

# The Ecozoic Reader

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STORY AND SHARED DREAM EXPERIENCE OF AN ECOLOGICAL AGE



## Earth Charter

*“The historical mission of our time is to reinvent the human—at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life systems, in a time-developmental context, by means of story and shared dream experience.”*

—Thomas Berry

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A publication of  
the Center for Ecozoic Studies

Fall 2001  
Volume 2, Number 1

# The Great Work

*We are about the Great Work.*

*We all have our particular work—some of us are teachers,  
some of us are healers, some of us in various professions,  
some of us are farming.*

*We have a variety of occupations.*

*But beside the particular work we do  
and the particular lives we lead,  
we have a Great Work that everyone  
is involved in and no one is exempt from.*

*That is the work of moving on from a terminal Cenozoic<sup>1</sup>  
to an emerging Ecozoic Era<sup>2</sup> in the story of the planet Earth...  
which is the Great Work.*

*- Thomas Berry*

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<sup>1</sup> Our current geo-biological era, the Cenozoic Era, began 67,000,000 years ago following the mass extinction of the dinosaurs and many other species. Now Earth is undergoing a mass extinction of plant and animal species of similar magnitude, this time caused by the impact of human activity on the community of life systems. The Cenozoic Era is ending.

<sup>2</sup> That another geo-biological era will follow the Cenozoic Era is not in question. What is in question is whether humans and other forms of life as we know them will continue. Will we achieve a viable mode of human presence on the Earth? The “Ecozoic Era”—a time of a mutually enhancing relationship of humans and the larger community of life systems—represents the hope that we will.

## Earth Charter Meditation

*by Sue Gould*

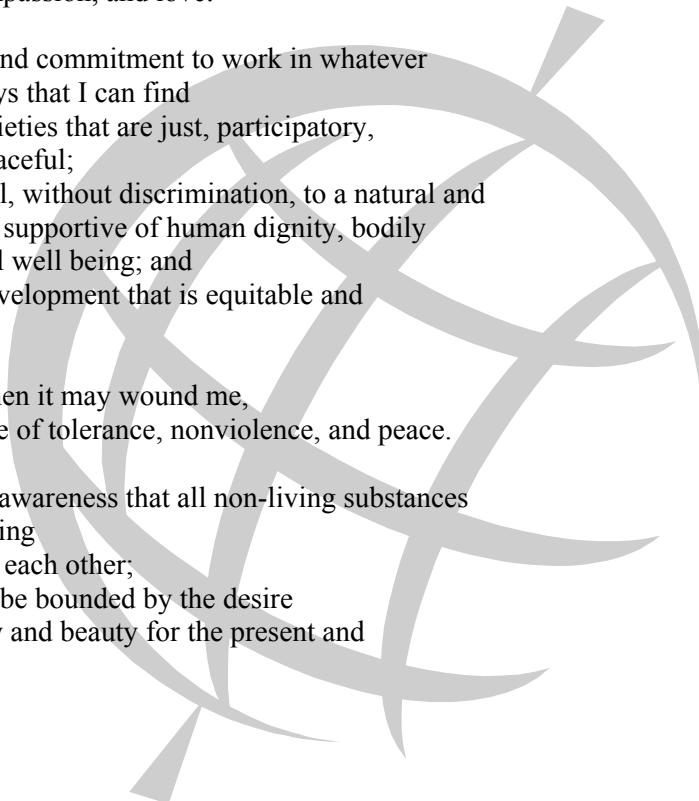
To our higher self, to others, to One of the infinite names,  
to the breezes, to Mystery.

May I find the strength and flexibility to respect Earth and life  
in all its diverse life forms;  
To treat all living beings with respect and consideration;  
To care for the community of life that I can touch with  
understanding, compassion, and love.

May I find the honesty and commitment to work in whatever  
large and small ways that I can find  
To build democratic societies that are just, participatory,  
sustainable, and peaceful;  
To uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and  
social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily  
health, and spiritual well being; and  
To support economic development that is equitable and  
sustainable.

May I stand up, even when it may wound me,  
to promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.

May I always retain my awareness that all non-living substances  
and every living being  
Are interdependent with each other;  
And may all my actions be bounded by the desire  
To secure Earth's bounty and beauty for the present and  
future generations.





## **The Earth Charter: Building a Global Culture of Peace\***

*by Steven C. Rockefeller*

September 11. We have come together for these Earth Charter community summits at a time of shock and grief in America and with a new awareness of the grave dangers that we face as a nation and a free society. This is a time that will test our courage and commitments as individuals and as a nation. In the midst of the suffering in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania, there have been many examples of bravery and self-sacrifice among fire fighters, police, doctors, nurses, and many others. Inspired by these men and women, we must rededicate ourselves to the highest ideals of our nation—to freedom, respect for diversity and the rights of the individual, solidarity in the midst of adversity, and the democratic way.

Terrorism is a form of criminal activity and barbarism that strikes at the very foundations of civilization. President Bush has wisely called on the nations of the world to unite together with the United States in the campaign against terrorism. It appears likely that military action will be necessary to bring to justice those responsible for terrorist acts and to defend our nation against future attacks. However, as the Bush administration has pointed out, it is also essential to use diplomatic, legal, financial, and economic tools in the effort to end terrorism, and these means may prove to be the most effective. We should be supportive of the caution and restraint that our leaders are showing in the use of military force.

Moreover, we make a mistake if we believe that terrorism by itself is the major global challenge we face today. Terrorism is a deadly threat, but it is only one part of a much larger complex of problems. This becomes clear if we consider the global situation and take a long-term view. Looking at the bigger picture can put the struggle against terrorism in perspective, and it can

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\* *Editor's note:* This article and the article by David Korten in this issue were first presented as speeches given in Tampa, Florida, on September 29, 2001, in connection with a national program of Earth Charter Community Summits.



help us as individuals, organizations, and local communities find intelligent and compassionate ways to respond to the crisis immediately at hand. I want to take the approach of using the Earth Charter as a guide and a source of hope.

### **A Global Culture of Peace**

The only long-term answer to the problem of terrorism is to build a global culture of peace. Again, this requires a world-wide partnership of all nations and all peoples. If this is our long-term objective, we must ensure that whatever military or other action we take to combat terrorism will prove in the long run to be a means to the end of creating a planetary culture of peace. The ends—no matter how noble—do not justify any means, in part because the means we use determine the nature of the ends we will actually achieve. Just as one cannot preserve and build a free and democratic society by using authoritarian and undemocratic means, so one cannot build peace if your primary means is war and violence. Military action may be necessary in certain situations to defend against the aggression of another state or to stop terrorism and genocide, but other creative means are required to build peace.

Here lies the relevance of the Earth Charter to the events of September 11 and the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Earth Charter culminates with a vision of peace, and the principles in the Earth Charter identify the essential elements of a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace. The Earth Charter, for example, recognizes that there will be no peace without social and economic justice. This includes the urgent need to eradicate the poverty in which 1.3 billion people live hopeless and desperate lives. A war on terrorism must include a war on global poverty if it is to have any chance of lasting success.

We must also recognize that 85% of the world's resources are in the hands of 20% of the world's people, and the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. Such conditions generate resentment and anger that make young people easy targets for religious fanatics, revolutionaries, and terrorists.

Another condition of enduring peace is democracy. Democracy gives a voice to the people and opens the door to participatory decision making. It involves creating the kind of vibrant civil society that finds expression in

gatherings such as these Earth Charter community summits. It provides a social and political environment in which women and men can secure their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The spread of democracy and its triumph over fascism and communist totalitarianism throughout much of the world may well be the most significant human achievement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Building a global culture of peace means renewing our own democratic institutions at home and supporting other peoples in their efforts to create democratic institutions appropriate to their distinct cultures. It means making more democratic the international institutions that govern world trade and international relations.

In addition, the only firm foundation for justice, economic well-being, democracy and peace is ecological security. Earth's ecological systems provide us with clean air, fresh water, the food we eat, other essential natural resources, and the natural beauty that gives us artistic and spiritual inspiration. In the most comprehensive study<sup>1</sup> to date of the health of the biosphere, an international team of scientists sponsored by the United Nations, the World Resources Institute, and the World Bank reports that human beings are degrading all of Earth's basic ecological systems at an accelerating rate. If this trend is not soon reversed, it will have a devastating impact on the human community, the larger living world, and future generations.

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Much has been done over the past thirty years to address our environmental problems. However, in general our response has been at best half-hearted and woefully inadequate. The warning signs are everywhere. A massive extinction of species is underway. Global warming is occurring. Ocean levels are rising, threatening low lying cities and villages. The water table in many regions of the world is dropping rapidly. Tropical and temperate rain forests that produce goods and services essential to the well-being of life on Earth are being burned and cut down. Major ocean fisheries have collapsed. Half of the world's coral reefs are dying. The scarcity of essential resources like water is increasingly a cause of conflict and violence. What kind of world do we want to leave for our grandchildren?

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<sup>1</sup> *World Resources 2000-2001: People and Ecosystems: The Fraying Web of Life* (World Resources Institute, 2000).



In our interdependent world, then, as we mount a campaign against terrorism, we must remember that the long-range goal is a world-wide partnership for peace. Enduring peace means promoting environmental protection, the eradication of poverty, democracy, human rights, gender equality, respect for cultural and religious diversity, and nonviolent conflict resolution. This is the message of the Earth Charter.

The meaning and importance of this message will become clearer if we consider more closely some of the major ideas that have shaped the document.

### **Interdependence**

One way of understanding the Earth Charter is to think of it as a declaration of global interdependence and universal responsibility. When this nation was founded, we issued a Declaration of Independence. Over 200 years later, we confront a very different world, and we urgently need a national and international declaration of interdependence. World-wide interdependence is to a large degree the result of American technology, industrialization, and trade. Our nation has been the leader in the process of globalization, and yet, we have not fully understood the ethical implications and practical consequences of living in the world we ourselves are actively creating.

The reality is that we have entered a planetary phase in the development of civilization—what the historians call an era of global history. Diverse communities, nations, and cultures have their own stories, but more and more all of our lives are also part of one story. We are a proud and free people and a mighty nation, but we must also recognize today that we are an interdependent member of the larger human family and the greater community of life. With this interdependence goes a vulnerability we cannot escape. As the Earth Charter puts it: In the midst of our cultural diversity, we are “one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.”

Our global interdependence is ecological, economic, political, cultural, and spiritual. There is not one major problem that we face—whether it be environmental protection, economic prosperity, the control of infectious disease, crime and drugs, or terrorism—that a community or nation can manage alone. Global cooperation is absolutely essential. Furthermore, if we want other nations to help the United States address problems like terrorism



about which we are especially concerned, then we must be willing to work more collaboratively with them on other critical global problems like poverty, economic opportunity for all, global warming, and arms control. Isolationism and unilateralism in our international policy is short-sighted and self-defeating. It is in our national interest to be caring global citizens, who work cooperatively with others for the common good.

In addition, we must recognize that none of the fundamental problems that face our communities, our nation, and the world can be effectively addressed in isolation. This, too, is part of the meaning of interdependence. Our environmental, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual challenges are interconnected. Poverty, for example, is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation. Our economy is a subsystem of the planet's ecological system, and environmental degradation and the depletion of resources will eventually undermine our best efforts to build healthy economies. When our ethical and spiritual life are weak and confused, our economic and social life are left without meaning and purpose. In the light of these considerations, holistic thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and integrated problem solving are essential.

## **Global Ethics**

In an interdependent world where cooperative problem solving is a prerequisite for progress, agreement on common goals and shared values is necessary. Effective international and cross-cultural collaboration requires a new global ethics. We urgently need a shared vision of basic values that will provide a basis for world-wide partnership and an ethical foundation for the emerging world community.

The mission of the Earth Charter initiative is to help establish such a foundation. The Earth Charter endeavors to make clear that in the final analysis the problems the world faces are ethical ones. If we are to create a secure world and better future for all, we must revise our idea of the good life and our understanding of right conduct, and we must do this together as global citizens. The objective is not to impose the values of one culture or tradition on everyone else or to create some new monoculture. The goal is to learn from one another and to find common ground through dialogue in the midst of our rich cultural diversity.




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The Earth Charter is a demonstration that we can meet this complex challenge. It is a product of a decade-long, world wide, cross-cultural, interfaith dialogue on shared values. This dialogue went on in face-to-face encounters in local, national, and international meetings, in a series of internet conferences, and by e-mail and fax. Hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals were involved. The Earth Charter sets forth a consensus on ethical values that is taking form in the

emerging global civil society. In the course of the global dialogue that generated the Earth Charter, there were often significant differences, but what impressed me most was the good will of all the participants and their determination to find common ground in the midst of difference.

### **Sustainability**

The ethical principles of the Earth Charter are described as “interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life” that provide a common standard for individuals, organizations, communities, and governments. The concept of a sustainable way of life and of sustainable development has become a new, powerful organizing idea like freedom or democracy. The concept of sustainability has a narrower and a broader meaning. An activity is sustainable if it can be continued indefinitely. Patterns of production and consumption are considered to be ecologically sustainable if they respect and safeguard the regenerative capacities of our oceans, rivers, forests, farmlands, and grasslands. However, using the term in the broader sense, one can talk about building a sustainable global society. In this connection, sustainability includes all the interrelated activities that promote the long-term flourishing of Earth’s human and ecological communities. The principles of the Earth Charter provide an inclusive definition of sustainability in this broader sense.

Finding our way to a truly sustainable way of living together is our hope for the future. It is the path to building a culture of nonviolence and peace.

### **An Ethic of Respect and Care**

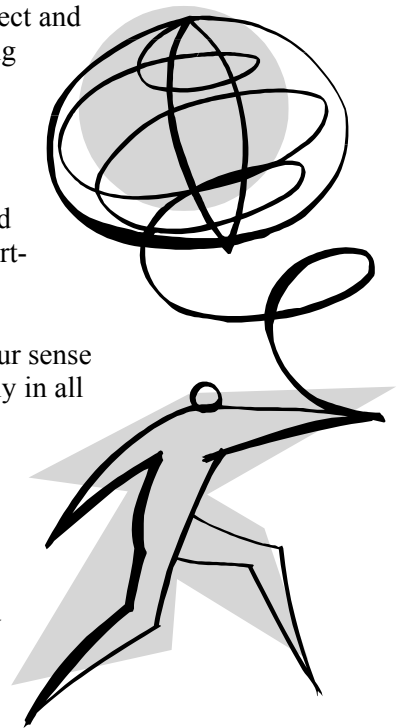
At the heart of the Earth Charter vision is an ethic of respect and care for all life forms and the greater community of life, of which humanity is an

interdependent part. This ethic of respect and care is articulated in the first two principles of the Charter—“Respect Earth and life in all its diversity” and “Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love”—and all the other principles follow from and elaborate the meaning of these first two.

The sense of ethical responsibility begins with an attitude of respect. Respect involves recognition and appreciation. What is worthy of respect also warrants moral consideration. The Earth Charter challenges us to expand our moral awareness and to respect and value all life forms and Earth, our planetary home that has made the development of life possible. Before the awesome mystery of life, respect can deepen into a reverence for life.

The ethical life begins with an attitude of respect for life, but it only takes form when respect develops into a deep sense of caring. Respect and care together create an ethically responsible human being. The attitudes and values associated with caring are a foundation upon which to build our public as well as private lives. Caring involves feeling as well as thinking and acting—our whole being. “To care for” means to respect and value. It means to prevent harm and to promote healing and well-being. Our caring is most profound and effective when it is inspired and guided by the integration of the head and the heart, knowledge and compassion, science and love. Communities that have lost their capacity for care show the environmental and social effects of indifference, narrow self-interest, short-term thinking, neglect and abuse.

At this juncture in human evolution, extending our sense of respect and care to embrace the whole human family in all its diversity, the greater community of life, and future generations has become an ecological and social necessity. In the vision of the Earth Charter, caring for people and caring for Earth are two interrelated aspects of one great task. Only such an expansion of our moral consciousness will transform industrial-technological civilization and lead toward a genuinely sustainable way of life and peace on Earth.





We all have a role to play in implementing the ethic of care, in achieving just and sustainable communities, and in building a global culture of peace. This is the meaning of universal responsibility in an interdependent world. Looking forward from September 11 in the spirit of the Earth Charter, what can you and I do?

- In times like these, we need the wisdom that flows from a clear mind and a pure heart. Taking time to center ourselves through prayer, meditation, and being with family, friends, and members of one's faith community can be a great help. Remember that the goal is to decrease hatred and violence and to build peace. This cannot be achieved with hatred and violence, but only through a life-affirming ethic of care. As we struggle to protect ourselves from terrorism, we must also, if we want long-term solutions, seek to understand and address the conditions and causes that produce hatred and violence at home and abroad.
- There is an urgent need for a new and deeper dialogue between Western culture and the Middle Eastern Islamic world. This is a good time for interfaith dialogue involving Christians, Jews and Muslims and members of other religious traditions as well. The Earth Charter can be used as a catalyst for exploring common ethical values in these exchanges. We can also demand that throughout the world our religious leaders take strong measures to prevent religion from becoming an instrument of hate.
- We must let our government leaders know that we support a spirit of collaborative engagement in world affairs—not just with regard to terrorism, but on the many fronts required to build a global culture of peace. In this regard, we must give the United Nations strong and consistent support, financially, diplomatically, and morally. The United Nations was founded first and foremost to prevent war and to promote peace, and it is absolutely essential at this stage in human history. A year from now, the United Nations will convene the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and our government representatives should know that we want the United States to play a creative leadership role at this critical world meeting.

- All of us can work to alter our lifestyles and to implement those Earth Charter principles that are relevant to our organizations, businesses, and local communities. Share the Earth Charter with teachers in your local schools and with government officials and business leaders. Use it to generate discussion and debate on the major challenges and choices we face. Urge your local governments to use the Charter as a guide to sustainable development and as a tool to assess progress toward that goal.
- Thousands of local, national, regional, and international organizations have now endorsed the Earth Charter. The most recent endorsement has come from the Parliament of the World's Religions. Invite your organization to consider endorsing the Earth Charter, if you have not already done so. The more support we have from civil society and local government, the greater the chance of endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly in 2002.
- The emerging global civil society, of which all of us here are a part, has become a third force shaping world affairs along with government and business. Through the ballot box and our purchasing power in the marketplace, we have the collective ability to influence profoundly government and business. There are many encouraging examples of such activism.

In my home state of Vermont, the Earth Charter is being transported across the state from town to town in a beautiful, handcrafted Ark of Hope by people walking in a spirit of peace. In addition to the Earth Charter, the Ark of Hope contains the prayers and poems of many Vermonters. The global challenges before us are great, but if we unite behind the kind of vision affirmed in the Earth Charter, there are grounds for hope. Humanity has the knowledge, technology, and financial resources required to protect Earth's ecological systems and to make progress in creating a just and peaceful world. With reverence for the mystery of being and with reverence for life, let us resolve here today to commit ourselves anew to this Great Work.



## Earth Charter in Kazakhstan

*by Marina Bakhnova and Sergey Shafarenko*

**T**here exists a legend in the East about imaginary and real values—the imaginary power of gold and a true value of clean and fresh water. Water quenches thirst, gives life to man, and a tree and to every living being on the Earth. A greedy and powerful khan put gold above everything, as so many rulers had done before him! He ordered his people to look for this metal everywhere, made them dig the fertile soil, destroy their crops, pollute all the rivers and sacred springs, which then turned to marshes, stank and dried up.

The hot wind rushed over the Earth and covered everything up with sand. People left this barren kingdom and its khan. Nobody was left to serve khan. He was thirsty and had to look for water. He was slow and clumsy, restricted by heavy golden bangles on his arms and legs. Massive golden chains on his neck and golden earrings in his ears weighed him to the ground. He was very weak after the long search and he fell onto the sand, and couldn't stand up any more. Only then it dawned upon him to part with his gold. The unhappy man, taking off his jewelry, prayed to heaven but it was too late. The merciless sun, the gust of wind, and the hot sand were the only replies to his prayer. Many years after the greedy khan died in the man-made desert, the passers-by could see those glittering heaps of gold guarded by a skeleton, but then, who needs gold in the desert?

Unfortunately this legend turned out to be prophetic. Many powerful people of our planet have been destroying Mother-Nature in their endless pursuit of a material gain, thus bringing us now to a time of global catastrophes.

It's time for humankind to make a lot of serious decisions and prove itself worthy of survival, and the Earth Charter is one of the ways to change our whole perception of our place and role on this planet.

Though the people of Kazakhstan learned the text of the document only in the spring of 1999, they readily identified themselves with the moral



values and principles of the Earth Charter. Kazakhstan, like many other newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, suffers from the impact of global and national environmental problems, such as devastation and destruction of forests, pollution of rivers and lakes, soil and air. Many kinds of plants and animals are now under the threat of dying out. Even after independence, during the period 1997-1998, 40 percent of all forests were burnt down in eastern Kazakhstan, where half of all Kazakhstan's forests are growing. Kazakhstan has its own share of ecological disasters, such as the Aral Sea and Semipalatinsk Nuclear Testing Site and the toll of these disasters is still very heavy in spite of multiple conferences and workshops, international forums and business-meetings aimed to improve these situations.

Even as you are reading this now, radioactive salt is being mined on the grounds of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Testing Site. Local peasants bring their cattle to graze there, as the site is neither fenced nor guarded. Large oil and mining plants and metal chemical plants are still there and the building of the "The Black Irtysh-Karamay" canal in China can lead to a global environmental catastrophe, which can be compared with the Aral Sea tragedy.

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Back in 1989, the Ecological Movement in Kazakhstan started to grow and the first nongovernmental environmental organizations were founded. Their main aim has since been environment protection, and now there are more than 2,000 environmental NGOs in the Republic. In 1997 the first Environmental Forum of NGOs was conducted, the coordinating council was founded, and an intensive effort was made to establish cooperation with the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Sustainable development and effective solutions to environmental problems are the main challenges for the Kazakh civil society. A lot of organizations are committed to the solution of environmental problems within the context of economic and social background and particularly, that of consciousness, culture and education. That is why it's necessary to change our priorities, values and our attitude towards the environment, to find a



solution to environmental, social and economic problems. A new global ethics of relationships between humankind and Nature is necessary.

This was the very reason why the Kazakh's civil society took an active part in the multiple discussions of the Earth Charter as a document that grows from internal to the international spread of new attitudes that help to keep life on the planet. Discussions of the document in Kazakhstan began in May of 1999 within ecological NGOs. Nearly 15 organizations took part in it. The document was also sent to the Kazakhstan Parliament. Additions and changes were suggested. Apart from ecological organizations, other NGOs, and different stakeholders of our civil society, as well as individuals joined this process.

This process received an impetus in June 1999 during the Central Asian Earth Charter hearings organized and held by the Earth Council in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan. In July of the same year, the discussion of the Earth Charter was held among the teachers, students and Peace Corps volunteers at the ecological summer camp for children. Representatives from Ust-Kamenogorsk and Leninogorsk NGOs took part in it. Both young and grown-up participants noted the importance and the timeliness of the discussed documents. The children would say that the Earth Charter was the document belonging to the future, and if some people did not accept it now, they would accept it in the future. The students also expressed their concern about the bad treatment of animals and considered how cruelty was penetrating other spheres of their lives.

The young participants of the Earth Charter process from Ust-Kamenogorsk high-schools made posters "We are discussing the Earth Charter" and placed them all over the city, with the text of the document, the history of the subject, and a space for individual commentaries.

All three drafts of the Earth Charter have been discussed by the NGOs and governmental institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Of course, the discussion through the Internet has its drawbacks, but it didn't prevent organizations from showing their interest in the work on the document.

At the end of 1999 and in the early part of 2000, a process of public hearings on the Earth Charter at the regional level began in five Kazakhstan cities. Among the participants in the hearings were the representatives of city



and regional maslikhats (local governments), social and environmental organizations, regional environmental protection governmental agencies, Departments of the National Ecological Center, teachers and students from high-schools and universities, city administrations and representatives of private business and media.

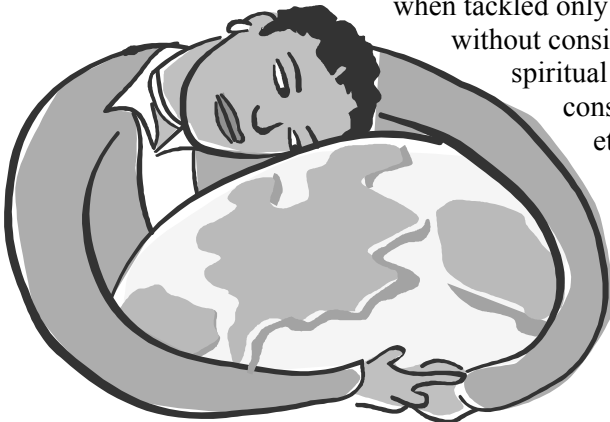
Articles were published and dedicated to the questions of public hearings on the Earth Charter in many newspapers. TV showed the reportings about the city and regional discussions of this document. The complete text of the Earth Charter was published in the official newspaper “Environmental Bulletin.”

The participants at public hearings in Uralsk, Karaganda, Leninogorsk, Semipalatinsk and Ust-Kamenogorsk endorsed the Earth Charter and contributed their comments and suggestions.

In February 2000, the process of national public hearings was summed up by the National Conference on the Earth Charter organized and held by the Earth Council in Almaty. Representatives of seven Kazakhstan regions, the Kazakh Government and Parliament, all took part in it. The Earth Charter National Committee was elected there and some additions and changes were made to the document. The National Committee consists of the representatives of Parliament, scholars, non-governmental organizations, the Council of the President, religious organizations and private business.

We at the Central Asian Earth Charter Council and in Kazakhstan came to a firm belief that not a single environmental problem can be solved if and when tackled only by scientific or technological means, without considering it to be a part of the global spiritual crisis of humankind, without considering the moral, cultural and ethical conditions of our civilization.

Global crisis is the crisis of priorities, values, and of individual consciousness. In the time of the industrial influence on Nature and the dramatic increase of the population of our planet, it is necessary to radically change our



attitudes towards the environment. It is necessary to promote the purification of the Earth's noosphere and accordingly treat our thoughts, which are the basis for our actions, more responsibly. This will lead to a total revisioning of our place within this wonderful gift of God, our world.

We need one common document for the whole planet, which will consist of main principals defining our behaviour and lifestyles. It can be modified, though, nationally and locally in terms of local cultural traditions and beliefs.

NGOs and governmental organizations of Astana, Almaty and Koktshetav took part in discussion of the Earth Charter. We hope that the process of discussing life and defining moral values and principals will spread throughout the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The text of the Earth Charter has been translated into the Kazakh language and distributed all over the country, including the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The National Committee offers a number of proposals:

- 1) To arrange correspondence on the Earth Charter by e-mail between the young people of different countries.
- 2) To conduct an informational campaign on the Earth Charter—publishing leaflets, booklets and issuing shirts. Creation of a film “Central Asia is welcoming the Earth Charter.”
- 3) To organize a festival of ecological songs and poems, which will be based on the text of the Earth Charter.
- 4) To carry out a competition on the development of Earth Charter symbols. This could be a flag, which could be raised along with the

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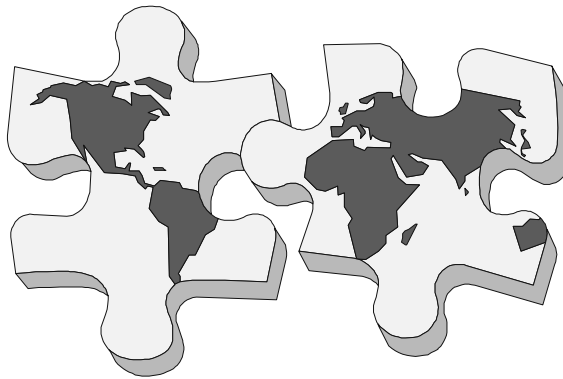
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state flag in any county were the Charter is accepted as the symbol of the responsibility of the state.

- 5) To create a new tradition—to leave some time for a real practical action at each conference, seminar, meeting; let's just start with planting trees, bushes, flowers! If one takes into account the number of different meetings that are being held only in one country at this very moment, it is easy to imagine how many new forests will appear on the planet.

Without any exaggeration, we can call the Earth Charter the most human and progressive document in the world, the true test of the maturity of humankind. If this messianic document is endorsed by the United Nations and internalized individually, we may still hope to save our beautiful Mother-Earth for us and our grandchildren.



## From the Love of Money to the Love of Life

*by David C. Korten*

**W**e come together at this time of national sorrow and unity to pledge our commitment to the values and principles set forth in the Earth Charter, a document that begins with these words:

*We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future.*

The terrible and unconscionable tragedy of September 11 gives a meaning and urgency to the prophetic words of the Earth Charter Preamble that could not have been imagined by any of us three weeks ago.

Two universally shared images are now deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of our species. One is the image of the living Earth—a vibrant gem as seen from the darkness of space—that has become the icon of humanity's emerging planetary consciousness—a symbol of peace and of the wonder and oneness of life. The other is the image of two gigantic World Trade Center towers collapsing into a pile of rubble and ending the lives of human beings trapped inside—a symbol of the fear, hatred, and violence that divide us in a deeply troubled world—a terrifying symbol of the ease with which those so alienated from life that they find meaning only in death, can transform the technological instruments of our power *over* the world into instruments of our vulnerability *to* the world.

The juxtaposition of these two images—one, the living jewel of life, the other, the collapsing towers of death—provides a defining reference point for humanity. Hold both of these images in mind as you listen further to the Earth Charter Preamble:

*We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history when humanity must choose its future.*

*The future at once holds great peril and great promise.*



*We must recognize that we are one human family, and one Earth community with a common destiny.*

*We must bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.*

*It is imperative that we declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.*

So much truth in so few words. The terrible tragedy of September 11 has focused world attention, altered our collective consciousness, and demonstrated the need to reorder human priorities. It is a moment that compels choice, but leaves it to us to determine what that choice will be. Much rests on how our nation, America, responds.

Succumbing to the dark forces of fear and vengeance, we can choose to respond in kind to this horrific and unconscionable act. We can unleash our vast military might against an invisible and widely dispersed network of a few thousand violent extremists, thereby risking the loss of tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands—even millions—of innocent lives—in an endlessly spiraling escalation of violence. Or we can choose a path of patient and compassionate justice that respects life, the rights of the innocent and the rule of law in a cooperative international effort to *bring the guilty to justice*, as we simultaneously work to *bring justice to the world* by creating a world that works for all—free of the injustice that leads to violence.

The September 11 attack on America was unthinkable, sudden, and brutal. It appeared without warning, seemingly from nowhere. And yet placed in the context of the historical forces that gave rise to this vicious act, it begins to seem almost inevitable—only the details of time and place—when and where—could not have been foreseen.

It was a wake up call too visible, too dramatic, too evil to ignore. It shocks us out of our trance of complacency about the fate of the world beyond America's shores and compels us to ask, "Why?" From where does such hatred of America spring? In our search for answers we confront the unbearable desperation and fear born of exclusion and powerlessness that are the daily experience of billions of our fellow human beings in a world of

increasing inequality, deprivation, and violence. We also confront the reality that in the eyes of many of the world's dispossessed, the hands of America are not clean.

The meaning of the Earth Charter in this time of crisis is found not only in its words, but also in the extraordinary process by which it was crafted. It is the product of an open, broadly participatory process that involved thousands of people from all walks of life and every part of the world. It gives voice to the deep values and profound vision of hope of ordinary people everywhere for what the world can be. It is a manifestation of an awakening planetary consciousness of the oneness of life that transcends race, gender, religious affiliation, nationality, and language—and it flows not from the deliberations of intellectual élites, but from the heart and soul of humanity.

More than simply an awakening to values too long neglected, humanity is experiencing an evolutionary step toward an awareness of culture itself — to a realization that cultural beliefs and values are human constructs, subject to conscious critical examination and choice. We are in a collective trance of blind acquiescence to a culture of violence, injustice, materialism, and domination so destructive of life that it threatens our very survival. As we free ourselves from this trance, we are able to direct our life energy toward the task of consciously, intentionally living into being a new culture of peace, justice, compassion and partnership grounded in the principles set forth in the Earth Charter.

We each come to this awakening in our own way. For many of us in America, it started with the civil rights movement when we first became aware that relations between blacks and whites had long been defined by cultural codes that had nothing to do with reality. Once we learned to recognize the difference between reality and the unexamined, unjust, and self-limiting belief system that governed race relations, it became easier to see similar distortions of reality in the cultural codes that define the relations between men and women, between people and nature, between straights and gays, and most recently between the institutions of money (including global corporations, the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO) and the needs of life.




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Awakening to the reality of our cultural conditioning is a critical step toward the realization of a new level of human freedom. Racism, sexism, homophobia, exploitation, and materialism are more easily seen for what they are, and our minds are opened to potentials within ourselves, otherwise denied. Increasingly immune to the distorted cultural conditioning of our minds by corporate media, advertising, and political demagogues, we are able to see that in our obsessive pursuit of power, money, and materialism we have forgotten how to live.

We awaken to the reality that we have given over our lives to the culture and institutions of a suicide economy that so devalues life that it actually rewards us for destroying life—the lives of persons, the life of community, and the life of nature—and to what end?—to make money for those who already have more money than they need.

It is a profound distortion of values. Money is purely an abstraction without substance or intrinsic worth. Life is the sacred essence of our being, the breath of God, the greatest of creation's miracles. Yet our cultural trance has so disabled us that we have come to accept, without question, the use of money as a measure of life's value. We have acquiesced to the rule of predatory global corporations, which are bound by law and structure to maximize financial return to faceless absentee owners without regard to the social and environmental consequences for life.

The task ahead, what theologian Thomas Berry calls “the Great Work,” is both simple and profound. We must transform societies dedicated to the love of money, into societies dedicated to the love of life. We must free ourselves from the pathological culture and institutions of the global suicide economy, withdrawing from them our life energy—the source of their sustenance—as we live into being the life-serving cultures and institutions of a planetary system of living economies\* comprised of human-scale, locally rooted, equitably owned enterprises that mimic the ways of healthy, mature ecosystems.

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\* *Editor's note:* For Dr. Korten's presentation on “A Planetary System of Living Economies,” see [www.pcdf.org/Living-Economies](http://www.pcdf.org/Living-Economies).



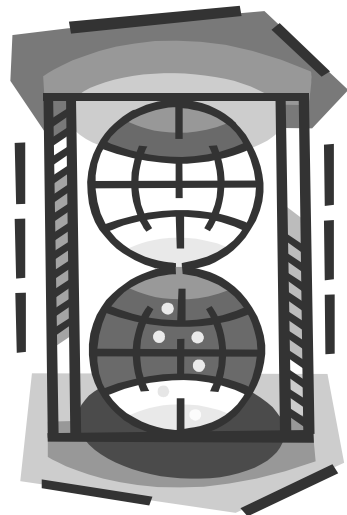
The Great Work begins in part by getting our story right. The cultural trance that alienates contemporary societies from life and spirit has been maintained in part by an old story that traces back to the early days of the scientific revolution.

As this limited and now badly out-dated story tells it, matter is the only reality, life is an accidental outcome of material complexity, consciousness is an illusion, and the cosmos is but a clockworks, defined by purely mechanical relationships, created and set in motion by the hand of a God who then abandoned his creation leaving the great clockworks to exhaust itself as its spring winds down. Elaborating on the story line of the mechanical universe, biologists added a sub-text that reduced the miracle of evolution to a series of chance genetic mutations combined with a competitive struggle in which those more fit survive and flourish, as the weaker and less worthy perish. It is an old story based on premises now largely discredited by science itself.

Yet a collective cultural trance continues to hold modern societies captive to this story's self-limiting view of reality and human possibility—stripping life of meaning, mocking compassion as naive, and dismissing concern for the well-being of one another and the Earth as irrational. The old story leaves us with no moral purpose beyond the compulsive pursuit of material gratification in an ultimately futile effort to distract ourselves from the terrible loneliness of conscious beings abandoned by their God in a dead and uncaring universe.

The awakening of our cultural consciousness allows us to see this story for what it is—simply a story—a creation of the human mind—a story in fact sharply at odds with the evidence of our daily experience and the findings of more contemporary science.

A new story is emerging from a convergence of modern scientific knowledge and ancient spiritual wisdom—a story that awakens us to the sacred wonder of a living cosmos embarked on an epic journey of self-discovery. It is the story theme for the Great Work ahead.





The new story begins some 15 billion years ago when all the energy and mass of our known universe burst forth from a point smaller than the head of a pin and spread as dispersed energy particles, the stuff of creation, into the vastness of space. With the passing of time these particles self-organized into atoms, swirled into great clouds that eventually formed into galaxies, then coalesced into stars that grew, died, and were reborn as new stars, star systems, and planets. The cataclysmic energies unleashed by the births and deaths of billions of suns converted simple atoms into ever more complex atoms and molecules—at each step opening new possibilities for the growth and evolution of the whole.

More than 11 billion years later, at least one among the countless planets of the cosmos gave birth to a living organism—the simplest of bacteria, only a single cell. Yet these enterprising creatures launched the planet's first great age of invention. They discovered the processes of fermentation, photosynthesis and respiration, which provided the building blocks for what was to follow. They learned to share their discoveries with one another through the exchange of genetic material and, in so doing, created the planet's first global communication system. With time they discovered how to join in cooperative unions to create complex, multi-celled organisms with capacities far beyond those of the individual cells of which they were comprised. Continuously experimenting, creating, building, life transformed the planet's substance into a living web of astonishing variety, beauty, awareness and capacity for intelligent and cooperative choice.

Then, a mere 2.6 million years ago, quite near the end of our 15 billion-year story, there came the creation of a being with capacities far beyond those of any creature that preceded it to reflect on its own consciousness; to experience with awe the beauty and mystery of creation; to articulate, communicate and share learning; to reshape the material world to its own ends; and to anticipate and intentionally choose its own future. Each of these extraordinary creatures was comprised of some 30 to 70 trillion individual living, self-regulating, self-reproducing cells joined in an exquisitely balanced cooperative union. They called themselves—humans.

The new story calls on us to re-examine our most basic assumptions about reality and about human possibilities. Its cosmic metaphor is not the machine, but the organism. Its irreducible building block is not a particle, but a thought. Rather than banishing to some distant place beyond our experience

the spiritual intelligence and energy we know as God, it acknowledges the essential and ever present spiritual unity that is the ground of all being. It reveals the wonder of life's extraordinary capacity for creative self-organization, infuses our lives with meaning and possibility, and evokes a love and reverence for the whole of life, the miracle of our living planet, and the creative potentials of each person. It suggests that far from being the end products of creation, we humans were born to find our place of service in life's quest to know itself through the continuing, unfolding discovery of new possibilities.

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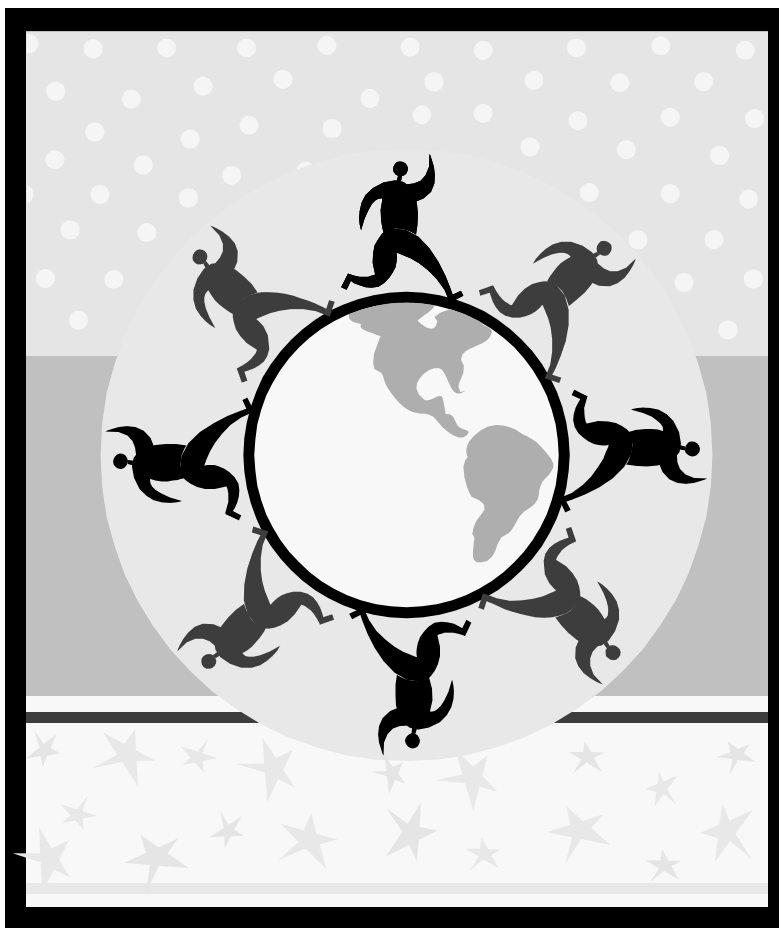
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The new story allows us to recognize evil as that which is destructive of life and the actualization of life's potential. Equally, it allows us to recognize our own capacity for goodness, compassion, and creative engagement in the unfolding drama of creation. And in revealing life's ability to self-organize with a mindfulness of both self and whole, it affirms our potential to create truly democratic, self-organizing human societies that acknowledge and nurture our individual capacity to balance freedom with responsibility.

As we humans must now consciously choose our future, so too must we choose the story that will guide us to that future. The principles embodied in the new story are the same principles articulated by the world's people in the Earth Charter. This is a time of passage to a new human era grounded in a new human consciousness. It is more than a historic moment. It is an evolutionary moment.

We are being called by the deep intelligence of creation to take a step toward species maturity — to accept responsibility for the consequences of our presence on this planet — a responsibility not only for the well-being of one another, but as well for the whole of life. The Earth Charter articulates the vision, values, and principles that we now embrace as we respond to that call.



## Something Great Out of Nothing

*by Catherine Browning*

*There comes a point where the mind takes a higher plane of knowledge, but can never prove how it got there. All great discoveries have involved such a leap.*

— Albert Einstein

Some of Albert Einstein's greatest ideas came out of seeming nothingness. He knew that phenomenal secrets of the universe are revealed to those who make room for nothingness and that befriending mystery makes sense out of nonsense. He spent long hours in intellectual solitude visualizing possibilities involving light, space, and time. He discovered the general theory of relativity by following his intuitive hunches. Einstein trusted his imagination more than his knowledge.

For those of us who have been touched by the profound essence of Einstein and the profound awareness that the original fireball explosion burst forth out of nothing, there is a strong imperative to make room, clear out space, and drench ourselves in emptiness. As the Ecozoic Era looms before us, this is the time for something new to emerge; this is the time to take a quantum leap.

The universe is filled with voids, vacuums, and gaps—big, gaping gaps. On the macroscopic level, we live in a universe with over a 100 billion galaxies. Each galaxy has at least 100 billion stars, and many of those stars have developed planets. Between solar systems, there are light years of space. Between galaxies, there are tens of millions of light years of space. On the microscopic level, living cells cushion themselves with interstitial space. They bathe in voids—the neurons with their synaptic gaps, the kidneys suspended in thoracic cavities, the mouth with its room to savor. All of creation is padded with raw roominess. Similarly, the universe thrives on breathing room. The universe is most creative when it has an open-air theatre in which to perform.

All creatures of this Earth need space. They have to be free to roam and explore, grow and expand. Since great things are prone to be born out of nothing, it's essential to look at the nothingness in our world and ask,



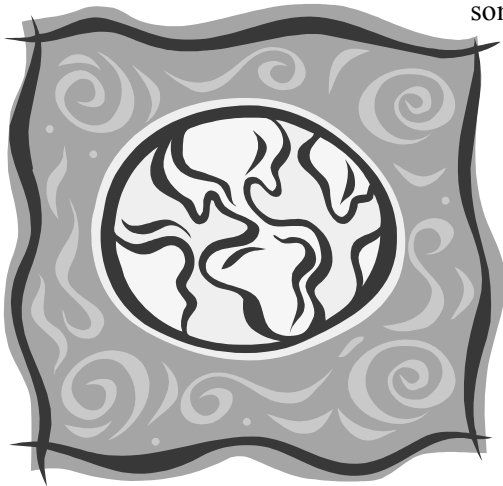
“Is there enough of it?” Most humans are too closely packed together on this planet. That’s a frightening reality. In the West our lives are cluttered with stuff. We cram-pack our schedules with agenda items and to-do lists. We sacrifice brilliance for immediate satisfaction from a task hastily completed. We risk losing our intuitive greatness for short-term, material satisfaction. How can we be great if nothingness is zapped from our lives? How can we do our Great Work if we are tied down with stifling, routine thinking?

What if the real danger in having too much stuff isn’t that we become enslaved by materialism, but that we lose the potential for fertile newness to break forth? That’s a scarier thought than the threat of being plagued by consumer addictions. If the human species loses its ability to be a receptacle for the universe—to be the eyes, ears, touch, reflections, actions, celebrations, and thoughts of the universe—then it loses its sense of purpose. Humans risk forfeiting their niche in the larger community of life. And if we lose our place, lose our ability to contribute, then we are doomed for extinction.

When we reach the saturation point in our individual and collective lives, it’s time to let go, to empty, to be emptied. This doesn’t mean to surrender into a comfortable, vegetative state, but to surrender into a conscious emptying and a heightened state of active listening. Learning to wait in our emptying, to be still in the pause moments of life, requires trusting the larger process. Just as it’s ineffective to fill in someone else’s sentences while they are talking, so too it’s wasteful to rush in and start

something new just because we are

uncomfortable with the unknown. Perhaps this is what tempted Einstein during his most challenging moment. As he sat alone with the universe’s wisdom pouring forth through his own intuition, he may have been frightened by the truths that were revealed. Trusting newness is never easy, especially when it comes out of seeming nothingness. Especially when what we hear may be contrary to what people want us to say. Especially when we realize that things aren’t always as they appear.



But as we learn to trust the patterns, images, and symbols revealed to us through the unveiling of nothingness, we experience a paradoxical humility. On the one hand, we become our most brilliant self when we allow the universe to speak through us. On the other hand, we realize that we are not responsible for this greatness. For it is the universe itself who speaks, and we are merely the messengers. The universe knows how the universe began, how it is developing, and where it is headed. The universe knows what lies beneath the mysterious tides and what is really going on in our nighttime dreams. The universe speaks to us through deep states of relaxation, silence, daydreaming, meditation, prayer, imaging, ceremony, breathing, storytelling, and music. The universe knows what words will work best on our paper before we even put the pen in our hand or what color we could paint on an easel before our brush even takes a stroke. It's in learning to trust this wisdom, in consciously surrendering into its mysterious creativity, that we become our best selves and provide solutions to our most pressing problems. The Ecozoic leader, therefore, is called by the universe to be a worthy vessel, an effective messenger of life-changing discoveries in these precarious times.

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The universe thrives  
on breathing room.

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At the risk of sounding like a scholastic heretic, I suggest that Ecozoic leadership requires less data, less critical thinking, and fewer research-based outcomes. Not that logic doesn't have its place in the process—of course it does—but balance is what we seek. We are good at talking to the universe. It's the listening that we need to work on. If we all commit ourselves, individually and collectively, to letting go of *everything* in our lives that does not resonate with our highest Ecozoic ideals, then we might open ourselves to some awesome changes.

If we carefully, and sacredly, let go of every piece of scrap paper, every piece of furniture, memento, distracting memory, cluttering thought, habit, acquaintance, chore, irrelevant detail of our lives that does not represent the Ecozoic, then we will create a huge abyss. Though waiting in that abyss might be painful for awhile, and we will feel tempted to run away or clutter up our lives with immediate, short-term fixes, the rewards for snuggling up to the abyss, for nurturing the abyss, will be great. As we sink into stillness, our instinctual knowing, our gut hunches and our intuitive genius will inevitably reveal themselves. As we learn to receive insights from the universe, as we learn to really listen to the universe, we will find that something great will come out of nothing.





## A Note on Teaching the Earth Charter to Youth

*by April Ambrose*

**T**eachers. They have such a wonderful creative career as educators of the young. They take fresh souls and give them the tools and the concepts with which to carve and mold their way along Earth's crust. Teachers have the opportunity to assess our current situation and foresee the possibilities of the future, and arm their students with the knowledge and skills needed to bridge that gap.

This bridging task is indeed a very difficult one with many pitfalls such as ego, politics, personal affiliations and preferences. It requires some organizing theme that can tie together past, present, and future in a meaningful way and bring ideas down to the everyday actions of our lives. It also requires an understanding of community.

At present we have some odd paradoxes when we look at the state of our human community and our Earth community. On the human side, we have more social relations than ever, yet rather than bringing unity and support, we seem more fragmented than ever and life in society has become a struggle for survival. Thus, teachers teach survival skills—ego, social and economic survival skills.

On the Earth side, similarly we interact with nature more than ever, yet this does not lead to unity either. Nature is not seen as an organism of which we are a part, rather it is seen as a set of resources to be taken, divided, and used fully with no thought to the future. For many people, there is now no need to teach about our natural environment, as it holds no real influence in most of our lives. Instead, the human-built environment supercedes all others. Teachers are forced, by way of standards, to teach about the context and history of these human constructs, rather than the future of human lives. They must teach students how to be a part of the human community, but not the community of life.

So, the message to students too often becomes no one is really bound to anybody or anything else, and thus no one is responsible. This sense of



irresponsibility, however, fragments the entire Earth community, and will, if continued, lead to certain devastation. If humans and life as we know it, are to survive, there must be something that binds us together. We need both a vision that ensures the continuation of our species and a clear path to executing that vision. Otherwise we may continue upon the dreadful path we are currently traveling.

The Earth Charter expresses such a vision. This is truly an amazing document, the roots of which lie deep in the rich diversity of human lives across the world and whose healing branches reach far into the future of life on Earth. It offers a stunning vision. What it does not make clear, however, is how to forge the path from where we are now to attaining that glorious vision.

### **Choosing the Vision and Acting Spontaneously**

Here is my belief about the path—in the simple choosing of this vision the path appears immediately like the yellow brick road leading us into the Ecozoic Era. Each person that has personally accepted the Earth Charter has accepted it based on his or her own sense of truth. This is their truth sense of what is right and wrong for them. These are their instincts that help them recognize what is healthy or unhealthy for them and their body and for our community. Healthy instincts guided by a clearly articulated vision allow one to act with a conviction as if in a Primal state where one just knows or feels when something is right.

The term, “Primalism,” is used quite loosely here as a state of being. This is a state in which a person acts from the felt truth within and very simply does what feels right, a state of being in which wants are whittled down to needs. Primalism involves the most basic feelings and thoughts about survival. The action that comes from these feelings and thoughts arises instantaneously and spontaneously. Primalism is accessing creative powers by acting out of a vision without intellectual and social restraint. In Primalism, thinking, feeling, and acting are all done simultaneously in a fluid extension of time. Primalism is being creative, rather than reactive.

Primalism is doing what feels right to you regardless of how that action may appear to other people. Though initially this seems like a foolish idea, one must only look at the world around us to see that it is not. Everywhere

people are lying to themselves and others. We play an infinite number of games of deceit for powers and purposes we claim are out of our control. Then there are people who would punish us for not following some of these lies. For example, not long ago people in the State of California were prohibited from advocating any form of health treatment other than radiation, chemotherapy, or surgery, or face the consequences, namely jail time. However, the application of punishment for acting on one's personal idea of truth is not limited to government. Big businesses can use its "big money" to lobby and pass laws punishing anybody believing against them. An example here is the health food industry vs. the drug industry. Primalism says that we want control of our own lives again, and we will reclaim them by reclaiming truth.

### **The Truth a Child Sees**

This may sound confusing at first. How does one recognize truth and not simply desire? How can we all have the same truth? How can children know what is right if we do not teach them? To adults this notion is preposterous, not worth a second thought. To a child, this is not a notion, but the way things are. Children can still hear the ringing bell of truth. They are still sad when they see the smallest of creatures suffering. They can see pain or joy on anybody's face. To children these things are still real, until we teach them otherwise. We teach them to ignore the homeless because they have chosen to be without shelter. We teach them to wear clothing that fits their socioeconomic standing. We teach them that dirty is wrong and clean is right. We teach them to ignore their bodies and the sensations it produces.





We don't, however, discourage these thoughts and feelings as much with our words as with our actions. Children are great observers. They see everything. For example, if a child's parents are fighting, they will see this and it will hurt them to see people that they love in pain. But then they will learn over time that fighting is okay because their parents do it. Children can see right through who you think that you are to the being you are displaying according to your actions.

We are constantly telling ourselves lies and expecting others to go along with them. Children do not accept these things unless we push them to do so. This is why children are our hope. We don't have to teach them what is right, we only have to show them that we accept what is right and reject what is wrong. This is why children can easily understand and accept a document like the Earth Charter because it lays out everything that we believe to be right and everything we will not stand for. It rings the bell of truth loud and clear. This is why the Earth Charter should be a primary teaching tool in our schools.

So, how do we teach the Earth Charter to our children? Easy, present it to them in a clear, concise form where your honest emotions and actions are worn on your shirtsleeve. Children want to believe what is true and they want approval of the things they are already thinking and feeling. They don't want to believe stories that end in pain and suffering. They want one that progresses in beauty and fun and that has room for their own creative input.

As we get older, we lose this truth sense. We begin to live our lives more for other people than ourselves. We lose sight of who we are inside. Adolescence definitely contributes to this. These are the awkward years of figuring out what place you want to occupy in the world, what truths you want to stand up for, what wrongs you will not stand for. The problem with adolescence is that an adolescent feels her or she must justify everything for his or her peers. Suddenly truth sense is not enough. They begin to hear truth in a different way. They hear it only in contradiction and hypocrisy. In other words, truth becomes harder to recognize in its own right and easier to hear only in relationship to someone else.

At around the teenage years, youths choose what truths they will commit to, and which lies they will commit to. This changes over the course of their life, of course, but it becomes more difficult to change over time.

Thus adolescence and some of the teenage years are the most pivotal times in a person's life. This is where the Earth Charter can be extraordinarily useful.

During these teenage years, youths need to become actively involved with the Earth Charter in whatever ways they can. They should be involved in service projects and activities that form youths into tight communities. Their activities should be non-competitive, non-hierarchical, group activities. They should also spend a lot of time alone. They should be constantly writing about their experiences, likes and dislikes. They should receive praise and support at every turn. They should also have very honest and open role models and teachers. They need to feel important, useful, and right. They need their lives to be validated in numerous ways. They need help seeing through some of society's lies. For example, they need to know why they are being taught what they are at school. They need to know why some people see war and violence as necessary. They need to understand what causes homelessness and poverty.

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Children can still  
hear the ringing bell  
of truth.

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### **Educating for Truth and Hope**

The education of the present is already the education of the past. Youths around the world are beginning to take traditional education less and less seriously as it does not teach them what they need to know about how to survive in this life. Current education is not based on truth for all. For example, it is becoming much more widely known that our history classes teach about a minority of the population in any given time. Even some of our science classes refuse to accept current knowledge of global warming trends. Classes are contained within buildings that never allow students to even learn what trees are in their schoolyard, much less what a forest looks, feels, and sounds like. Schools have become much less involved with teaching about life and survival, and more involved in producing better employees of society.

The saddest thing about all of this is that our youths know that the world is in a bad spot right now. They also know that they are our future, that we look to them for answers and solutions. Yet, when they finally emerge from school into the crazy world that has been created, they almost instantly become extraordinarily frustrated. Why? Because school did not teach them

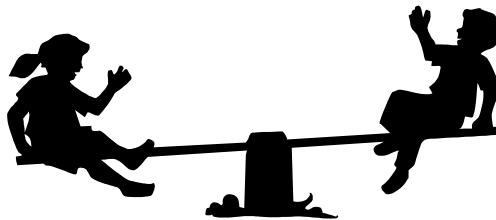


about this—about life. School did not teach them how to enter into the rat race and yet still maintain a sense of what is right. Most of all school did not teach them how to make things better.

Most of these youth have become disillusioned. They have accepted pain and suffering and lies as what they must be. Some of these people, however, are trying to drop out of the race. Some of these people are working to make their corner of the universe better. These people are called the counterculture. These are the people who refuse to recognize society as it is and whom society refuses to recognize. These are the people who are trying to get back in touch with their primal nature—with what feels good and right. These are the people who are trying to reclaim truth by acting out their visions. But it is hard, for society allows them few resources. By the time most of them gain these resources, they have forgotten their dreams or deemed them impossible. They become realistic like society instead of idealistic like the Earth Charter.

Society is only as healthy as its young people. Our society is very unhealthy and our youth are crying for help. They don't want to shoot each other. They don't want to feel pain. They are not ready for war. We need to help them by listening to their cries. We cannot ignore them anymore. They are our future—literally. They will choose what from their lives and our present age to take into the future with them and what they will create.

Will they take war or will they take peace? Will they choose the lies and the superficial cares or will they take truth and each other? Will they live in fear or will they live in joy? That choice is more up to us than we think. For we are their teachers, and we are their students. We must guide them and let them lead us, simultaneously and fluidly, into a better world.



## The Earth Charter, Globalization and Sustainable Community

*by Larry Rasmussen*

The dream of a common Earth ethic and the unity of humankind is a hoary one, at least as old as the Hebrew prophets, Confucius, the Buddha, Plato and Jesus. That should surprise no one since religions themselves, together with ancient philosophies and the primordial visions of first peoples, have consistently staked out a highly audacious claim for “community.” It is community sufficiently generous to include not only the neighbors (at least those we like!) but Earth as a whole, indeed the cosmos *in toto*. Creation as a community has not only been the aged and enduring dream; it has been a basic religious, moral, even metaphysical, claim.

Humans dream these dreams because community provides answers to restive stirrings deep within our souls. Indeed, religion and ethics may well arise from a yearning to align our lives with an order that outstrips them, an order attuned to the same powers that flung the stars and planets into their orbits, an order in which we are truly home to the universe itself.

In our time the old dream has found realization in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, posited as it is on the notion of universal human dignity and endorsed as a common moral standard and instrument for all peoples everywhere. By all counts, it has been a powerful means for effecting and institutionalizing universal moral claims.

### **New Moral Universe Based on Respect for the Full Community of Life**

The Earth Charter Movement and the Charter itself belong to the deep tradition of this irrepressible dream of Earth as a comprehensive community guided by a shared ethic. There are a couple new twists, however. The most remarkable one, at least for the children of modernity, is to render the ethics of *homo sapiens* derivative of Earth’s requirements and to consider the whole community of life the bearer of compelling moral claims. “Respect Earth and life in all its diversity” is the fundamental principle of the Earth Charter. It is



in fact the parallel of human dignity, or respect for every human life, as the baseline of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But the parallel hides a moral revolution. The fabled “turn to the human subject” of modern Western ethics—a turn underlying modern psychology, philosophy, economics, politics, and the omnipotent science and technology of the industrial paradigm itself, as well as the turn that issued in the notion of human rights itself—this is the turn rejected by the Earth Charter and its moral world. The language is mild and careful and never truly confrontational, but the Earth Charter is an assault on the institutionalized anthropocentrism of reigning practices and their morality, especially patterns of production and consumption. To say “humanity is part of a vast evolving universe” and to view Earth as a remarkable niche in that universe, and alive, because it is the bearer and sustainer of a unique community of life, is already to dislodge the morally transcendent human subject and invert the orientation of prevailing ethics. In fact, the very moral universe that gave us universal human rights does not accord with the Earth Charter ethic. The Earth Charter wants to de-center the sovereign human self (historically, an androcentric and white Western self) who is the moral legislator and whose very notion of freedom rests in giving ourselves the laws we live by. It wants to locate the ecology of all human action within the economy of Earth itself and temper the sovereign swagger of idolatrous human powers parading mastery on a grand scale. But the universal rights tradition *combines* the rightful assertion of human dignity as the norming norm *with* a practical and deeply institutionalized morality of the sovereign human subject as legislator over all else. This the Charter does not accept, even though it deeply affirms the dignity of all human beings and the ascription of freedom, equality and respect to every person as a condition of human fulfillment.

There is another theme that puts the Earth ethic of the Charter far from the reigning moral universe of present institutions and daily habits. Cosmologies now emerging in science, namely ones in which the web of life spreads to embrace distant galaxies and all thirteen to fifteen billion years of the epic of evolution, have little place in our moral sensibilities and conventions. Most all present worlds, at least dominant ones, still regard humans morally as an ecologically segregated species. So we moved more rocks and soil and water in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than did volcanoes and glaciers and tectonic plates, and we altered the thin envelope of the atmosphere more in that time than all humans together in previous and far longer stretches of



time, yet none of this registered as a profoundly moral matter, much less a moral crisis.

In sum, the Earth Charter is trying to line out what Earth as *Earth community* means for ethics and moral agency. In moral theory it means de-centering the sovereign human self and in practice it means re-doing the world created by that self, what the words of an earlier draft dubbed as no less than “reinvent[ing] industrial-technological civilization.” This primacy of Earth community for ethics—or a communitarian understanding of nature and society together, with the economy of Earth basic to all—is the new twist, at least for the modern era.

### **High Level of Representation in Creation of Earth Charter**

Still another remarkable quality of the Earth Charter is its genesis and generation, the drafting process itself. The Charter initially failed. It was to be the international product of nation-state negotiations climaxed at the Earth Summit in Rio, 1992. That did not happen. The Earth Charter Commission, gifted with remarkable leadership, then decided to re-launch the effort as a global civil society initiative. This grass-roots participation by communities and associations of all kinds resulted in what has been termed “a people’s treaty.” It is not a true “treaty,” negotiated by appointed sovereigns and signed by their national bodies, but there is a call for the Charter’s endorsement by the UN General Assembly in 2002 as a “soft law” document. Furthermore, its drafting has been coordinated with a genuine “hard law treaty” underway as “The International Covenant on Environment and Development.” This renders the Charter more than an inspirational document for a developing global consciousness and an educational tool and guide for action in many quarters, important as these are. It has the substance of a genuine charter seeking universal recognition and backed by international law.

The specific point about genesis and process, however, is the Charter’s rarity among time-worn efforts at a global ethic. Few have been generated from the bottom up—or more precisely, from high levels of participation cutting across virtually all sectors of society, with a determined effort to include historically under-represented voices. Past efforts at an Earth ethic were far less representative, and to my knowledge none were carried out by way of a democratic consultative process this open with this much revision over time. It is a remarkable instance, made possible by electronic



globalization, of what in fact may be an emerging global society tuned to local communities and bio-regions as well as myriad forms of expertise from every quarter—government, business, academe. Against the homogenizing forces of economic globalization, the Charter process has seen new local coalitions and cross-cultural alliances emerge. Dimensions of local and regional belonging have been strengthened and given voice in the face of economic invasions that have tended to weaken them and render them dependent—usually in the name of interdependence itself!

### **What Brought on the Earth Charter**

What brought on the Earth Charter Movement has been laid out in different ways. Theodore Roszak says that ecological problems cannot “be fully solved, if at all, by the nation-state, the free-trade zone, the military alliance, or the multinational corporation.”<sup>1</sup> These “awkwardly improvised human structures”<sup>2</sup> are powerful, but they aren’t up to the task of addressing their own macroconsequences spread across a humanly dominated biosphere. Some kind of reinvention of inner and outer worlds together is necessary.

Lester Brown’s “take” is that we are looking at the need for an environmental revolution on an order of magnitude that matches the agricultural and industrial revolutions—and necessarily transforms them at the same time. Like the agricultural revolution, the environmental revolution will also dramatically alter population trends. But whereas the agricultural “set the stage for enormous increases in human numbers,” the environmental “will succeed only if it stabilizes population size” in ways that establish “a balance between people and nature.” And in contrast to the industrial revolution, “which was based on a shift to fossil fuels,” the environmental will have to shift away from them, on some other base.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Berry is the most dramatic of these witnesses. History is governed, he says, by overarching movements “that give shape and meaning to life by relating the human venture to the larger destinies of the universe.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Roszak, “Where Psyche Meets Gaia,” *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, and Allen D. Kanner, eds. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Roszak, “Where Psyche Meets Gaia,” *Ecopsychology*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Lester Brown, “Foreword,” *Ecopsychology*, xv.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 1.

Such a movement can be called “the Great Work” of a people and age. And the great work before us is effecting the transition “from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans [are] present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.”<sup>5</sup> Berry does not shrink from describing this as nothing less than a shift of geological ages: from the Cenozoic, with its “irrational exuberance”<sup>6</sup> of life forms, to either the Technozoic, which essentially places the human as subject *vis-à-vis* all else as object, and extends present arrangements, or the Ecozoic, that age of mutually enhancing relationships struck between humans and the rest of the community of life.

Among Christian ethicists, Douglas Sturm approaches Berry’s scale. The key point in Sturm’s formidable essay on the Earth Charter, titled: “Identity and Otherness: Summons to a New Axial Age (Perspectives on the Earth Charter Movement),”<sup>7</sup> is that the recent turn to human subjectivity in ethics and society, as expressed in the varied modalities of modernity, was a subjectivity that saw all else—the supposedly external world—as fair game for manipulation, whether non-human or human. Thus an Enlightenment movement that both sought and proclaimed human liberation led by emancipated reason ended up organizing patterns of widespread domination of nature and of peoples considered “close to nature.”<sup>8</sup> The need, Sturm argues, is for intersubjectivity, a subjectivity that understands relations to be profoundly internal, since interdependency is our lot at every level and the

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<sup>5</sup> Berry, *The Great Work*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> With apologies to Alan Greenspan for using his phrase (about stock market behavior) completely out of context.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Sturm, “Identity and Otherness: Summons to a New Axial Age (Perspective on the Earth Charter Movement),” an essay published by the Forum on Religion and Ecology, c/o Department of Religion, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA 17837.

<sup>8</sup> It might be noted that Dietrich Bonhoeffer surmised much the same in the 1940s. What he calls “Euro-American” civilization and its neo-European extensions around the globe used the “emancipated” reason of the Enlightenment to trumpet its own autonomy in an expansionist journey of idolatrous confidence in progress and conquest, elaborated as an ethic of civilization. The Western aim, writes Bonhoeffer, is to be independent of nature. And it issues in what he calls “a new spirit,” “the spirit of the forcible subjugation of nature beneath the rule of the thinking and experimenting man.” The outcome is technology as “an end in itself” with “a soul of its own.” Its symbol “is the machine, the embodiment of the violation and exploitation of nature.” See his *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 98.



fiery core of ancient stars our origin. The Earth Charter is premised on such intersubjectivity as this.<sup>9</sup>

### **What's at Stake in the Earth Charter – Sustainable Community**

Finally, to understand the meaning of the Earth Charter, let's look at what's at stake in its implementation by a focus on one area: sustainable development or sustainable community? The going lingo for the ways of global capitalism is "globalization," meaning the process of an increasingly porous movement of information, money, goods, images, ideas, and people across countries and cultures, driven above all by the progressive integration of all these elements into a single geopolitical economy. The players are many but most prominent are global corporations.

Most discussions of "sustainable development" assume the globalizing economy of corporate capitalism and seek to "green" that. That is, sustainable development is the necessary effort to wrap the global environment around the global economy in such a way that both economy and environment are sustained.

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Creation as a community has not only been the aged and enduring dream; it has been a basic religious, moral, even metaphysical dream.

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The Earth Charter, too, uses the language of "sustainable development." Yet most of its spirit and direction accord with what might better be called "sustainable community." Sustainable community works on the principle of subsidiarity and asks how you wrap both economy and environment around local communities and bio-regions. In contrast to the ways of globalization as current corporate capitalism, even "greened" corporate capitalism, sustainable community tries to preserve or create the following: greater economic self-sufficiency locally and regionally, with a view to the bio-regions

themselves as basic to human organization; agriculture appropriate to regions and in the hands of local owners and workers using local knowledge and crop varieties, with ability to save their own seeds and treat their own plants and soils with their own products; the preservation of local and regional

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<sup>9</sup> Sturm, "Identity and Otherness," 8-9.

traditions, language, and cultures and a resistance to global homogenization of culture and values; a revival of religious life and a sense of the sacred, *vis a vis* a present way of life that leeches the sacred from the everyday and has no sense of mystery because it reduces life to the utilitarian; the repair of the moral fiber of society on some terms other than sovereign consumerism; resistance to the commodification of all things, including knowledge; the internalization of costs to the local, regional, and global environment in the price of goods; and the protection of ecosystems and the cultivation of Earth, in the language of the Charter, as “a sacred trust held in common.”

All this is global democratic community, not nativist localism. That is, it is not asking *whether* to “globalize,” but *how*. And its answer—democratic community democratically arrived at—is *global* community by virtue of both its planetary consciousness and the impressive networking of citizens around the world made possible by electronic globalization. But adherents of sustainable community have this, rather than “development” in mind, because they are not trying to wrap the global environment around the integrating global corporate economy. They are asking, “what makes for healthy community on successive levels—local, regional, sometimes national, and global—and how do we wrap both economy and environment around that, aware that Earth’s requirements are fundamental?” They are attentive to questions that global capitalism, even as sustainable development, rarely asks: namely, what are the essential bonds of human community and culture, as well as the bonds of the human with the more-than-human world; and what is the meaning of such primal bonds for the rendering of a healthy concrete way of life? What is cultural wealth and biological wealth and how are they sustained in the places people live with the rest of the community of life?

Sustainable community is, not, however, a panacea. Panaceas don’t exist. Nonetheless, the direction of the Earth Charter itself is correct; namely, a communitarian understanding of nature, society, even cosmos. Sustainable community offers a far more promising vision of the future than sustainable development as the green version of global capitalism. May the Earth Charter guide us in this and other areas of our lives.





## Center for Ecozoic Studies

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### Statement of Purpose

The Center for Ecozoic Studies contributes through education and research to the realization of the Ecozoic Era. CES emphasizes dreaming and story telling as ways of enabling the creative advance needed to bring into being understandings for a new mode of human civilizational presence. CES believes we live in a meaningful, continuously evolving universe. In such a universe, the Ecozoic Era is a process concept—not something to be arrived at, but something ever to be created. Its hallmarks are inclusiveness, interdependence, and celebration; communion, differentiation, and interiority; and sensitivity, adaptability and responsibility. It crucially involves more just and cooperative relationships among humans, as well as transformed relationships of humans with the larger natural world.

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## Submissions for Publication

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We invite you to share with us your dream experiences of the Ecozoic Era and your stories of awakening and development. We also invite you to share your insights regarding steps that may be taken to move toward the Ecozoic.

To submit an article for publication, send a double-spaced printed copy of the article and the electronic file(s) on diskette (formatted for PC) to Center for Ecozoic Studies, 2516 Wittingham Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27516, U.S.A. Alternatively, you may e-mail your submission to [ecozoic@mindspring.com](mailto:ecozoic@mindspring.com). In addition, please send your contact information and a brief biographical description of yourself that we may use to identify you to our readers.

# The Ecozoic Reader

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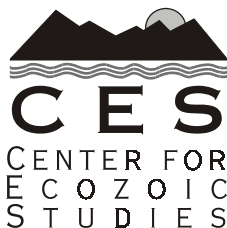
Volume 2, Number 1

Fall 2001

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|  |    |
|--|----|
| Earth Charter Meditation .....                                   | 1  |
| <i>Sue Gould</i>   |    |
| The Earth Charter: Building a Global Culture of Peace .....      | 3  |
| <i>Steven C. Rockefeller</i>                                     |    |
| Earth Charter in Kazakhstan .....                                | 13 |
| <i>Marina Bakhnova and Sergey Shafarenko</i>                     |    |
| From the Love of Money to the Love of Life .....                 | 19 |
| <i>David C. Korten</i>   |    |
| Something Great Out of Nothing .....                             | 27 |
| <i>Catherine Browning</i>  |    |
| A Note on Teaching the Earth Charter to Youth .....              | 31 |
| <i>April Ambrose</i>   |    |
| The Earth Charter, Globalization and Sustainable Community ..... | 37 |
| <i>Larry Rasmussen</i>   |    |

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