

The Green Spirit of Ecology and Psychology: Educating, Counseling, and Healing with Nature through 53 Natural Senses

Michael J. Cohen, Ph.D.

The deteriorating state of most aspects of the world indicates that with regard to sustaining the health of our society and the environment, we have been bewildered since the days of Henry David Thoreau. Advanced research suggests that this is simply because we omit an important factor in our spirituality and thinking. We seldom view natural attractions as valuable scientific facts so we continue to suffer from their loss.

The ecology of natural attractions is a holistic environmental psychology process, a green spirituality that explores nature's blending of the way we think and the way natural systems work. It is a blend that Industrial Society teaches us to ignore.

Research into this blend finds that by the time we are born, we have at least 53 natural attraction senses that enable our thoughts and feelings to make sense by connecting with nature so we may live in balance with the whole of Planet Earth, its spirit and each other. However, to our loss, we have learned to overlook this inheritance. For example, most of us in Industrial Society have enjoyed a walk or meditation in the park or other attractive experiences in nature that have relieved our stress, cleared our thinking or strengthened our spirit. Although we often take this restoration for granted, the reason it occurs is because humanity is part of the web of life. In a natural area, gently connecting our natural senses with the grace of nature's balancing and purifying attraction powers revitalizes our psyche.

We seldom learn that our body and mind consist of ten times more cells of other organisms than human cells; over 110 species live on our skin alone, our genetic makeup includes plant and animal DNA and every 2-7 years every atom in us is replaced by atoms from the environment. Throughout our lives the natural world becomes us and we become it. We are obviously part of Earth's web-of-life community and its green spirit, a seamless continuum of its flow through our body, mind and spirituality.

The detrimental effects of our indoor lives excessively disconnecting us from nature's regenerative ways clearly show that the global ecosystem is a heart of our lives. What is also true is that *in order to be part of any system, one must be in communication with that system.* We seldom recognize that, as part of the global ecosystem, *we biologically inherit the ability to communicate with it.*

As noted above, Earth communicates with us, as part of itself, through the intelligent sensibilities of at least 53 natural senses. For example, our sense/sensation of thirst intelligently "turns on" to attract us to drink water, to make the global water cycle flow through and sustain us. In addition, when we have enough water, thirst reasonably "turns-off" and, in balanced ways, attracts us to stop drinking. Each of our additional 52 senses is a similar attraction intelligence. Besides the sense of thirst, our love for water, these senses include our love of community, reason and trust; aroma, place and consciousness; color, taste and motion; belonging, beauty, music and gravity along with 40 additional natural sensory attractions. The web-of-life and we hold them in

common while they, without words, hold us together in natural unity.

We suffer because we have learned to ignore or obstruct the peaceful and biologically balanced fulfillment of our 53 natural senses. Rather than honor them for what they are as nameless, green spirit attractions that we can sense or feel, we entangle ourselves with labels and stories we have attached to them that seldom agree. For example, are our 53 natural attraction sensitivities, needs, drives, spirits, instincts, divas, wants, motives, angels, desires, intuitions or god callings? We build differing technologies, institutions and belief systems around these labels and their stories. We think and relate with the meanings of the stories, not directly with the nameless green spirit sensations of natural attractions and their ability to unify. This reduces our inherent ability to make sense and cooperatively enjoy nature's peace. Instead, it often results in estrangements, arguments or war over beliefs and other differences.

Significantly, on average, Industrial Society's prejudicial need to profit by excessively naming and exploiting nature socializes us to disconnect over 98 percent of our time, thinking and feeling from the satisfactions we obtain from the restorative callings of "nameless" attractions we find in nature.

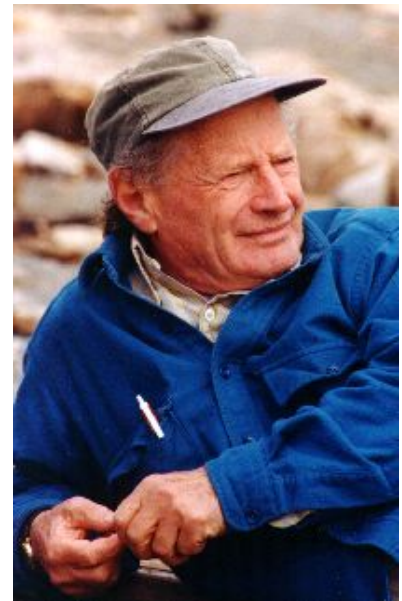
Our extensive loss of rewarding support from nature's green spirit perfection leaves us wanting. We feel that we never have, or are, enough. This spawns our excessiveness, feelings of inadequacy and other problems. We become destructively greedy, stressed, abusive, depressed and/or chemical and relationship dependent.

Nature knows how to sustain its optimums of life, diversity, balance, purity and cooperation. It does this without producing garbage and with a minimum of greed, abusiveness and isolation. Everything in nature belongs, including us. As part of nature, because we register natural attraction sensibilities, we meditate and dream about living in their perfection.

In natural areas, attractions we find help us remedy many troubles and increase personal, social and environmental well-being. Independent of drugs or hallucinogens, and as a modern tool for shamans, we reasonably reconnect our thinking to the healing flow and spirit of natural systems, in and around us. Backyard or back country, we learn to make genuine contact with authentic natural systems. As exemplified by even a walk in the park, this empowers our thinking to help nature recycle any garbage or pollution that Industrial Society has dumped in our mind.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Recipient of the 1994 Distinguished World Citizen Award, Ecopsychologist Michael J. Cohen, Ph.D. is a Director of the Institute of Global Education, where he coordinates its Integrated Ecology Department and Project NatureConnect. He also serves on the faculty of Portland State University, Akamai University and West Coast University. Dr. Cohen founded sensory environmental education outdoor programs independently and for the National Audubon Society and Lesley University(AEI.) He conceived the 1985 National Audubon Conference "Is the Earth a Living Organism," and has been identified as a "maverick genius" or "the reincarnation of Henry David Thoreau as a psychologist." He is an award-winning author of *The Web of Life Imperative, Reconnecting With Nature, Einstein's World, and How Nature Works* as well as an accomplished folk song artist and contra dancer who presents traditional music programs for the U.S. National Park Service and Elderhostel on San Juan Island, Washington.



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History

In 1936, a New York City elementary school policy insisted that Michael Cohen, a left-handed, six-year old, first grader, write with his right hand. The suppression of this youngster's left-handedness depressed him and led to mild speech, posture, nail-biting and stress disorders. Over time, as he worked to overcome these difficulties, his skills led him to attain a Ph.D. in a blend of outdoor environmental science, education, counseling and psychology.

Research with people in contact with natural areas helped Cohen, in 1965, recognize Earth to be a living organism and that from it we are born with, not just five, but more than 53 natural senses that help us sustain personal and global well-being (including a sense of left-handedness for 10-15 percent of the population).

Cohen's investigation of our natural-senses brought to light that most of the personal, social and environmental disorders that we suffer - including greed, stress, violence, abuse, depression and addiction - result from an unreasonable, but profit making, prejudice against nature in Industrial Society that we seldom acknowledge. This prejudice holds an irrational disregard for nature's integrity and the green spirit callings of the 53 natural senses that we inherit as part of nature. We become less sensible and we weaken our well-being due to the absence of the self-correcting and restorative ways of our natural senses and spirituality.

To our loss, we produce our greatest problems because we seldom learn to think sensibly by respecting the green spirit of our natural senses and their sensibilities. Instead, our unreasonable

prejudice against nature socializes us to injuriously drive these senses out of our awareness and into our subconscious where they lie hurt and frustrated.

To deal with this phenomenon, Cohen produced a hands-on, nature-connecting, sensitivity tool that helps us eliminate our natural-sense deprivation. He demonstrated that his renewing educating, counseling and healing with nature process is a sensory and spiritual ecology that enables us think like nature's restorative processes work. Readily available on-line, and in his newly released book, "Educating, Counseling and Healing With Nature," the process generates genuine, nature-connected learning and relating that heals and renews our injured natural senses. By learning to use the process, we become more resilient and sensitive; we build more sensible relationships and many disorders subside.

"Educating, Counseling and Healing With Nature," is a professionally refereed, practical, environmentally based psychology and spirituality. It helps our thinking and meditation co-create with nature's self-correcting and regenerative ways. Because it is an effective green spirit antidote and preventative for many dysfunctions, including Nature Deficit Disorder, it enables us to increase well-being and decrease our alarming prejudice against nature.

Whenever natural attractions connect our psyche with the web of life, our restored natural senses transform our disorders into constructive relationships. The latter consist of the balance, cooperation and unconditional love that nature shares with us to sustain life in peace.

"We cannot win the battle to increase the well-being of the web of life, that includes our life, without strengthening our natural senses, our emotional bonds with nature - for we will not fight to save what we do not love."

- M. J. Cohen's blend of Stephen Jay Gould and Jalaluddin Rumi

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You may read or download *Educating, Counseling and Healing With Nature* on line at:
www.ecopsych.com/ksanity.html.