

GAIA, MOTHER EARTH



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University of
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Higher Education for Spiritual Unfoldment

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Gaia, Mother Earth

Written by Rozlyn Grace Imrie

Introduction

“There is no word for ‘nature’ in my language,” said Audrey Shenandoah, a member of the Onondaga clan. She said this to Harvey Arder and Steve Wall who authored the book *Wisdomkeepers*. “Nature, in English, seems to refer to that which is separate from human beings. It is a distinction we don't recognize.” I try not to recognize this distinction either; however, in the English language there are many words for nature such as the environment, the earth, the wilderness, the natural world, the ecosystem, and Gaia just to name a few. Many native and indigenous cultures used words that are roughly translated into English as Mother Earth or Great Grandmother, so I will use the term the Earth Mother.

The Earth Mother has been worshipped all over the world in almost every religion throughout history. She has inspired many people to do extraordinary things and write amazing books. Recently, she has even received recognition from the modern and scientific world. Many scientists have elaborated on the Earth Mother concept, giving her the name Gaia and a full spectrum of research. Now, not only the religious world but also the scientific world has recognized the Earth Mother. Nevertheless, many people still pave over her skin, suck out her resources, and pollute her natural beauty. Often, this abuse is recognized but it is not always truly comprehended as self-abuse. We are merely a small part of the great Earth Mother who is simple yet complex, unified yet diverse. The Earth Mother is a composite organism made up of living beings, ecosystems, and elements, all of which share a common sentience and purpose. This course will explore different aspects of the Earth Mother's body and spirit in religious views as well as scientific and philosophical views.



Spirituality and Religion

Spiritual practices of all kinds bring people closer to the Earth Mother. Almost every religion that I can find has something beneficial to say about the Earth Mother and has a God or Goddess to personify it. Even monotheistic religions have an earthly, creative, and nurturing side to their one God. Often the Earth Mother has been overlooked, so this course will illuminate her. It is easy to simplify religions and say that they are all the same; likewise, it is easy to insist that all religions oppose all others. In this course I have tried to include as much as possible without focusing too much on any one thing.

First I must point out that the religions selected for this course are truly basic and minimal. There are many important religions that I have failed to include in this section. This is not because I have a religious preference but because I am trying to simplify the vast expanse of this subject. I apologize for leaving an important point of view out.

To begin, let us turn to Pantheism. In the book *Pantheism: Understanding the Divinity in Nature and the Universe* the author, Paul Harrison, writes that the root of Pantheism is “pan” which in Greek means “all.” Pan is also a God of Greek mythology who is associated with nature and reproduction and believed to be half goat and half man. The second part of the word Pantheism is “theos” which means God. Therefore, Pantheism means “All is God” and that is exactly what the religion is based on: the belief that all things in the universe are divine. Pantheists also believe that all things in the universe are “interconnected and interdependent.” These are basic concepts that served as a foundation for many religions throughout history. More recently, with the uprising of Christianity, these ideas were suppressed because it went against the idea of a single almighty God. Nevertheless, the belief that all things in the universe are interconnected is now becoming widely accepted, even among Christians and other readers of the Biblical text.

Though Pan is a Greek god who is associated with nature, he is not the God who personifies the Earth Mother. Gaia, once Ge (or Roman Gea), is the Greek Earth Goddess. This root began English words such as geometry, geography, and geology. The Goddess Gea or Gaia is the Earth, as in the actual soil and creatures of

the planet. In Greek mythology Gaia creates herself out of swirling mist, shaping her body into lively landscapes. Finally, she called upon *Ouranos* the God of the Sky to wrap around her as a protector. Then she gave birth to the Titan gods and goddess as well as to the ocean and thus to creation itself. The creation myth is the only myth in which Gaia is a main character. Though she appears in many other scenes, her story is short. Demeter is an important goddess, possibly much more important to Greek mythology than Gaia. But Demeter is the Goddess of Corn or of the harvest. Gaia is the womb of the Earth Mother, while Demeter is the breast that feeds her children as they grow. Greek mythology has many other gods and goddesses to personify other aspects of the Earth Mother.

Asia

Asian religions are also full of Earth mythology. Hinduism, like Greek mythology, has a different god and/or goddess for nearly every aspect of the Earth Mother. Hinduism cultivates respect for living creatures. The term “holy cow” comes from Hinduism, because the cow is worshipped and given holidays. This is because animal life has just as much validity as human life does. A Hindu named Swami Vivekananda told his followers to be kind to all of God’s creatures. Hindus have an intimate view of the Earth Mother as a whole and at the same time they have respect for each part of the Earth Mother. In a book called *Attitudes to Nature*, Anuradha Roma Choudhury writes about Hindus, “They feel akin to this environment, so much so that they develop an animistic view of nature, believing that there is a life and soul in every little thing in nature.” Such a view of nature is difficult to comprehend when trying to find a name for or relation to each creature. But anything short of this would be too anthropocentric. At the same time, the Hindus not only have an intimate view of each thing, but they also have “a wide view of the universe” in which the creator has a relationship with the entire cosmos. So the Hindus see humans “not as isolated beings” but as part of a living community in all its complexity and simplicity.

Other than Hindus, there are many tribes in India who worship the Earth Mother. In *The Worship of Nature*, Frazer wrote about tribes of Central India who would participate in elaborate rituals to ensure fertility of the soil. One of these rituals took place in “Hoshangabad” and included building a thatched hut for the Earth and then leaving offerings such as rice, milk, and saffron. The milk is put in an earthen pot on a tiny fire and allowed to boil over while the saffron is dabbed on the foreheads of the people performing the main tasks. Then red thread is hung from the horns of free-roaming cattle and the men run full speed as they scatter boiled wheat. Many other tribes practice similar or simpler rituals and vary in the types of offerings. Some offer liquor, flowers, food, or sacrifices. Animal sacrifices are usually goats. All believe the Earth is sacred and needs offerings of some kind to be appeased.

Myths of ancient China also contain stories about the earth and creation. James G. Frazer writes extensively in *The Worship of Nature* about China’s worship. Here again the earth and the sky are married as a Mother Goddess and Father God. But like the Greeks, in China there is also a Harvest God who is extremely important. There are gods or goddesses for different parts of the Earth Mother as well as for different parishes or provinces. Shrines, altars, and temples have been built to honor these deities but these rituals were not seen as enough. Along with an altar, a tree must be planted. The Chinese either planted a different tree to honor each different Earth God or they worshipped a forest.

Asian religions from Japan, China and India all have deep roots in mythology, in which they have creation myths where the Earth Mother is born or gives birth to the world. There is a whole world of worship regarding the Earth amongst these myths. No religious belief that I have found thus far lacks a story about the Earth Mother.

Buddhism and other sects of Asian religions incorporate a strong sense of respect for the sentience of humans as well as other beings. Like other religions, Buddhism has many different views. Therefore, to understand it we must trace it back to its root, to the story of Buddha himself or “enlightened one.” In the story of Buddha, as told by Herman Hesse in his book *Siddhartha*, he goes into the forest to seek truth and enlightenment. There he sits and meditates underneath a *bodhi* tree, and then he touches the earth. He is enlightened by the inspiring morning star. In the story of Buddha we can see that it was the Earth Mother who enlightened him. Buddhism since then has developed into a social religion, but the main idea still comes from nature and includes nature in its teachings. Even the term “Buddha nature” is used to describe the practice of “kindness and pity for all living beings,” according to Tom Hayden in *The Lost Gospel of the Earth*. Another teaching of Buddha is the concept of giving up material objects and attachments, which often distracts people from the Earth Mother.

In Buddhism the four noble truths include the truth of following the eight fold path, which includes the idea of Right Action. In Right Action, the idea is that of giving all sentient creatures respect. It also has a principle called non-injury (*ahimsa*), which encompasses all creatures that are regarded as sentient. The Diamond Sutra is an ancient text that tells its readers how to give true respect to all forms of life, whether they are animal or plant and even mineral. In Thich Nhat Hanh's book, *The Heart of Buddha's Teaching* he writes, "I entrust myself to Earth. Earth entrusts herself to me." He also writes in the same book, "I am committed to cultivating compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals..." *A Policy of Kindness: An Anthology of Writing by and about The Dalai Lama*, which is compiled and edited by Sidney Piburn, teaches, "Morally speaking, we should be concerned for our whole environment. This, however, is not just a question of morality or ethics, but a question of our own survival." Therefore, many Asian religions have the utmost respect of the Earth Mother and our "oneness" with her.

The Bible and the Koran

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are based on the teachings of the Bible and/or the Koran. It is not fair to say that these religions are the same or even interpret the same scriptures in the same way. However, they are based on the same texts. There are two sides to the environmental ethics argument regarding these ancient texts. One side states that the earth was made for man to dominate over, with respect only for the divine and toward fellow humans. This view is often accused as being the root of "the environmental crisis." Lynn White, the author of *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*, blames the Christian religion of being "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen." This accusation may have validity in it. However, there is another side to the Bible. The other side sees the earth as God's sacred land, which He had given to humans to watch over with great respect and responsibility. If one is to examine the words in Hebrews opposed to the words in English, it becomes obvious that the meanings are unclear. Hebrew is a subtle language full of mixed meanings, double meanings, and ambiguities. It is no wonder that scholars see the Bible in so many different ways. For example, Jeanne Kay wrote an article published in *Environmental Ethics*, in which she states that the word *nefesh* is used to describe both human and animal spirits alike. Similarly, the word for God is *Elohim*, the root of which is *el*. The words for trees, such as terebinth, is "*elah*" and oak is "*elon*" or "*alon*," implying that these trees had divine associations.

In Genesis, the earth is given a female form of name and God claims multiple times that "it was good." Further, when God says to subdue the Earth, He also says it is for food, not for whatever man chooses to do with it. A Hebrew book called *ETZ HAYIM*, which is edited by David Lieber, says that the biblical words "'Let the earth bring forth,' may be related to the ancient concept of 'Mother Earth.'" At the turn of the thirteenth century, a Roman Catholic called St. Francis of Assisi, quoted in *Environmental Ethics*, "Praise be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us [...]."

More serious interpretations of the Jewish Bible and the Koran believe that plundering or exploiting God's Earth is a sin. Even though the Earth is viewed by many as grounds for humans to dwell until Judgment Day, God will not judge in favor of those who do not respect the Earth. Still, these anthropocentric views are contradicted in Job 12:7-10, King James Bible: "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." Listening to the Earth Mother appears in the most translations of the Bible and it is repeated in a different light throughout the story of Job. Another example is in Proverbs 6:6-8: "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food for harvest." Even though priests might not recommend learning from watching an insect, the Bible itself has a grand concept of not only the entire Earth Mother but also for her tiniest creature.



Therefore, from Asia to America, from animism to monotheism, and in mythology as well as the Bible, teachings point to the same basic principle in the end—the Earth Mother should be respected. One can discover her voice through any path. Finding the Earth Mother’s voice is the essential key.

Indigenous and Native Views

Though all the different native and indigenous religions are very unique, their views of the Earth Mother unify them. “The world is an open Bible for us,” Matthew King, a Native American elder, once said to the editors of the book *Wisdomkeepers*. “We’ve learned that God rules the universe and that everything God made is living. Even the rocks are alive.” Tom Hayden wrote in *The Lost Gospel of the Earth* that in the Cherokee language their word for land, religion, history and culture is the same word, *eloheh*. The way people lived and the way of the land were recognized as two parts of a single thing that would reach the same end. Hayden also wrote that in the Sierra foothills, tribes called people, animals, birds, and fish all by the same name, *maidu*, which encompasses all “beings.” Similarly, *Tapuat* is the Hopi name for Mother Earth, but it has the connotation of being a child at the same time.

Native American religion was based primarily upon the Earth and the Sky as a whole. They saw how all things were connected to their people. Mother Earth and Father Sky provided these people with life. Another important ritual of the Native Americans was the worship of a totem animal or plant. Most Native tribes had rituals and worshipping beliefs tied up with certain important animals or plants, which are closely related to their people.

The Natives of this country cherished every aspect of the Earth Mother. The famous Chief Seattle once said in a speech written about in *Indian Oratory*, “Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people [...] Even the rocks, which seem to be dumb and dead as they swelter in the sun along silent shores, thrill with the memories of stirring events connected with the lives of my people.” He also said, “Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.” Chief Seattle and his people recognized our connection to the Earth Mother. Many chiefs tried to speak to the Europeans during the invasion of America and tried to teach the ancient wisdom of the Earth Mother.

Though these wise words were almost forgotten at the time, today these ideas are being brought back as more than just a memory. In *The Black Oak*, a newspaper about and by the Native Americans, an article was written in July by Shawn Bourque about the Native American management of the forests in the Klamath Mountain regions. Bourque reminded us that the wilderness was not untouched when modern Western society “discovered” the area. The Karuk and other tribes had used fire to keep the forest floors open since the end of the Ice Age. The value, beauty, and integrity of the old growth forest could be destroyed by invasive plants that are no longer being controlled in the way they had been for so many years. Therefore, the indigenous people were “thus intertwined as part of the evolution” of the old growth forests. Western society is just beginning to realize how the land must be managed by these age old techniques used by the local tribes.

Tom Hayden described the native tribes of America as “botanists and zoologists” in his book *The Lost Gospel of the Earth*. Furthermore, Hayden wrote that tribes usually were able to take what they needed from the land without destroying it. They understood how to grow crops without the problems of fertilization, erosion, and tillage, which the agricultural industry uses today. Also, the tribes hunted wild medicines, edible or useful plants, and animals in such a way that the hunted species would continue to prosper. Today people are learning from these ancient teachings little by little.

The Natives of America were not the only indigenous people to worship the Earth Mother. In fact, most indigenous people have similar beliefs. In the book *Story Earth*, many native people write about their culture, religious beliefs, and their way of life, which is all based on the Earth Mother. In the book *Story Earth*, Rigoberto Queme Chay, a Mayan from Guatemala, writes about her ancient roots, “for the Mayan culture Mother Earth is sacred and man is part of nature [...]” In that book Salvador Palomino writes about the Quechua people of South America who teach an ancient song that goes, “The sun is my father, the moon is my mother, and the stars are my brothers.” Also in *Story Earth* Alberto Hotus Chavez writes about his people from Easter Island, who are commonly called the Rapa Nui, “Our *kaninga i’he nue* is Mother Earth, but it also refers to the womb and the placenta.” Obviously the Rapa Nui people believe they are so interwoven with the earth that the earth and the womb share the same words; they also share many of the same features of bringing life into the world. Another example comes from Pablo Santos of the Aeta people of the Philippines, who writes, “Land is life.” He also quotes *Gaia, Mother Earth* ©2019 University of Metaphysical Sciences

Datu Mandagese, who tells us that the Earth Mother is “the breast that feeds us.” But this book does not just cover tropical cultures: even in Finland people have similar ideas. Pekka Aikio writes about his people, the Sami, saying that the indigenous ways have not been lost and that the Sami people still say, “The Sun is our father and the Earth is our mother.”

Further, in Nordic cultures the Earth Mother has also been worshipped. In *Sagas of the Norsemen*, the goddess Nerthus is the “Mother Earth” worshipped by Tacitus and by Danish tribes. On the Dutch Islands the goddess of the earth is Nehalennia. Both of these goddesses, Nerthus and Nehalennia, are worshipped in association with safety and prosperity. Nerthus is divinely paired with the god of the sea bounty and wind, Njord. Furthermore, the root of the word Earth comes from the Greek root *ergaze*, which means the working of the ground, but then evolved into the name Erda, who is another Nordic Earth goddess. Many other Celtic, Nordic, and Druid cultures had deities personifying the Earth Mother.

Earth Worship and Tree Worship

In *The Golden Bough*, James Frazer writes about the worship of trees in Europe by the Aryan race. He says “nothing could be more natural” than for people to worship trees. Sacred oak groves were worshipped by the Druids. Groves were also worshipped by ancient Germans, Greeks, and Italians as well as in the capital of Sweden. Certain types of trees were worshipped, such as fig trees and cornel-trees by the Romans. If the sacred cornel-tree in Rome appeared to be drooping, a passerby would cry out to other people in the street, who would echo the cry until people would run to the tree with pails of water as if to put out a fire.



In the Congo, people left offerings of palm-wine at the foot of sacred trees so that if the tree's spirit was thirsty it could drink. In Eastern Africa, the Wanika people believe that the destruction of a cocoa-nut tree is regarded as equivalent to matricide, because that tree gives them life and nourishment, as a mother does her child. Also, the Moluccas people respected the blooming clove-trees like pregnant women. This meant that both blossoming clove-trees and pregnant women should be taken care of and not frightened by noise, light, or fire because, like a woman who is frightened into miscarrying, the clove-tree was believed to drop its fruit too soon if it was startled. The Japanese and the people of Orissa have similar traditions:

when rice fields are in bloom the field is treated in the same way that a pregnant woman should be. They feared the crop might bear straw but no grain.

Other cultures believed that the tree spirit and the tree could be parted before the tree was cut, so rituals were set up before felling a tree to give the tree-spirit a new home. Different rituals were practiced and legends were told in ancient times in places all over the world by people in Germany, India, Rome, Sumatra, Assam, Prussia, Samogitia, Gilgit, the Pelew Islands, and the Chedooba Islands. Besides worshipping trees, the Ojebway Indians, the Jarkino people, the Samoa people, the Dieyerie tribe, and the Islanders of the Philippines all have legends about trees screaming and/or bleeding when cut, so they avoided doing so unless necessary.

Other cultures and religions believed that trees or tree-spirits have the power to bring forth rain or sunshine. The Lithuanis and the Mundaris in Assam, according to Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, believed that they would not have rain and/or sunshine if a sacred tree or sacred grove was damaged. Many of these people who worshiped trees also believed that rituals for sacred trees would bring plentiful harvests. The harvest-may rituals were practiced throughout ancient Germany, France, Sweden, Greece, Swabia, and among the Dyaks of Sarawak. This ritual varied among cultures but the basic idea was that a special branch would be fastened on the roof of the farm house or the fence of the field to bring an abundant harvest. Similar rituals are practiced in India and Africa. Throughout time the harvest-may ritual turned into the Maypole of Mayday. The ancient rituals regarding trees and tree worship continue throughout history and occupy over fifty pages of short descriptions and pictures in *The Golden Bough*. Nevertheless, with the brief information here it is obvious that trees have been worshiped throughout ancient history all over the world.

A similar book to the *Golden Bough* is a book called *The Sacred Tree in Religion and Myth* (1897) by Mrs. J. H. Philpot, who lived in the late 1800's. Tree worship was so prominent for years in Celtic cultures that when the *Gaia, Mother Earth* ©2019 University of Metaphysical Sciences

Christians of Europe wanted to drive the Pagan religion out, they burnt entire forests. Such a devastating fire brought chaos upon the Druids and Pagans because they felt as though their deities and sacred places were destroyed. The commonly known Maypole ritual and the Christmas tree were both adopted from the Pagan religion. However, unlike the people of today, the Pagans used live trees for the celebration of spring and winter. It is also apparent to Philpot, as it is to other authors, that the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt show immense worship of trees, flowers, and other aspects of nature.

Tree worship is a prime example of the impact our Earth Mother has had on our evolution, culture, and belief systems throughout history and in nearly every crevice of her body. Other plants have been worshipped in this same universal way. Medicinal plants and psychedelic plants have both been used with respect in rituals for the Earth that provided them. Lives have been saved, diseases cured, and spirits enlightened by these sacred plants. Because plants are on the Earth Mother's skin we can not separate the connection between plants and the Earth as well as the worship thereof. The concept of the Earth Mother is a universal, age old tradition that may never leave our consciousness no matter how much we pretend that we are superior to or separate from the Earth Mother.

It seems that nearly every civilization has or is worshipping some aspect of nature. Another book written by James Frazer is *The Worship of Nature*, in which he gives detailed accounts of sky, earth, and sun worship or a system of complete nature worship. Frazer says, "The Worship of Nature is based on the assumption that natural phenomena, whether animate or inanimate, are living personal beings analogous to man in their nature, though often far superior to him in power." Among the long list of people who worship nature, the most obvious cultures are the indigenous or, as Frazer puts it, "primitive" people. Most of Frazer's experience with these types of people had been among the Vedic Indians and the people of Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa, as well as the Congo. Frazer also includes the ancient religions of Egypt, Babylon, Greece, and Rome, only excluding the Christians, Buddhist, and Islamic religions from his research due to their more modern upbringings. All of these religions have their own names for the sky, the earth, and gods or goddesses, and have myths that explain creation, life, and natural phenomena. Often the sky and the earth are personified and married, or sometimes the earth and the sea are married. Either way, the Earth Mother is respected and worshiped in some sense.

In Africa, tribes worship the earth with the belief that she is angered if human blood is shed on her soil. The chief of these tribes must perform rituals, usually requiring the sacrifice of a goat, sheep, or bird. Similar sacrificial rituals are believed to help rain fall in droughts or are used to appease the Earth after burning or cutting a forest. Along with the Earth deity, most tribes in Africa believe that the Forest is the daughter of the Earth, and a separate deity personifies earthquakes. Though sacrifices to the Earth deity are common, the flesh is always eaten after the blood is smeared, sprinkled, or poured on the soil, a stone, or a tree, depending on the tribe and location.

All of these people who worship the Earth Mother in some way believed that they were "surrounded by invisible intelligence," according to Frazer in *The Worship of Nature*. Furthermore, they saw no more real evidence in science than in religion. Believing in the existence of a ghost, god, or fairy was just as vague as believing in an atom or an electron. In both cases the effects can be perceived, but the things themselves cannot be truly examined.

Fairies are to nature what angels are to humans. Fairies have been worshipped as personifications of nature for centuries. A book written on fairies is *The Real World of Fairies* by Dora Van Gelder, who was gifted with the ability to see fairies. Gelder was born in India and grew up traveling the world in the early 1900's. When she published her book in 1904, fairies had little recognition. Gelder wrote in detail about the descriptions, actions, and influences of the fairies, and other spirits such as tree spirits. All of these fairies and spirits were spoken of by Gelder as if they were her friends. She even spoke fondly of rocks and her relationship to special rocks that, when she sat on them, they communicated a vague sense of joy and then of sadness when she left. She even presented the idea that rocks "see" even though they have no eyes. Gelder wrote that we are growing old too fast because we have lost our connection to the earth and to all the small spirits in the world. "But when we try, just try, to believe and even to experience some of these things which may at first seem so strange and even mad, we recover touch with the departed glory of nature, the mother of all living, and thus recapture youth, which is life." Therefore, believing in fairies, befriending tree spirits, and listening to the vague emotions of stones is part of the Earth Mother concept.

The Earth Mother concept can seem endlessly complex, while strands hold every complexity together in a unifying web. In the introduction of *The Worship of Nature*, J.G. Frazer explained the "unification and Gaia, Mother Earth ©2019 University of Metaphysical Sciences

simplification" of the complexities. He explained that both science and religion, through time, have gone from examining each individual complexity in the universe, to trying to simplify and unify these complexities into one category. For example, chemists for a long time categorized the elements into some eighty-eight categories. Because the end was not in sight, these categories of elements seemed infinitely complex so stopping at any number seemed silly. More recently, scientists simplified these categories into "the single element of hydrogen." Similarly, biologists reduced the innumerable species into "a single simple type of living organism." Likewise, religions in ancient times believed that dust particles had an individual sentience or soul. However, this complex belief became simpler. "Instead of a separate spirit for every individual tree, they came to conceive of a god of the woods in general," wrote Frazer, as he explains the movement from animism to polytheism. Today, even polytheism has been pushed aside by monotheism. This progression, like the scientific progression, moves religion into a unifying concept. It seems to me, as it did to Frazer, "that complexity is infinite, so the search for the ultimate unity is probably endless also."

On this note comes the conclusion to the spiritual views toward the Earth Mother because the detailed descriptions of deities, gods, and goddesses in relation to the Earth Mother are endless. Nevertheless, as we look back at all the different types of worship, we can see that there is most definitely a unifying concept, the Earth Mother. The latter part of this essay will show the complexities and then the unification of science and philosophy.

Science

Spirituality and science are often separated because they argue like children. In this subject, spirituality and science argue but when stripped of their presumptions and superficial surfaces, they agree on the most basic Earth Mother concepts. In any biology book, it is common knowledge that life feeds on life and the Earth supports all forms of life. The complex cycles of air, water, soil, and food (or life force exchange) are taught in elementary school. However, it is usually a lightly taken matter. The fact that every thing we do to anything on the planet will cycle back to us eventually is often overlooked. The very air we breathe comes directly from plants and vice versa. We could not breathe or live without the rest of creation. The web of life, or the food chain which is studied in biology, shows us that we will eventually eat ourselves, metaphorically. Pollutants (such as herbicides) not only poison the plant they are put on, but also travel throughout the food chain by collecting in the fat cells of the mammals that eat it. While traveling in the food chain, the poison grows stronger because it concentrates in the fat of each creature. It cannot be denied that there is interconnectedness among all individual things. This concept is extremely important to science because some people have grown to glorify complexity to such an extent that they see themselves as separate from the rest of the complex world. This separateness has given people a superiority complex that allows them to destroy the Earth Mother without believing it impacts their own body. However, science has proven this assumption false

To begin with the most basic components seems necessary. Because hydrogen is believed to be the first element, and it is the primary element of water, it seems that water would be the preliminary element to examine. Water covers most of the earth's surface and also makes up most of the human body. Even though water is at the base of everything, we know little about it. Scientists in Asia have begun a project called Hado in which they examine the life force of water. Dr. Masaru Emoto studied water molecules, at the moment of being frozen, with a high speed camera and a high powered microscope. He discovered that water molecules look different under various conditions. Water that is first blessed or imbued with loving thoughts of thanks before it is examined will appear to have a beautiful, intricate, and symmetrical snowflake pattern. On the other hand, if the water is neglected, thought about in a negative way, or polluted, then there is no such pattern. Therefore, water reacts to our emotions, thoughts, and treatment. Because water is the most basic element on the Earth Mother and in all life, water could be affecting everything. Though this concept is new to science, people have worshiped water throughout the ages, but that is another story.

The study of plants is the next basic topic. Plants have not only made a strong impression upon the cultures and religions of people all over the world, but the importance of plants has also begun to leak into science. Obviously, plants support the entire food chain, and thus all of life. Herbalists have recognized the power of medicinal plants to heal the body for centuries. Now the energy and sentience of plants is a concept that is becoming accepted as well. Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird wrote a book called *The Secret Life of Plants* which documents many accounts of different relations between plants and people as well as their environment.

Some of the oldest accounts found in *The Secret Life of Plants* are of physicians and doctors. Paracelsus was a doctor who believed in the healing powers of plants, which he adopted from herbalists, old lore, and wise men of the East and of Europe. Paracelsus claimed to feel the healing power of a plant just by holding it in his hand. This was the beginning of the idea of magnetism, which a Viennese physician, Franz Anton Mesmer developed into what he called “animal magnetism.” He also claimed to be able to feel magnetic forces the same way Paracelsus and others did. Though these ideas were accused of being witchcraft, they inspired many other doctors such as William Gilbert, who referred to the feelings he sensed as “soul-like.” In 1930, Edward Bach was so inspired by Paracelsus’ teachings that he began wandering the Earth searching for wisdom and the secrets of plants. Then he developed an idea of learning from plants about how to heal yourself with your mind. He saw sickness as a mental problem. He wrote extensively about the power of plant energy and its ability to heal by sun light, dew drops, and energy alone, healing the ill person’s mental condition.

One of the most remarkable accounts of science in *The Secret Life of Plants* was written about a man named Cleve Backster. In 1966, Backster was teaching the art of lie detection with the assistance of a lie detector device called a “galvanometer.” The basic idea of the device is that it hooks up to a human’s body and detects the electrical potential or the energy fluctuations, which are indicators of thought and emotion. Out of curiosity, Backster attached the electrodes of the device to a leaf of a tropical houseplant called a dracaena. Backster noticed, in astonishment, that the plant was making the device react similarly to the way it would if it was hooked up to a human. Backster decided to do an experiment. First he dipped a leaf of the plant into his hot cup of coffee. But there was no significant reaction. Then, without moving or doing anything, Backster thought about burning the leaf with a match. As soon as the image of fire entered his mind, the device’s recording pen showed an unmistakable sweep. This amazing discovery made Backster want to run through the streets screaming about how plants not only think and feel but that they read minds! Instead of running around like a mad man, Backster plunged into an in-depth investigation filled with experiments.



Backster came upon many important discoveries, which are recorded in great detail in *The Secret Life of Plants*. Many of his experiments were done in a professional laboratory, where he came to conclusions such as, “Maybe plants see better *without* eyes [...] better than humans do with them.” Backster said in his book, “If you don’t like the looks of something [...] you can look the other way, or not look. If everyone were to be in everyone else’s mind all the time it would be chaos.” Other accounts recorded in *The Secret Life of Plants* are less scientific. For instance, Backster was eating yogurt when he noticed that his plants reacted. He realized later that when he put jam into his yogurt there was a chemical preservative in the jam which killed some of the live bacilli. The plants also reacted to hot water flowing down the drain, killing bacteria. It even reacted when Backster cut his finger and dabbed it with iodine, which killed cells. These at-home experiences inspired Backster to design an experiment that would monitor plants while a machine killed brine shrimp at random (so human involvement was not be a factor). The results of several scientific experiments showed that the plants reacted strongly to the deaths of the shrimp.

In *The Secret Life of Plants*, the authors quote Backster as saying, “Sentience [...] does not seem to stop at the cellular level. It may go down to the molecular, the atomic and even the subatomic. All sorts of things which have been conventionally considered to be inanimate may have to be reevaluated.” This was the catalyst for many scientists who once laughed at Backster to eat their words and reevaluate all aspects of the natural world, discovering that science cannot define life, let alone sentience, so easily.

While Backster was doing his research, Professor Marcel Vogel, who was also featured in *The Secret Life of Plants*, did many interesting experiments with the help of his students. One of his students, Vivian Wiley, tried a simple experiment with dead leaves. She took two leaves and set them beside her bed. Each morning she would look at one of the leaves and will it to live. Though both leaves were disconnected from their plant bodies at the same time, the leaf that she paid close attention to continued to look as if it was picked recently. After a month she brought Vogel to her house to photograph the two leaves. The one she had willed to live was still a vibrant

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green, as if it had just been picked, while the ignored leaf was brown, dry and obviously decaying. This convinced Vogel that there had to be “psychic energy” which kept these plants from decaying. Vogel performed further experiments by giving energy to plants and recording their responses with electrical devices. He declared in a lecture, which is recorded in *The Secret Life of Plants*, “It is fact: man can and does communicate with plant life.” Furthermore, in the same lecture he says that plants “radiate energy forces that are beneficial to man. One can feel these forces! They feed into one’s own force field, which in turn feeds back energy to the plant.” This is comparable to the wisdom of native and indigenous cultures, where people energetically charged themselves by embracing trees and other forms of nature.

Plant Communication

Science is starting to believe that we must learn to communicate with plants. *The Secret Life of Plants* quotes a Russian, Chertkov, in his article, “What Leaves Tell Us,” as saying, “Plants talk [...] yes, they scream.” Further, he writes about an experiment: “Before my eyes a barley sprout literally cried out when its roots were plunged into hot water.” It seems that plants have feelings just as humans and animals do. He found this out by attaching electrodes to the plants and measuring the electrical output as various experiments were performed. There are definite responses from the plants as events happened. At times when nothing was happening, the electrical impulses were slow, normal and steady.

The more science researches the lives of plants, the more it is sure that a life force is there that we have yet to completely understand. However, it seems that the experimenters that are written about in *The Secret Life of Plants* became intimately involved with their plants. Vogel is even reported as comparing his relationship and the reactions of the plants as being similar to the reactions of two lovers. It is also suggested that people would feel better and understand more if they connected to plants in this way and developed a relationship with plants. We all know that houseplants that are “talked to” by their caregivers thrive more than those that are not!

A German poet named Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was criticized in his time because he tried to combine the ideas of science and poetry. His words are printed in *The Secret Life of Plants*. His views are shown in this passage: “All plants are thus seen as specific manifestations of the archetypal plant which controls the entire plant kingdom and gives the value to nature’s artistry in creating forms. It is in ceaseless play within the world of plant form, capable of moving backwards and forwards, up and down, in and out, through the scale of forms.” Later in life, his idea of an archetypal plant expanded to viewing the entire earth as an archetypal deity. He wrote about the earth as an organism who breathes. He connected the breath of the Earth to the mystery of gravitational pulls. He writes about how the earth inhales and draws water into the sky, which condenses into clouds and rain, and then the earth exhales, allowing the water to dissipate into the outermost regions of the atmosphere and space.

Also in Germany, a professor named Gustav Theodor Fecher developed the idea of plants having a life and a soul. He continued to say that plants must also have some sort of nervous system that he thought may even be more sensitive than that of a human’s. He also wrote about the way flowers might communicate with their perfumes. Plant communication was also explored by an agricultural chemist, George Washington Carver, who was called the “Wizard of Tuskegee” in *The Secret Life of Plants* because he seemed to perform miracles in agriculture by making land which had become barren grow crops again. Though most of his secrets were simply natural fertilizers and crop rotation, he said, “All flowers talk to me and so do hundreds of little living things in the woods. I learn what I know by watching and loving everything.” Also he said, “Nature is the greatest teacher [...] the secrets are in the plants. To elicit them you have to love them enough.”

There are many scientists who have experimented with the ability of plants and animals to be alchemists within their bodies. In *The Secret Life of Plants*, there are many scientists, professors, and experiments written about on this subject, such as Pierre Baranger, who was a professor and had an organic chemistry laboratory. Baranger performed many experiments and came to the conclusion that “plants know the old secret of the alchemists” and “plants can transmute elements.” In more recent times, scientists have done research on the microorganisms in the guts of termites. They concluded that these microorganisms change the methane inside the termites and turn it into nutrients that the termites can use rather than releasing methane the way cows do.

The Gaia Hypothesis

As the concepts of nature began to become more important to science, new ideas began to bloom on more philosophical levels. The complexity that had developed from these sciences of the past, turned into a holistic idea of unison often called Gaia instead of Mother Earth.

Recently the word Gaia has emerged into common vocabulary again. The roots of Gaia are ancient, like the origins of the word. The newer ideas were in part inspired by James Hutton, “the father of geology,” who wrote about the Earth as a super organism in 1785. Gaia has become, in more recent years, a hypothesis and then even a theory, commonly called the Gaia Hypothesis. This scientific theory began with James Lovelock (with the supportive advice of Lynn Margulis) but it branched out to many scientists, philosophers, and authors. It is the idea that the Earth, or Gaia, is a living organism within itself. Or, as Elisabet Sahtouris puts it in *Earth Dance*, “the Earth is a live planet rather than a planet with life upon it [...]” This is a confusing concept for many scientists because biologists cannot decide on an exact definition for what life *really is*. Lovelock defines life in his book *The Ages of Gaia*, as “an entity or a process.” Further he writes, “The concept of Gaia is entirely linked with the concept of life.” Even if scientists cannot decide what life is in scientific terms, no one can deny that it is important in every moment, everywhere. Lovelock says about life, “It is edible, lovable, or lethal.” He also writes extensively about how important our connection with Gaia is: “Our future depends much more upon a right relationship with Gaia than with the never-ending drama of human interest.” He proves that the Earth has had the ability to



maintain a constant temperature and consistency in atmospheric gases throughout its evolution. He wrote that Gaia, “regulates itself as a system,” therefore, Gaia “is a system. The human body is also a system.” With this idea we can see that global warming is Gaia having a fever. Lovelock writes in *The Ages of Gaia*, “Individuals interact with Gaia in the cycling of the elements and in the control of the climate, just like a cell does in the body.” But Lovelock reflected in the new preface of the book *Gaia*, “We need to love and respect the Earth with the same intensity that we give to our families and our tribe,” not just understand it as a living organism.

More research about living organisms show that life, if studied with high-powered microscopes, continues far beyond the naked eye. Lewis Thomas wrote in his book, *The Lives of a Cell*, about our connection with Gaia: “Man is embedded in nature. There is nothing fragile about the earth's membrane. Humans, however, are very fragile.” Furthermore, he wrote, “Every creature is, in some sense, connected to and dependent on the rest.” It seems that the Earth is not only an organism, but the body which we live on and are part of in every sense.

Thomas also wrote that scientists have studied microscopic organisms in such detail that they realized inside cells there are atoms and inside these there are subatomic atoms, which, when studied closely, appear to have living organisms or even entire systems inside of them. Thomas is quoted often as saying, “I have been trying to think of the earth as a kind of organism, but it is no go [...]. If not like an organism, what is it like, what is it *most* like? Then, satisfactorily for that moment, it came to me: it is *most* like a single cell.” Therefore, with the definitions of life that we have developed thus far, Gaia must be living. Possibly, if life can be examined at the smallest scale, then it should also be viewed from the broadest scale. Both a cell and the Earth are complex worlds in themselves. The examination of life has no visible end.

One woman who brought the Gaia theory to new horizons is Elisabet Sahtouris in *Earth Dance: Living Systems in Evolution*. She acknowledges that scientists cannot agree on a definition for life, but she believes that “life is the essence or process of the whole living being.” She writes extensively about the evolutionary process which Gaia has gone through and humankind's place in this process. She says that the human race is in its “adolescent” stage as a species, and like most teenagers, the human species is rebelling against the native and indigenous ways of living in balance with the Earth Mother. Yet Sahtouris is hopeful that we are maturing into adulthood and as a species we are about to achieve a greater understanding than ever before. Further, she writes

that every creature would see itself as the superior creature on this planet if it thought the way we do. "And so all these forms of Gaian life—bacteria, fungi, plants and animals—could find reason to see themselves as superior to the others. Even rocks, for that matter, could see the whole world as nothing more than its own dance, its endless transformation into living creatures and back into rock. Try for yourself the exercise of looking out over your world and seeing all of it—the airplanes, the cities, the furniture in your house, this book in your hands—all as no more and less than rock rearranged." This could help people to get out of anthropocentrism. Exercises such as this could help establish a better connection to the Earth Mother.

Philosophy

The Earth Mother has begun to trickle into science, western society, and environmental philosophies. Between science and religion lies philosophy. Here we find people using science to support their own ideas, which often have similarities to ancient religious beliefs, and also people who have first person accounts of the Earth Mother's wisdom. Some philosophers study books, others observe nature.

One of the first documented observers of nature was Henry David Thoreau, who wrote many first-hand accounts of the solutions and problems regarding the Earth Mother, and about his experience of living near Walden pond in the mid-1840's. His book *Walden* served as inspiration for many philosophers and thinkers thereafter. Thoreau went to Walden for many reasons, such as "to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life." In the "marrow" Thoreau found that, "It is life near the bone where it is sweetest," and above all, "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!" At the same time, he found a complexity in the details of Nature herself, which is illustrated in *Walden* with the detailed and objective stories about Nature. He wrote, "The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly." His observations of life had many examples, like his reflection on an insect, which seemed oblivious to his presence while Thoreau thought to himself how some greater entity might be observing him as he scurries about, oblivious. This view was just the beginning of the widening of our view of the universe. Thoreau's dreams of a wider view of the world have developed into the ideas previously discussed in Lewis Thomas's book *The Lives of a Cell* and James Lovelock's book about Gaia, when both of these scientists discussed the scope of life going beyond the subatomic particles and the Gaia organism. Thoreau knew that people needed to widen such views because, even in his day, the Earth Mother seemed to be taking too much abuse. "The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and culture." Still, he did not believe that Nature herself, was completely destructible or weak. On the contrary, he said, "Nature is as well adapted to our weakness as to our strength." He also wrote that Nature "is likely to outlive all her children yet." However, today, with the emerging of Gaia in a new light, we can see that these ruts and highways are beginning to be lined with respectful worshipers, protesters, and scientists who all are waking up to these ideas, which were so alien in Thoreau's time. With the old philosophies and the new concepts we are able to see that the Earth Mother will take care of us if we take care of her, but in the same notion if we abuse her, she will give us a taste of our own medicine.

Henry David Thoreau asked in *Walden*, "What are we celebrating?" in civilization. Thomas Berry wrote in, *The Dream of the Earth*, "For too long we have been away somewhere, entranced with our industrial world of wires and wheels, concrete and steel, and our unending highways, where we race back and forth in continual frenzy," thus celebrating civilization in this way. However, Berry has a different, wider view of celebrating: "the universe, by definition, is a single gorgeous celebratory event." With this wider view of celebrating we can truly appreciate celebrating, but without it we find that we are caught in that civilized celebration, which is not always enjoyable and appears to be war to most other creatures. Civilization lets us lose ourselves, according to Thomas Berry, but he has some very inspiring ideas that might remedy this problem. Berry recognizes the importance of strengthening, "the relationship between the human community and the earth process." He continues and emphasizes, "A truly human intimacy with the earth and with the entire natural world is needed." The real question becomes how to achieve this connection or intimate relationship with the Earth Mother. Berry's answer is, "Our best procedure might be to consider that we need not a human answer to an earth problem, but an earth answer to an earth problem. The earth will solve its problems, and possibly our own, if we will let the earth function in its own ways. We need only to listen to what the earth is telling us." Though *The Dream of the Earth* is a brilliant book, Berry's teachings tell us to not just read books but learn from the Earth Mother herself.

The thought of listening to the Earth Mother is nothing new. The Bible, ancient indigenous myths, and many religious scriptures have told their readers time and time again to listen to the Earth Mother. No one but the Earth Mother herself knows what is truly best for her. John Burroughs, in his essays *Nature Near Home and Other Papers*, said, "When people ask me, 'How shall we teach our children to love nature?' I reply: 'Do not try to teach them at all. Just turn them loose in the country and trust to luck.'" Maybe the way for children and adults to understand nature is to do what Thoreau did, experience it first hand and try to taste that "marrow." Listening to nature for some is thought of as a metaphorical concept, but to Derek Jensen it is very literal. Jensen wrote the book *A Language Older than Words*, in which he reflects on his own experiences as well as discussing this language which nature speaks universally, but to which we seldom listen. "There is a language older by far and deeper than words. It is the language of bodies, of gesture, symbol, and memory. We have forgotten the language. We do not even remember that it exists." Some people are beginning to remember what Jensen feared we had all forgotten. This may be because nature is trying to get us to remember. Freeman House wrote a book called *Totem Salmon*, where she quotes David Abram as saying, "Naturally, the mountains, the creatures, the entire non-human world is struggling to make contact with us." House quotes Abram again: "The plants we eat or smoke are trying to ask us what we are up to; the animals are signaling to us in our dreams or in forests; the whole Earth is rumbling and straining to let us remember that we are of it, that this planet, this microcosm is our flesh, that the grasses are our hair, the trees our hands, the rivers our blood, that the Earth is our real body and that it is alive." So it is possible that the Earth Mother is reaching out to us as she begins to suffer and to teach us. However, we must still make the effort to recognize her and see her in ourselves.



The movement from nature observations into modern philosophy was in part inspired by a forester and wildlife manager named Aldo Leopold, who wrote the inspiring book *The Sand County Almanac*. This book, which contains beautiful and poetic accounts of nature, is most well known by its essay and eventually philosophy called "The Land Ethic." This essay presents guidelines for how to manage the land, because Leopold believed that the ethics of land conservation, management, and forestry were still based on economic self-interest and has been made so simple as to make it trivial. He pointed out problems in attitudes and implements of the conservation process, calling it "dangerous" and "devoid of critical understanding either of the land or of economic land-use." His ideas for a land ethic were based on a few statements such as, "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land." He also states, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community." Though his words were beyond his time, today he is regarded as the founder of eco-centrism or the holistic movement. His goal was to make people realize that they should have a land ethic of their own in their heart. He did believe that the government should practice better conservation skills. However, his main focus was on the common person and trying to make people understand that they have obligations to the land, which provides for them. He saw the land as something that was greater than individuals. This is shown in the next passage: "Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf." He too believed that the Earth is our Mother and we must respect her. Even in 1949, when "The Land Ethic" was written, it was obvious to Leopold that the wilderness has been "hammered" by "the artifact called civilization." Leopold saw the Earth Mother as a delicate creature that may perish if disturbed and put out of balance. This is why he stresses the importance for humans to show respect and responsibility to the Earth Mother. Leopold's views of the Earth Mother's delicacy differ from the views of James Lovelock or Lynn Margulis who both saw the earth as "a tough bitch," in Margulis' words which were written in *Symbiotic Planet*. The balance and health of the Earth Mother is a problem that must be solved for the human species to survive. The solutions are extremely difficult to pinpoint because we are humans trying to see the world objectively, which is nearly impossible.

To find solutions, the problems must first be recognized. Rachel Carson heard the Earth Mother's voice and felt truly hurt by the treatment the Earth Mother received. In the 1960's she wrote *Silent Spring*, a book which

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helped the banning of many deadly poisons such as DDT. She had a wonderful understanding of how soil, water, air, and life are connected. She wrote, "Without soil, land plants as we know them could not grow, and without plants no animals could survive." She also wrote that in the same sense soil is dependent upon the death and decay of life: "Soil is, in part, a creation of life." As this connectiveness is examined she wrote, "The earth's vegetation is part of a web of life in which there are intimate and essential relations between plants and the earth, between plants and other plants, between plants and animals." Therefore, "in nature nothing exists alone." Carson saw that in an agricultural society these connections are lost.

The story of the plow shows us how agriculture brought us further away from the earth. In the beginning, before the modern plow, the farmer had to carefully respect his fields and plow them with his single horse and bare hands. This made him develop a relationship with the land. In modern times, the new plow is a tractor which the common man can afford. Therefore, commercial industry takes control of the cultivation of the land and hires help. This is how nature became something man could exploit.

Solutions to help people break away from their habits of exploitation were explored by a metaphysical system for environmental ethics that was developed by Alfred North Whitehead in the 1960's. Out of his teachings emerged many people who reflected upon his writings. Susan Armstrong-Buck wrote a discussion paper for her students at Humboldt State University which came from *Environmental Ethics* and summarizes Whitehead's views in simple terms. Whitehead presented that the Earth as a whole and each individual thing on the Earth has intrinsic value, which is defined as "value in and of itself independent of human preferences." He emphasizes the need for both an understanding of "basic unity" as well as "the uniqueness of individual beings." Despite his efforts to develop understanding, he still states in his book *Modes* (1938), "we can never fully understand. But we can increase our penetration." Whitehead developed five important points that help one penetrate his philosophy easily: "(1) Each individual thing is irreplaceably valuable because each thing is a novel, creative contribution to the world; (2) Each thing is inseparably related to all other things; (3) Each thing experiences its own process of self-creation and hence is intrinsically valuable because it is self-significant; (4) The differences between things are due to differences in organization of constituent elements; (5) There is a purpose in the natural order, a striving toward novelty, harmony, complexity, and intensity of experience, which is part of what we mean by the presence of divinity in the world process and which allows us to make comparative value judgments." He also wrote, "We are in the world and the world in us" in a book compiled by Ruth Nanda Anshen called *Alfred North Whitehead: His Reflections on Man and Nature*. Though he is humble and realizes that humans cannot be anthropocentric, his metaphysical system helps a student penetrate deep into ecology. His philosophy is well-rounded, giving broad views and narrow accounts.

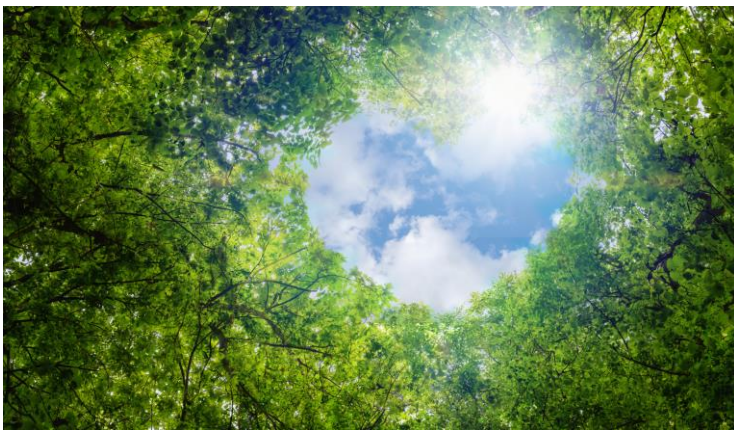
Another philosopher is Albert Schweitzer, who wrote *A Place for Revelation* and made a similar statement: "Wherever you see life—that is yourself!" Likewise, "In everything you recognize yourself." He also wrote about how strange it truly is that people cut flowers and put their dying corpse into vases and pretend that these dead bodies are beautiful symbols of nature. He thought that someday history classes will teach our children that in the ancient cultures people had barbaric rituals of cutting and displaying dead flowers. Hopefully this sacrifice will appall the children of the future as we are appalled by human sacrifice.

As we explore these philosophical ideas we will find new emerging concepts in our own minds. This is how movements and groups began to form, such as a group called "A Council of all Beings," which put together a book called *Thinking like a Mountain*, where many authors have published their writings. Among them was John Seed, who wrote in an essay called "Beyond Anthropocentrism." He states that we need to expand our thinking and broaden our concept of protecting the Mother Earth. He says we must learn to think in a new way. "I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking." This union of humans and nature can feel like quite a relief. We are not separate from nature. This, according to Seed, is usually a great relief to people. Furthermore, Seed writes, "We are the rocks dancing. Why do we look down on them with such a condescending air? It is they that are the immortal part of us." John Seed became well known for his wise words, but the Council was not so lucky and stayed small.

Some of the most progressive environmental movements have been Earth First!, The Sierra Club, and Natural Conservancy. Dave Foreman was the founder of Earth First! He also participated in The Sierra Club and Natural Conservancy. His visions of the Earth were some of the most radical in his time. In his book *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*, he wrote about humans as animals and their role in the real world, and the wilderness as opposed to the artificial world of materialism. His love for the Earth as a living organism inspired many "eco-warriors" in his time and beyond. Earth First! is still very active today; however, some of Foreman's more radical ideas of the *Gaia, Mother Earth* ©2019 University of Metaphysical Sciences

“warrior” have been put aside to make way for more peaceful and nonviolent-centered views. “A warrior recognizes that there is a greater reality outside life that must be defended,” wrote Foreman in *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*. This defense is still very much alive. Dave Foreman had hoped to make people realize that they needed to change their personal lifestyles to be in balance with the rest of the Earth and it seems that his impact did change many people who were already involved in the deep ecology movement. The term “deep ecology” was first used by Arne Naess, who made the study of ecology change from being a shallow study of the ecosystem to a deep philosophy. Some of the main ideas in deep ecology are that we are not separate from nature and we should not think we own the earth. Naess developed complex systems to achieve self-realization with the path of deep ecology.

Deep ecology and radical groups like Earth First! helped support movement toward great achievements like the now-progressing idea of Earth liberation. Rights for nature began with animal liberation, which has achieved the Endangered Species Act but is often viewed as too narrow, yet it is so basic. It is in our own best interest to give nature rights because, as Edward Abbey puts it in his book, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, “I am in favor of animal liberation. Why? Because I’m an animal.” Furthermore, we are also connected with the plants, rocks, waters, and gases of this Earth Mother. Likewise, if plants have feelings, thoughts, and/or sentience, then the animal rights activists may have stopped too soon. Jeremy Bentham has the famous quote regarding animal rights, which is in *Environmental Ethics*, “Do they suffer?” and if they do, then they must have rights just as people do. Now, with the research found in *The Secret Life of Plants*, we begin to wonder if plants, like animals, can suffer too, and thus feel. If they do, then our scope of rights may expand beyond animals to plants, and if they go that far there is no reason why rights should stop with individual creatures. Since it is well known that all aspects of the Earth Mother are interconnected, then human rights, if respected, would encompass all parts of the Earth Mother.



The first plants and “natural objects” rights pioneer may have been Christopher Stone, who wrote in *Should Trees Have Standing?* “I am quite seriously proposing that we give legal rights to forests, oceans, rivers and other so-called ‘natural objects’ in the environment—indeed, to the natural environment as a whole.” The battle to achieve rights for all parts of nature is well discussed in the book *The Rights of Nature*, which is written by Roderick Frazier Nash but contains countless quotes from famous people. Among Nash's writings he quotes Theodore Roszak, “Nature must also have its natural rights.” He also quotes John

Muir (1867) as saying, “How blind to the rights of all the rest of creation!” and David R. Brower, “I believe in the rights of creatures other than man.” These quotes go on and on as Nash shows us how we can no longer ignore the rest of nature. We must expand our views of rights, just as we have in the past to think of women and black Africans as more than merely property. We have seen this emerging recently. On the internet you can now find groups fighting for the human rights to cleaner air and cleaner water.

The list of philosophers who wrote about Mother Earth could continue endlessly, but such complexity might make the entire philosophy seem arbitrary. A few more important philosophers include John Muir, who wrote about his personal accounts in the wilderness in various books. Other famous figures include Stephen Jay Gould, Edward O. Wilson, Holmes Rolston III, Tom Regan and Peter Singer. Further exploration of deep ecology, environmental ethics, and ecocentrism or holism is a good idea if this subject fascinates you.

Exercises

After learning so much about Mother Earth, it is irresistible to find ways to gain a better connection with her. Understanding her history in religion and science is the first step. But once this understanding is accomplished, exercises, practices, and daily rituals will help you connect with the Earth Mother spirit. Some of the best ways to do this are found in the historic religious cultures. James G. Frazer's books *The Golden Bough* (1981) and *The Worship of Nature* (1926) are great guides to learning from ancient cultures. Furthermore, there are countless books about the ways of the Native Americans, who also have ways to connect with nature. Studying the ways of local natives in your own region would be most beneficial.

If you are not the religious type, but still want to develop a relationship with the Earth Mother, there are more modern sources which have less religious connotations. Loren Cruden wrote a book called *The Spirit of Place: A Workbook for Sacred Alignment* (1995), in which she begins by stating, "All of Earth's life is interconnected and sacred." To develop a connection with the Earth, Cruden gives weekly exercises. Some of the primary teachings that must be understood before anything is practiced are the sacred four directions, East, South, West, and North, as well as the seasons, which can be coupled with the directions: Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. In *The Spirit of Place* (1995), Cruden explains how there can be four basic steps to achieving a connection with the Mother Earth. But she also advises that these steps be taken slowly, week by week, for an entire year. This is a very involved and intense way to make sacred space and create a connection with Mother Earth. Not everyone wants to make such a commitment. Regardless, there are lessons to be learned from Cruden's book, such as the importance of mindful breathing and meditation. She also discusses purification and grounding.

The idea of totem animals, totem plants, and totem minerals should be understood. These totem creatures are developed so that you can connect with the Earth Mother in a more intimate way. Trying to focus on the huge concept of the Earth Mother is mind boggling, but focusing on one animal, one plant, and one mineral is much easier for one mind to grasp at first. Once you have gained an understanding of one of these principles, you may go on to another until you have a broad understanding of individual aspects of the Earth Mother. Cultures in the past have picked animals, plants, and minerals that are found near where they spend most of their time, because observation will help the process of understanding. Although a book might help you understand an animal, plant, or mineral, a book alone will not allow you to truly connect with the Earth Mother. Conversely, if you have no written knowledge of an animal, plant, or mineral but you meditate, watch, listen to, and learn from that being, then you very well may be able to connect to the Earth Mother in your own way.

If you feel you need a bit of guidance, the book *The Tracker* (1978) by Tom Brown Jr. and William Jon Watkins might help. This is a true story and first person account of two men and their journeys searching for the secrets of animals and of the Earth Mother. It also teaches the most "fundamental principles of how to track." This book could be coupled with other, more technical identification books, to help you connect with the Earth Mother through animals. Likewise, if plants call out to you then the book *Secrets from the Lives of Trees* (1991) by Jeffrey Goelitz might help you communicate with trees. In this book he writes about his own experience meditating and communicating with different trees. Meditation helps people enter the natural peaceful state of mind, which is required to communicate with other beings in nature. For some people, such communication may flow easily and naturally, while others may need to meditate in nature settings often. Still, personal experience and practice will serve you better than any written words.

A connection with the Earth cannot be taught with words on paper but can be learned only from the Earth Mother herself or from her messengers, which can take any form, even yourself. Therefore, here is some humble advice from me to you: simply search for your own path. One suggestion for this is to go into nature and just sit there. Ground yourself and relax every muscle in your body while staying alert and ready to absorb. Watch everything around you. Do this with more than just your eyes, try to feel the emotions of the world, listen to every sound, and smell every scent. If you feel that you have done the Earth Mother wrong and want to feel redeemed, a ritual may be in order, not for her to forgive you, but for you to forgive yourself and put your mind to rest. Offerings of food, drink, or minerals are a good way to feel close and on good terms with the Mother Earth. Another type of offering is burning an herb such as pine, cedar, sage, sweetgrass, or copal. Each of these have been given special properties and purposes, so pick whichever herb calls out to you. Likewise in the next step, connect with totems. Most people find that there is an animal they relate to best or feel that they already understand a little. Often people find it easier to pick a totem animal before trying to relate to plants or minerals.

Above all, listen to the Mother Earth. She is always singing her great secrets if only we will listen to her. She is always calling to us, begging us to hear her voice. Yet, her words do not always fall into our ears, but into all of our senses -- not just our five known senses, but into every feeling and emotion which we can or cannot describe. Learn Mother Earth's language and listen to it in every moment of every day. Feel her wisdom, always. Be with her in everything you do. She can be with you always, because she is you, and you are her.

Review of Literature

(Exam questions are not drawn from the Review of Literature section)

The Earth Mother is a concept studied by many scientists, philosophers, religions, and cultures, making this review of literature obscure. Where to begin and how far to take the study is a struggle for anyone trying to research such an ambiguous subject. One place to start is a broad book like *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, edited by Richard G. Botzler and Susan J. Armstrong. This book is a compilation of different essays about the environment. It does not take sides and gives a fair chance for negative and positive voices to speak out for or against the environment and in response to each other. The essays are about both sides of the following: science, morality, aesthetics, history, religion, anthropocentrism, individualism, ecocentrism, ecofeminism, and society. It is designed for college students to develop their own environmental ethic. Since 1988 this book has been revised. The revisions are equally good, but contain different essays.

One essay in all versions of *Environmental Ethics* is "The Land Ethic," which is actually the last chapter of Aldo Leopold's book *A Sand County Almanac*. This is a brilliantly written book in which the last chapter is glorified because of its development of an idea he called "the Land Ethic." The beginning of the book contains first hand observations of nature in such detail as to truly take the reader away into a natural setting, while making each animal or plant seem like a close friend with a unique character.

Another book based on first person accounts of nature is *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, who lived near Walden Pond in Massachusetts, alone, during the mid-1840's in a house that he built himself. During his stay "Nature herself" taught him many important lessons which he describes in this book. Thoreau wrote that he went to Walden to experience "Life!" because "who knows what it is, what it does?" Though Thoreau returned to "civilized life" after two years and two months, his book still leads people into Nature's embrace where they can find the answers to their own questions about life. Aldo Leopold and Henry David Thoreau are well known authors whose accounts are about men who had to unlearn an old society and way of life to then learn the lessons of the Earth Mother. However, many people who grew up in indigenous cultures did not need to unlearn anything to tell us about the Earth Mother they grew up knowing.

James G. Frazer wrote extensively about religions all over the world worshipping the Earth Mother in his book *The Worship of Nature*. He writes in great detail about each culture and religion, giving specific examples with extensive footnotes. He unites complexity with simplification by presenting detailed sky, earth, and sun worship together as different aspects of nature as a whole. This book will allow the reader to travel back in time and to all corners of nature.

Some of the essays written about people with native and indigenous roots are collected in *Story Earth: Native Voices on the Environment*, which was compiled by Inter Press Service and edited by Pablo Piacentini. It contains essays by people who in some way are connected with native or indigenous cultures from all over the world. All the essays are about the Earth Mother but each have unique things to say.

Science is the other side of the Earth Mother coin. *The Secret Life of Plants* by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird gives "a fascinating account of the physical, emotional, and spiritual relations between plants and man," with detailed accounts of scientific experiments and other experiences between humans and plants. On the back of this book it says, "Recent experiments in communication with plants indicate, as Paracelsus and Mesmer foretold, that all living things—man, plants, earth, planets and stars—are interconnected: what affects one affects them all." The context may seem a bit dry at times, but the content is expansive, detailed, and important.

Science has progressed to unify the life forces on earth and James Lovelock's ideas gave the entire world of science a giant leap in this direction with his books about Gaia. Among his books, the most detailed and advanced is probably *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth*, in which he explains why Gaia is a living organism and how this should change our views of the world. His Gaia hypothesis inspired many well-known scientists and began a movement commonly called the Gaia Theory.

A scientist, who inspired Lovelock, is Lewis Thomas, who wrote the book *The Lives of a Cell*. He is quoted in Lovelock's book as saying, "Viewed from the distance of the moon, the astonishing thing about the Earth, catching a breath, is that it is alive." In this book he explores not only how cells and atoms act, but also how the earth behaves as a whole.

Rachel Carson is another well-known author and philosopher who wrote *Silent Spring* which helped ban DDT and other pollutants as well as inspire many other people to write books, start movements, and help change the world. She is well respected among the common people as well as in the eyes of scientist, and politicians such as Al Gore, who wrote the introduction to *Silent Spring*. This book changed the course of history and began the environmental movement as we know it today.

Beyond this, I must advise that you should find local animal, plant, and mineral identification books. With these books, walk into the local natural environment and discover the wisdom of the Earth Mother for yourself. Also read up on medicinal and edible plants in the local area. Every person will have to find their own books on this subject because each corner of the Earth Mother's surface has been graced with a different variety of life. However, this may be the source of the most significant information found in the course. You won't find the wisdom in the books themselves, but they will serve as maps to discover a connection with life, which will teach you how to learn from the Earth Mother. The Earth Mother's wisdom is what this course is truly about.

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Gaia Exam Questions

Name _____ Phone # _____

Address _____

(Please supply name, phone #, and address as identifying factors for giving credit properly)

1. Many native and indigenous cultures do not recognize a separation between humans and nature and use words for the planet that roughly translate to Mother Earth or Great Grandmother.
T F
2. The term Gaia:
 - A. is the Sanskrit word for clay
 - B. comes from the indigenous people of Botswana
 - C. comes from the plant gods of Northern Europe
 - D. is from Greek mythology and has been used by the scientific community
3. Pan:
 - A. means "all" in Greek
 - B. is half goat, half man
 - C. is associated with nature and reproduction
 - D. All A, B and C
4. It is this Pan who gives birth (through his thigh!) to all the Titan Gods and Goddesses, the ocean, and creation itself.
T F
5. In Hinduism, it is the python that personifies the Earth Mother.
T F
6. In Chinese tradition, one would plant a different tree to honor each different Earth God at the altar or worship a forest.
T F
7. Native American spirituality is based primarily on the Earth and the Sky as a whole.
T F
8. Many ancient indigenous myths told readers to abuse and neglect their Earth Mother.
T F
9. Trees were worshiped:
 - A. by the Druids
 - B. in the Congo
 - C. by the Italians
 - D. All A, B and C
10. Science has also shown us the connectedness of all living beings.
T F
11. Along with fertilizer and crop rotation, the "Wizard of Tuskegee" used:
 - A. Pesticides
 - B. herbicides

- C. talk
- D. A and B

12. Henry David Thoreau was one of the first to write about the Earth Mother in western society.

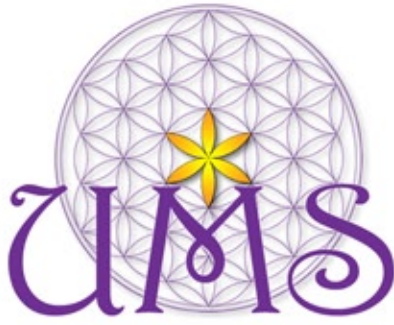
T F

13. DDT was banned, in part, from the influence of *Silent Spring*.

T F

14. Edward Abbey favors animals' liberation:

- A. because it is the responsible thing for human care providers to give them
- B. because he's an animal
- C. because he is a fanatical nut
- D. All A, B and C



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Christine Breese is the founder of University of Metaphysical Sciences in Arcata, California, as well as Gaia Sagrada Retreat Center in Ecuador. At a young age Christine began her healing journey, leading her to study many different spiritual paths in order to understand the various ways people seek enlightenment. She devoted her life to being guided by Spirit, which has led her to write, teach, counsel, and help others along their path to awakening through the UMS program, working with plant medicines, focused meditation, and living in the ever-unfolding now.

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