heart-felt compassion, awe and wonder, and honor.

As a long-standing wellness practitioner, it has been my perception that at the heart of our concern for Earth/Nature and her diverse species and human cultures is the issue of wellness. Wellness is both a goal and a means that aids in the **restorative, regenerative, and sustainable** functioning of an organism/system's form, consciousness, and spirit. We cannot sustain personal wellness unless we know how to wisely restore and regenerate our bodymindspirit through life-enhancing behaviors. We cannot sustain another culture's wellness if we refuse to understand and aid in their unique means to restore and regenerate their

autonomous connection to geography, artistry, and life-affirming spirituality. We cannot sustain the integrity of a species within the web of life (endangered species and ecosystems come to mind) if we do not aid in restoring and regenerating that very web of interconnected life itself. We cannot sustain Earth's unique self-regulatory (restorative and regenerative) processes unless we become conscious and conscientious participants in limiting our technological and consumptive exploitation of the natural environment. Finally, we cannot sustain our relationship to just one other being, human or otherwise, and to some aspect of divinity if we do not see clearly those attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors necessary to restore, sustain, and revere that being or the Cosmic Force within all of life.

Reverencing the Earth, therefore, is practicing the presence of Nature in our thoughts and deeds. For, our particular human well-being cannot be separated in its restorative, regenerative, and sustaining capacities and capabilities from that of any species or system of Nature. In this respect, merely the attempt to stimulate a **Cortesian** bond enhances at some level a being's general sense of wellness. In the Earthly court, Nature treats even the smallest gesture of human courtesy, respect, and reverence as if it were a priceless gift given by a royal subject. We should be honored that even in showing a love which often appears so difficult to consistently and consciously give, Nature accepts it each time as if it were the only behavior we humans could ever express.

In practice, I have found four conscious expressions which help me to maintain my love affair with Earth/Nature; I would also hope that they serve to enhance Her sense of restorative, regenerative, and sustainable wellness.

First and foremost, is the expression of **Deep Love & Reverence**. If I am to acknowledge my bond to a forest, for example, I must feel love for it. I must appreciate the forest. I must give thanks to the forest that sustains the life of its dependent species. I must respect both the whole and autonomous parts of this biotic community, a community of species personnas each of whom has a face, form, voice, soul, and consciousness involved in the matters of birth, life, evolution, and death. Having this deep love and reverence allows me to recognize the necessary expression of noble **Stewardship & Trusteeship**. Acknowledging my bond to Earth/Nature means that I will accept my duty to serve the forest by protecting it for all the species who dwell within it. As trustee, I accept a noble purpose: to put aside my unbridled self-interest and to strive to remake my life and the lives of other humans for the sake of this forest, its species, this Earth, and all the children and species who will inherit it. What this primarily means is serving in cooperation with the forest's natural restorative and regenerative processes, and finding refuge in it as a source of inspiration for my own physical, mental, and spiritual restoration/regeneration.

In a third expression of my bond with Earth/Nature, I strive for **Modesty & Humility** in my relationship with the forest. I realize I must borrow from the forest as an honorable guest, as a kind and thoughtful friend. I must wisely use only what is necessary for vital human needs,

recognizing that other species have an interdependent relationship with the forest as well. I must also express reciprocal service by returning something of value in exchange for the forest's use.

With humility, I observe that the forest, like all of Nature, can only restore, regenerate, and sustain itself at its own pace, in its own unique ways, and only at a capacity and ability it can handle without disturbing the delicate equilibrium of all its interrelative species.

In a final expression of reverencing the Earth, I seek to honor **Artistry & Frugality**. The eye of reverence recognizes not only the surface aestheticness of the forest but also the deeper and inherent artistry at work in its attempts at overall thrift and economy for the sake of all its species. Energy, space, form, and function all seem to be interwoven in a delicate balance where needs of species appear to be met adequately without deprivation or excess if severe interference from without is not imposed. Such "Buddhist economics" inspires me to find my own artistic and frugal way of living. For as Eknath Easwaran puts it in his inspiring book, **The Compassionate Universe**: "We need people with the artistry to live in simplicity as the hummingbird does, enjoying the nectar without bruising the flower."

Earth as Talisman

I believe Earth/Nature is a sacred talisman, a touchstone of our universal subconscious need to touch, embrace, hold, feel, and relate to the Source of our existence. We pass through Nature's hands on our journey for understanding in this life, but more than that, Earth/Nature passes through our own human hands, like a talisman, seeking to pass its magical knowing to we who wish to receive it. **Cortesian** philosophy sees Earth as a live Talisman, a vibrant and vital Touchstone. There is no object, no subject. There is only the humility experienced through connecting with, or being connected by the Source of our Self. As such, lines are lost between who is doing the touching, the adoring, the respecting, and who is receiving the touch, the adoration, the respect.

It is no small wonder, friend, that many of us who roam the **Cortesian** landscape of our soul, find a reverence in our holding of Earth/Nature as Talisman, for we feel in its energy the very God/dess-like energy within our Self. If we walk in harmony and balance with the many aspects of Nature, silently adoring and paying courtesy to the beautiful Spirit/Friend/Guest within it all, can we be any less a spiritual being in the eye of any other Nature being? The truth indeed may be this: As humans we are the talisman of the forest, the touchstone of the mountain, meadow, wildflower, sunset, butterfly, speck of sand. Think about it. This is the magical touch of Earth Talisman, if we but allow the child and sage within us to be affected by a gesture of reverence. Whom then is touching whom?

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