

## **Falling In Love Anew With Earth**

by Christopher Forrest McDowell, Ph.D.

When I think of a relationship with Earth, I think of bonding --- the depth of my human commitment, devotion, and honoring of all other beings. I identify this bond as a feeling and an act of compassion, as the desire to have a courteous, respectful relationship with a compassionate universe. This is what Eknath Easwaran suggests in his empowering little book, **The Compassionate Universe**, in that the compassionate plea of this era in Earth consciousness is: "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 have found within my deep ecological self the seeds of a new myth, a new voice and vision that speaks to this compassionate bond to Earth. It is in an ancient French word, **Cortesia**, which means noble courtesy, or a deep sense of reverence for another as seen in the reciprocal nature of an abiding relationship. Indeed, I have found in practice, that 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?"

These are noble motives we are talking about here. Deeds that are both nurturing and nourishing. Expressions of reverence, of noble courtesy in our relationships which allows a human to truly fall in love anew with Earth, Nature, another human, other cultures, and some Great Spirit.

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 need to desire to peer behind Nature's veil intensely enough in order to know what is the essence of a tree, flower, rock, dew drop, butterfly's existence. One will have to desire this wisdom like a lover aching for the heart of her beloved, like a drowning man grasping for air, like a mother groping in the dark night for her crying child. For in fact, Earth/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 curious joy and awe. 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. Indeed, the challenge in our relationship to Earth/Nature is to see how these common bonding traits are manifested in unique ways among all beings. 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, 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.

In practice, I have found four conscious expressions which help me to maintain my love affair with Earth/Nature. Let me share them with you by using the example of my relationship with an Earth forest.

First and foremost, is the expression of **Deep Love & Reverence**. If I am to acknowledge my bond to a forest, 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 a second 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 again so eloquently says: "We need people with the artistry to live in simplicity as the hummingbird does, enjoying the nectar without bruising the flower."

In closing, 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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