

Spirituality & Community

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www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Peele's Alphabet
By Stanley Peele

Christmas Spirit
By Kurt Venables



Arne Naess Deep Ecology

Songs of Innocence

Introduction: Piping Down the Valleys Wild

By William Blake

Smoke on the Mountains

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Who We Are

www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Origins

Spirituality & Community was founded in late 2003 by Kurt Venables to communicate with others who share an interest in spirituality and an appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.

Mission

We are dedicated to the spiritual development of our members and promoting spirituality and appreciation for the rich array of spiritual beliefs the world provides.

Foundations

Spirituality & Community is a magazine and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. We hold closely these fundamental truths:

•To find true happiness, one must open his or her heart to the pure goodness that lies deep within. We call this pure goodness the Good, the Light, and the Lord within.

•The process of opening one's heart is a lifelong journey, which we call Spirituality.

We distinguish between spirituality and religion. *Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment.* We are concerned with what lies within the heart. In religion, metaphysical and supernatural concepts are inextricably linked to spirituality, and you will find such religious concepts discussed here to the extent that the writer believes them to be entwined with spiritual topics. However, you will not find material written for the sole purpose of asserting, denying, or debating supernatural religious phenomena, whether they be associated with traditional religions or new age religions. Examples of such phenomena might include the existence of God, reincarnation, or extraterrestrials. It's not that we don't consider these to be worthy subjects; it's just that we believe that spirituality, the inner journey, is important in its own right, and that is our focus here.

We believe that true spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs. Among our highest values is open-mindedness. We do not require or expect others to accept the particular beliefs of any one of us. We believe that as we develop such an appreciation for diversity, our perspective shifts away from an "all or nothing" concept of spirituality, an approach that supposes that one must either wholly accept or utterly reject a particular set of spiritual beliefs. This perceptual shift allows us to view the beliefs of others from a fresh vantage point, take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. *We believe that spirituality may best be defined as a personal journey towards true happiness and spiritual fulfillment and that the beliefs of others serve to guide each of us on our own journey.* Our goals are the personal growth of each and every member and the promotion of spiritual values and respect for individuality.

We believe that when we view the spiritual beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. Truth shines all around us if we know how to see it. The truth we see in the spiritual beliefs of others guides each of us. It is in this vein that we wish this organization to be viewed. ***Through Spirituality & Community, we reveal our most intimate beliefs. We sincerely hope that some will find some truth within them, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!***

What We Do- Opportunities for Exploring Spirituality and Communication

Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas. We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- Spirituality & Community magazine***
- Features on the site***
- Online chats***
- Retreats*** (as interest arises)

The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features from the past several issues are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. An eventual goal is to organize retreats in major metropolitan areas to allow participants to meet each other and discuss issues face to face.

Membership in Spirituality & Community is free and may be withdrawn at any time. The magazine is also free. Level of participation in any aspect of Spirituality & Community is strictly voluntary.

The organization and site were launched only very recently. Currently, membership is very small- We are in growth mode right now. ***If you would like to join, please visit our web site and click the Join Us! link.***

Arne Naess

Deep Ecology

Arne Naess is a Norwegian philosopher. His deeply spiritual environmentalist concepts ignited the Deep Ecology movement that began in the 1970's and continued thereafter. The following are excerpts from an interview by W. David Kubiak. For more see:

<http://www.nancho.net/advisors/anaes.html> and
<http://www.sum.uio.no/staff/arnena>.



Nancho: Let's start at ground zero. What is your personal definition of "Deep Ecology"?

Arne Naess: Deep Ecology - I could also call it "Green" - the Green Movement is a movement where you not only do good for the planet for the sake of humans but also for the sake of the planet itself. That's to say that you start from the whole of the globe and talk about the ecosystems, trying to keep them healthy as a value in itself. That is to say, for their own sake, like you do things for your own children or for your own dog, not only thinking of the dog as an instrument for your pleasure. So, deep ecology starts from a philosophical or religious view that all living beings have value in themselves and therefore need protection against the destruction from billions of humans. That's one basic point. Otherwise I would say that deep ecology or the green movement is a movement of activists or being active amongst one's own friends and where one works and, if one has the time, one takes part in demonstrations; one should try to not break any laws, but if it is absolutely necessary and everything has been with no result, then we also must break some laws. So, we have a total view; that is to say, a view of nature and man's relation to nature such that we combine a fundamental attitude and rejoice in nature for nature with practice in society.

Well, as this develops not just as a philosophical idea but as an actual movement in society, how do you see it expressing itself most importantly?

AN: Its expressions are very different, of very different character, and therefore it is difficult for all people who really belong to this movement to find each other and go together making an impact on politics and so we have difficult years to come together enough and agree on fairly practical problems, what should be the first priority today...what's left of different countries and our planet as a whole.

In Japan you particularly hear news about greens and politics in West Germany and in Sweden. What is their agenda like?

AN: Well, in West Germany where the term "green" was first used in politics, practically every alternative movement called itself green. So, it's a mixture of many different kinds. In Sweden, it's more really what I would call green or nearer the deep ecology movement. First to say they find it...we have to hurry up to stop the increase of destruction and try to get into a position where we decrease the total impact of the total volume of destruction on the planet. So, the

Swedish greens are in my view very justly called green because their ecological basis is so sharp. But there is still, we must not be too rigid and too radical in green parties. We have the fundamental views for ourselves in our philosophy and our general attitude and then we must make a program for green political parties which is not too far away from how people think in general, and that is one of our tactical or practical problems we have in green politics. So, we have a difficult time ahead but in the 1990s the devastation, the bad things happening on the planet have such a tremendous scope that I think the political influence will be much greater than today, in the 1990s.

Well, you've seen a big upsurge just in the last couple of years, is that because of the green movement, do you think, or is the green movement growing out of that?

AN: This rather sudden upsurge is mysterious in the sense that we don't really know what made it. We had an upsurge from 1963 to 1970 and then there was nothing practically later in the so-called "Ronald Reagan" period. Then all of a sudden there is an upsurge and hundreds of people will come and listen to really radical views that we must live otherwise, we must have a different policy. And I don't know why but I am lecturing in many countries now because all over I find people who are eager to listen and what I try to do is to make them feel that there are now millions and millions of people who would have a different policy, a different government, different ways of treating nature even if it costs, and it would cost a lot, especially for rich countries like Norway and Japan. We have to help the poor nations ecologically and that is a great, great task to do, a joyful task because we can get back the full richness and diversity of life forms on earth.

What brought you to Japan at this time?

AN: Well, I meet Japanese people in California and many other places and they complain about Japanese politics, they complain about what Japanese do in foreign countries - in Brazil and other places and they suggest that I should come to Japan. They told me it may be all important for the green movement in Japan that I can tell about things in all parts of the world - bad things going on, just as bad as in Japan and good things. So, I'm now one month going from place to place and partaking in tiny discussions or big discussions and trying to point out certain things that we have in common, the greens or what they call those who support the deep ecology movement and not only fragments like ozone layer or acid rain or oil on the coasts and so on. We have to be, we are, we in the deep green movement are concerned with the total ecosystems and the total planet and we wish to interfere much less than now. And also we wish that the human population should eventually be much smaller than now. And this maybe sounds a little strange but obviously we could reach the aim of life easier with less people.

That sounds like a fairly politically sensitive point.

AN: It's politically sensitive, therefore I talk a lot about it because I am old and established and nobody will think that I am fascist or Hitler, and nobody will think that I am not fond of children. What I am just saying is that, for instance, people with only one or no children, they should get less tax because they are doing something very good for our society.

As you travel around Japan and talk to people, how close or far do you think the society is from its own greening?

AN: I think it will have to be much worse in Japan before it really, really will turn. But it will turn because of the thousand year background where people have had that near relation to nature or that you obviously think that nature is something good in itself. So, I'm sure there will be a turn and when the turn comes the solidarity of the Japanese people, they're feeling together very well compared to, let us say, Norwegians. When the turn comes there will be great solidarity and self-discipline in turning increase of destruction into decrease of destruction. Then I may have died, but I wish I could experience the turn of the tide in Japan.

Some people have noted that a lot of green spiritual values have been inspired or at least augmented by Buddhist concepts. Do you think that is an important way to approach consciousness here?

AN: It's much easier to come from Buddhism to green thinking than it is to come from Christianity. But even in Christianity at the moment there is a turn of the tide. The Christians talk about we have sinned against creation: God created the Earth not only for our sake but all the creations of God is perfect in a sense because it is created by God Himself, so we must behave very different than we have behaved. We must be much more careful but of course we also must think of the poor people, if the poor people cut down a forest in order to live we cannot say, "No. Don't." We must help them for a good life without cutting down the trees like they do in Brazil.

Most of the places that the "greens" have had impact are in local politics or in specific national societies, but the environmental problems are inherently international. How do you see coalitions forming across national borders?

AN: They are forming at the moment. There is a lot of communication between countries such as between Europe and the United States, and Canada is also very good. And we have started last year good relations with South American deep ecology and people who call themselves "social ecologists" because they are aware of the very difficult situation of the poor people and aware that many of the poor people in South America who are not coming from Europe, not Spaniards, not Portuguese, they have a lot of knowledge of ecology; they have a lot of knowledge of how to protect their localities and so we must use that and we must help them to find ways to stop the increase of population. But we must do it with, cooperating with the poor people. Internationally, for instance, the erosion problem, the problem of erosion is so big that in the year 2000 we will have to spend about 24 billion dollars a year to stop erosion and of those 24 billion dollars a year, Japan must pay quite a lot and Norway must pay quite a lot because we have well-administered and well-organized societies and we are rich and we must contribute to stop erosion in Nepal and many other places. So, internationally there will be a lot of cooperation. I would not say internationally, I would say globally, global cooperation in the 1990s will be very broad and universities and high schools of Japan and Norway and other places will turn out many students who are capable of working on the global problems of erosion, of disappearing forests, of disappearing animals or of the atmospheric or climatic difficulties we will have.

There's one school of thought in Japan that says that the environmental movement, that says that the problems are not so much caused by human beings as they are caused by corporate bodies. That is essentially either governments or large corporations that are responsible for the majority of the things that are going wrong in the environment.

AN: I agree completely and this means that it's not enough to be lovers of nature and "oh, how beautiful here and how beautiful there" and "we should protect this and we should protect that". As many as possible of the deep ecology supporters, as many as we can get, should be active in local politics, should try to make small insertions of articles in local papers, should try at least locally to get a foot inside politics. We have to go through the political process and therefore we are so grateful for every young man or woman who can tolerate politics and who can have a good time doing a political job. Most people who are very fond of nature, detest politics. They don't like to be political at all. So, we must be very grateful to those people who take up the political questions and who are writing or talking to politicians gratefully when they have the courage to say we must in our budget spend more money on this, spend money on ecological things, we must stop indirectly through our big firms to cut down our Brazilian and other rainforests, etc., etc. There is a need for more people who have a social and political consciousness.

Well, I will not repeat myself, only say that we are grateful for whatever young or old people do to change policies so that governments are able to fight the tremendously big firms transnational who have more power than nations. There are powerful international firms much more powerful than, for instance, the nation Norway or Sweden or Denmark. So, there is the thing that we should take notice of.

What do you see, for example, at the millennium as a hopeful and yet realistic goal for people working today?

AN: I see it as a realistic goal that about the year 2010 the main bulk of interference in the ecosystems of the globe is diminishing, so that the 21st century and the 22nd century, at least, we come down to development that is sustainable ecologically and maybe 23rd century we will start going down in population and having a technology that is very mild or soft toward the planet and where all children grow up in a natural environment, so that they have not only social relations but ecological relations with animal, plants and landscapes and we are then back in the direction of Paradise.

Shareright (S) 1999: Nancho Ijin Butai "You may reproduce this material if your recipients may also reproduce it."

The Deep Ecology Platform

- The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness these may have for narrow human purposes.
- Richness and diversity of life forms are values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth.
- Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
- Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
- The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
- Significant change of life conditions for the better requires change in policies. These affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures.
- The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of intrinsic value) rather than adhering to a high standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
- Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, Cambridge, 1989, CUP, p. 29.

Spiritual Soup

By Kurt Venables

Christmas Spirit



It's now late December, and like everyone else, my wife and I are busy rushing around getting ready for the holidays. Yet amid all the bustle, sometimes a seemingly ordinary event can stop time and cause an important spiritual truth to crystallize in your mind. This happened to me not once but twice recently; must be the season.

Samantha and Blaine had their Christmas play last weekend. Samantha played a star/angel. Blaine played a shepherd. Samantha's part was to talk with the other stars/angels about what to get Jesus for Christmas- Not a tie, she said, they get him that every year. Blaine was to just stand with the other shepherds and sing songs. He did pretty well but had a little trouble standing still for most of it. Then he had to go to the bathroom in the middle of "If You Could Only Imagine". Not sure if those two things were related.

While I was sitting in the audience watching the kids sing, time just kind of froze, and I was struck with a deep feeling of gratitude as I realized anew the important things in life, like family, and how blessed I am. We all wish for true happiness, but to achieve it, we must be very wise about what will bring us happiness. In order to be truly happy, a person must fulfill his or her basic needs. We have a variety of needs, physical needs, such as the need to eat and sleep, and emotional needs. The greatest emotional need is goodness, the need for light in your heart. Goodness is the essence of humanity. We cannot be happy unless we open our hearts to the light and allow it grow within.

Yet so many look to materialism for happiness. Ironically, this is especially true during the holiday season. Unfortunately, driving a big SUV is not a basic emotional need, nor is owning a big house. People expend enormous resources to acquire these things and then wonder why these things don't make them happy. We have to be very wise about what is truly important in life. This is one great spiritual concept that is particularly appropriate to remember this time of year. Another struck me at the Y recently during one of those moments.

I was at the YMCA, changing into my gym clothes, when three kids about 8 years old (third grade) came in to change into their trunks for swimming. Each was trying to outdo the other, and their conversation went something like this: The first proudly proclaimed, "I can read at a fourth grade level." The second said, "I was tested, and I can read at a fifth grade level." The third said, "I'm reading at a seventh grade level." So far, this is as expected. Then one said, "I'm dyslexic, and I can write at only a second grade level." Another said, "I can write at only a first grade level." Finally, the third said, "My writing is at about a kindergarten level." Well, this had me busting up inside, though I tried not to let them see me laughing. Then, time kind of

froze, and I realized anew another great spiritual truth.

It's expected for kids to act this way, of course, but what's sad is that so many *parents* act in an identical manner. I'll explain if we can go back to the SUV's- why do people spent so much time and energy pursuing things that won't really make them happy? Because materialism is in our culture (it's a highly regarded cultural value), and people in our culture are almost obsessed with how they look to others. So they go to extraordinary lengths to put up a front, whether it makes any sense or not.

Spirituality is of enormous benefit to people. It gives us Light, which is the life of humanity. But it can also impose burdens, which we must bear. Sometimes, we must stand up and do the right thing, even if everyone else is off in left field doing ridiculous things, even if others do not appreciate or recognize our efforts. Sometimes, we must stand up, perhaps alone, and do the right thing, even if we must endure derision and detriment to ourselves. Spirituality is our life. Sometimes, however, we are called to sacrifice, and we must bear this burden. In doing so, we also set a powerful example for others. This is the great spiritual concept that struck me at the Y, and one that is particularly apt at Christmas.

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Spiritual Soup

By Kurt Venables

Smoke on the Mountains

I was driving to work in the rain one day last week. Southwest Virginia really doesn't have a lot of traffic, and I was traveling along at a comfortable speed with another car behind me. After 15 minutes or so, a group of cars came speeding up behind us. They were each weaving from lane to lane, jockeying for position, like they were in some kind of race. Upon seeing them, the guy in the car behind me decided he now wanted to go faster and joined the menagerie, weaving in and out, jockeying for position, like the others. After much maneuvering, the whole pack finally passed me, and I was left driving alone. I took pause, looked around, and was struck by the eerie beauty of the mountains on that dark morning in the rain. Mist just hung on the ridges, like smoke on the mountains.

I began to think that the whole experience was a nice metaphor for some of the most important ideas in spirituality. We need to slow down and not just blindly follow others. *Dare to be different.* Believe in yourself. *And always be an optimist.* We *can* often find a better way than what everyone else seems to be doing. Inspiration and innovation have been the cornerstones of American economic and technological success. We need to realize that they are also key in spirituality. We also must not become jaded, thinking that because we find some flaw in a given spiritual system, that the whole should be distrusted and discarded. *Don't throw the baby out with*

the bath water. No one has all the right answers. Nor is anyone likely to have all the wrong answers. We must look around, collect pieces of truth from wherever they may be found, and put together the puzzle for ourselves. The cynical and the arrogant are truly the most ignorant among us. We must shift our gaze around and upwards, to the mountains and the sky. I suspect that my myopic fellow travelers on that rainy morning saw only wet pavement and the bumper of the car in front of them. I saw the beauty of the smoke on the mountains, but I think that I was not the only one.

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Peele's Alphabet

By Stanley Peele

All is well,
Because **G**od is
Continually present;
Demonstrating love
Even in the worst of times.
Faith can carry us to **G**od.
God can carry us to bliss.
Hold on to good cheer.
Imagine a place where there is
Joy unbounded, no lies, no pain.
Keep this in your heart.
LOVE, only love exists.
Move away from fear, anxiety and anger
Now. Now is the time; this instant
Of transporting self beyond the earth to
Peace. Peace. Peace.
Quit your attachment to drama.
Redemption comes for a humble heart
Steadily beating in harmless thoughts;
Thanking **G**od for each breath;
United in oneness with all that is.
Victory is a victory over the ego.
Worship, let go of self. **P**rayer is like an
X-ray, excising sadness and judgment.
Yes! The **b**reath of **G**od can enter--a
Zephyr, gently bringing in the **l**ight!

William Blake

From: Songs of Innocence

Introduction: Piping Down the Valleys Wild

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"
So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper, pipe that song again;"
So I piped: he wept to hear.

"Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe;
Sing thy songs of happy cheer:"
So I sung the same again,
While he wept with joy to hear.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book, that all may read."
So he vanish'd from my sight,
And I pluck'd a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.