

[www.e-Dialogues.ca](http://www.e-Dialogues.ca)  
Royal Roads University

## **Spirituality and Sustainability: Who Cares?**

June 17, 19, 21, 2002  
Moderated by Ann Dale

### **Participants**

**Ann Dale**, Professor, Science, Technology & Environment Division, Royal Roads University, BC  
**Paul Allison**, Craftsman Gardener and Horticultural Therapy Consultant, Royal Roads University  
**Ann Cowan**, North Growth Management Director of Programs, Simon Fraser University  
**Elaine Dale**, Departmental Assistant, Secretary of State, Industry Canada  
**Heather Eaton**, Professor, Department of Theology, Saint Paul University  
**Sue Freeze**  
**Heather Hamilton**, Executive Coordinator, Canadian Biodiversity Institute  
**John Hasell**, Organizational Development Facilitator, John Hasell Ventures  
**Kasitsa Jacobs**, Kahnawake Environment Office  
**Rick Kool**, Government Liaison Officer, Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection  
**Nina-Marie Lister**, Assistant Professor, School of Urban & Regional Planning, Ryerson University  
**Lesley Moody**, Environmental Health Officer, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada  
**Jenny Onyx**, Associate Professor, School of Management, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia  
**Michael Picard**, Associate Faculty, Royal Roads University  
**Henry Regier**, Professor Emeritus of Zoology, University of Toronto  
**Patricia Roberts-Pichette**, Former Director, Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network (EMAN), and Executive Secretary, Canada's Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Program  
**Rick Searle**, Associate Faculty, Royal Roads University, and Department of Geography, University of Victoria  
**Jennie Sparkes**, Parks Canada  
**Jay Violini**  
**Cory Waters**, Executive Director, City Green

**Day One:** How does Sustainability relate to Spirituality?

**Day Two:** How does Spirituality relate to Sustainability?

**Day Three:** The Connections - Spirituality & Sustainable Development

### **Dialogue - Day One: How does Sustainability relate to Spirituality?**

---

#### **Ann Dale**

Welcome every one, we have a distinguished group of people with a wide diversity of ideas and experience. The format of this dialogue will be a little different, in that I will use a more directed form of moderation given our numbers. To begin, I be moderating

by asking each you to comment on a particular point, or a question. As well, when referring to a point from one of your colleagues, it is helpful to use their name. Following our getting to know one another, we will then open the dialogue to a free-flow of conversation. Now, let's rock and roll. What does spirituality mean to you? Rick, Heather, Michael and Henry.

---

### **Rick Kool**

Spirituality....to me, this refers to being willing to engage with the uncertainty of meaning in the world that goes beyond the human. To feel a sacredness in things that is a given rather than an assigned. To deal with the transcendent at the same time that we deal with the temporal... all of these things are part of my understanding of spirituality. This is also to say that religion in an organized framework can help provide me with tools for approaching the sacred and may help me, through words and ritual to move my understandings forward.

---

### **Heather Eaton**

Spirituality - is a deep engagement with life, and involves becoming aware of dimensions of life that are not immediately apparent - it means discovering, as Teilhard de Chardin said, that we live in a divine milieu, that there is a sacredness to life. Spirituality is experienced, and reflection is a secondary process, spirituality is expressed through symbolic language or arts, and takes the custom and culture of its surroundings. Spirituality is a horizon of meaning, with ultimate values, which then put demands on one's life. Although deeply personal it is not individualistic. Finally, spirituality is expressed - in all traditions - as related to 'wonder and awe' or marveling at existence, and a recognition of sacredness in all life and thus a protection of existence - which translates into justice.

---

### **Michael Picard**

If sustainability implies an obligation to so conduct ourselves today that future human generations are not deprived by our actions of enjoyment of natural and social goods, then sustainability is fundamentally an ethical notion, an obligation. The relation of spirituality to sustainability would therefore depend upon whether or not ethics has a spiritual basis. Without commenting on that great question, I would only note that there are ethical and upright people would not describe themselves as spiritual. As a final point, I would note that there is no reason to restrict the future generations to whom our obligations are owed to human generations. If we owe today any obligations to animals, plants, life systems, even nature itself, then surely we owe similar obligations to future generations of all life forms. In that case, the spiritual basis of ethics may have more to do with our relation to nature than to our relation to each other.

---

**Henry Regier**

I'm not a practiced, expert spiritual person. Full stop. So as an amateur verging on agnosticism on this issue as any others, spirituality goes beyond the material, cognitive, emotional. My spirituality doesn't presuppose that any particular spirit is a 'good spirit.

---

**Jenny Onyx**

Henry does not presuppose a good spirit?? To me the spiritual is beyond "good" and "bad". In fact I suspect that it is beyond all binary opposites. It simply IS. Therefore of course impossible to use the normal scientific method to know. Hence it's bad scientific press.

---

**John Hasell**

Here's my take on spirituality: The essence of being – what lies beyond the physical and mechanical aspect of living and reproducing. The natural expression of one's own higher spirit, such as the intuitive knowledge of truth, of sensitivity to the unity of life and, many would add, attentiveness to God's will.

---

**Heather Eaton**

John - hello - and a comment to your posting. Why is the spirit 'beyond' the physical? For myself it is embedded within the physical, and the split between material and spirituality reality is part of Greek dualistic thinking.

---

**John Hasell**

In reply to Heather, What I meant by "beyond the physical" was that spirituality is an added dimension. It can only be experienced through one's physical body and mind, but it is not, in itself physical. It is transcendental and enriches the mere physical appreciation of the worlds about us.

---

**Jenny Onyx**

Spirituality is hard to define, but for me it is partly the sense of deep connection with each other and with our mother planet.

---

**Ann Dale**

Paul, do you want to add your views on what spirituality means to you? and Ann Cowan.

---

**Paul Allison**

Just came in from the garden. Firstly let me wish everyone a Happy Solstice week (How can you tell I am a gardener)!

During the past twenty years of practice as a horticultural therapist I have observed an important link between the human spirit and Nature. The ability for nature to allow the mind to rest through involuntary fascination has provided a unique tool to heal the spirit of many people confined in our institutions. The word 'meaningful' is mentioned many times by the people I work with and the sense of co-creating in the environment has raised the spirits of many clients involved in horticultural therapy programming.

**Ann Cowan** on June 17, 2002, 01:54 PM: Spirituality would I guess mean possessing the quality of spirit which comes from the word for breath--the difference between life and death is I guess, in a very basic sense, that we are breathing, taking in breath, inspiration--and why so many practices which seek to unite mind and body begin with exercises related to mindfulness of breathing. That said, what does spirituality mean to me? Probably the mindful and physical attempt at consciousness and all that consciousness implies.

---

**Ann Dale**

Kat, what does spirituality mean to you?

---

**Kasitsa Jacobs**

Skennenkowa. To me spirituality is the deep connection we possess with our Mother the Earth and all of her children. It is felt in our respect of all our brothers and sisters of creation, of our ancestors and of the faces yet to come.

---

**Elaine Dale**

To me, spirituality is a deep sense of connectedness, of oneness, to a collectivity. The collectivity may be physical in nature (e.g., a group of people, a place) or not physical (e.g., a belief).

---

**Lesley Moody**

I think spirituality is as unique as the fingerprints each of us has. We have as masses, permitted a few people with some agenda to formulate a dogma and then apply it to great numbers of peoples usually related to geographic regions of the earth. Why if there exists such diversity in the human physical form have we settled for just a few definitions of the spiritual form that exists within each human?

---

**Rick Searle**

I agree with those who have defined spirituality in terms of essence, of Ground of Being, etc. I think spirituality manifests itself in ordinary life as two grand questions: Who am I? and Why am I here? It is these questions, which propel us on an inner journey that results in living an examined life. In sum, spirituality is really a search for personal meaning, or maybe more properly, the creation of personal meaning from what might otherwise pass as the simple chaos and flux of things. Thoughts?

---

**Nina-Marie Lister**

Hello everyone. I am very glad to have been invited to participate in this exciting conversation. I think this is a timely topic and one worthy of inspired discussion. My thoughts on spirituality... well, I am not a scholar of religion to be sure (although I have to credit some of my thinking about this to a good friend and colleague who \*is\* -- Pamela Klassen!).

I think that in modern times and in western culture we have pretty much separated "religious" from "spirituality", yet the two for me and others are not entirely separate, or at least I see them as part of blurry continuum. "Spirituality" seems to me to be central to the spirit, derived from one's soul, which would mean according to this tentative definition, that you'd have to believe in the concept of a soul or a spirit to be spiritual or experience something this way. Yet Heather's comments resonate for me, in that while spirituality seems to be derived from the individual self, it is not an exclusively "individualistic" concept. I think it was Rick who made reference earlier to the spiritual experience of nature, which can certainly be shared in the collective. Similarly, my colleague Pamela Klassen (who I referred to above) wrote a book on childbirth and religion, in which she discusses the many ways in which women often perceive, both individually and collectively, childbirth as a spiritual experience... just for a couple of thought-provoking examples!

---

**Cory Waters**

For me, spirituality is an energy that transcends physical experience but can be expressed or find expression in the physical. For humans, it is deeply personal, rooted

in the belief of a common extra-physical connection. I think humans are pretty presumptuous to assume we are the only "spiritual" beings. Indeed, creation itself is deeply spiritual and as we commonly associate spirituality with religion, religion certainly does not hold the monopoly on spiritual experience or expression. As for many gods (polytheism) versus monotheism (one god), or male/female, I think these are perfect examples of the struggle we as humans have to define the spiritual - that we can be presumptive enough to even try to label the "unlabel-able" (sorry). I believe in a divine spirit, One who has indeed set the wheel in motion and who loves all beings so much as to give us the opportunity to exist in this physical world.

---

### **Sue Freeze**

In reply to Ann's question to all. For me, who attempts to live a "simple" life, if indeed there is such a thing, I believe spirituality is mine and everyone else's connectedness to all that exists, even that which we do not recognize or that is beyond our consciousness. This includes an intangible (an Energy, a Creator, a Sustainer, a Great Mystery....) which exists within and without all of us and creation, which is immeasurable and ultimately greater than the sum of its parts. What name we put to that, or however many names, we still are one. Only our quest divides or joins us.

---

### **Rick Searle**

Sue has captured the essence of the debate so well. Kudos to you.

---

### **Ann Dale**

As referenced by Henry, does spirituality mean you also believe in a God?

---

### **Rick Kool**

Ann, the question of belief comes and goes in my life. In fact, for me, belief in God has little to do with religion. My understanding of God has to do with the moral ground of things... and I am always humbled by the brilliant minds that have had such intense and devoted belief that I feel if those with such brilliance had that belief, there must be something there that I need to involve myself in.

---

### **Henry Regier**

Reply to Ann: I'm willing to grant a distinct possibility that there is a Divinity, and wouldn't want to alienate Her.

---

**Heather Eaton**

The question of God... what is God - to feminist God is a verb - an energy, for some a noun - a presence, for others a lawgiver (usually the customs and laws of the given culture are attached to this God, laws about women and men, sexuality, rituals of life and death) But, if God is simply the word used to name the ultimate value or horizon - such as success, consumerism, money, health - or the other gods alive in our culture... not really ultimate values, but acting so in people's lives, what about beauty, truth, justice, equality, ecological sustainability?

---

**Ann Dale**

Henry, you and I once had a conversation about the movement in human beliefs from many gods (polytheism) to monotheism (one god). Your thoughts, and those of everyone on this idea. In other words, is the fact that we no longer 'accept' a diversity of beliefs affecting religions and/or spirituality?

---

**Jay Violini**

I wouldn't say we no longer accept polytheism. People are free to believe what they want but if one form of belief is purported to be the only truth and enforced somehow than people will believe otherwise in private and have basement meetings. We live in a culturally diverse country (Canada) that embraces many expressions and definitions of God. In other parts of the world it is illegal to practice anything other than the state religion but people can believe what they want. The inability to practice what you believe though will have serious consequences on the human spirit and social fabric of the community.

---

**Michael Picard**

On the topic of evolution to monotheism: this is a story of many tellings, each one different. Perhaps all of us have read or heard of the simplistic positivist notions that we start in myth and many gods, move to religion and one god, then advance to science without god, the triumph over myth and religion. This is not history, it is a story we have told ourselves as our history from August Comte on down, and it is cultural and mythological through and through. First, we have not moved beyond multiple gods. I won't refer to the Western penchant of recognizing our neighbor's god as a devil, a fallen divinity. I won't even refer to the trinity or a Mary before there was a nature. I do not refer even to the revival of pagan and Wicca practices, and the multitude of spiritualisms that abound. Within the living, breathing Hindu traditions there are multitudes of gods. The Hindus also evolved from polytheism to monotheism to monism, but they never gave up their many gods. Even their monotheism was not the exclusive sort (take no other gods before me, and smash all their icons) but the inclusive variety.

Your god is the smile of our god. The wind god is the breath of Brahman, the fire god his mouth and his sacred prayers. Brahma is the creator, but Brahma is Vishnu, the preserver. And Siva the destroyer is no different, but his name and image are not the same. There is only one god. There are many gods, each faces and masks of the one. The very earth is god. And the cow too, for she represents the life and nourishing spirit in all.

---

### **Rick Kool**

Of course, belief in God has little to do with things, really... within many traditions, what is important is not belief, but deed. Reading in the Prophet Mica, I think, the question is asked, what does God expect from us... and belief is nowhere in the answer. But the answer has to do with the actions that God expects!

---

### **John Hasell**

I am right beside Rick K.'s assessment. Spirituality has to be rooted in one's search for meaning and the purpose of one's life. Spirituality is a very individual concept even when it defines our links with others.

---

### **Ann Dale**

John, is it like a personal journey, a quest for the Holy Grail? Rick, to comment as well.

---

### **Rick Searle**

I concur with Rick Kool, that is, a belief in God (whatever this is conceived to be) is not fundamental to spirituality. One can be spiritual without being religious. I do not need to believe in God (or Goddess) to experience a deep sense of connection to the Ground of Being. Having said that, I can readily accept that some might call the Ground of Being God. What religion and spirituality may share in common is a profound sense of personal experience, that is, if religion or spirituality are to make any sense, they must be felt at the whole being level. And to your question, Ann, about one or many Gods, I wonder if there is not a deeper question needing to be addressed, that being, the need (?) of humanity to create/conceptualize something greater than themselves to believe in. Why do we do this? Is out of some great existential loneliness? Or out of fear over the unknown? Fear of mortality?



---

**Jay Violini**

Rick S., some believe because they feel that "God" prompts them on this journey and that is the sole reason for their existence. That being, they search for meaning because meaning exists and this quest or desire to know "God" or truth is innate much like your need to eat to replenish your body. Those who do not acknowledge this innate need starve themselves spiritually and die spiritually in the same way one would who does not eat would die physically.

---

**Ann Dale**

There are some general themes emerging, meaning, purpose, maybe it's just all about that, a search for meaning. And some of us may find that meaning in God or for others like me, in the trees, the moon and the stars. Nina-Marie, would you care to comment?

---

**Nina-Marie Lister**

While I do think that "meaning" and "purpose" are related to, and indeed for me very much derived from a sense of spirituality, they are not as Heather points out, requirements of spirituality per se. I think whatever one derives from the individual self or soul (or whatever arises from this sense) might be called "spiritual". In this context, there can be no assumed qualification of the spiritual as the necessarily "good" I would think. Hmmm, I wonder if there is a "pathological" spirituality? To play Devil's advocate (apropos here?) I wonder if international currency traders gain a "spiritual" moment when they make a bundle on falling/rising currencies as a result of some national or global crisis?

---

**Rick Kool**

Ann, at the risk of being rude (but you know I'm not), just how do the trees, moon and stars give you direction as to how to act in the world?

---

**Ann Dale**

In answer to Rick K, and I know you could never be rude, the trees, the moon and the stars give me beauty which gives me the space to reflect, which then brings me to my soul, which directs me.

---

**Henry Regier**

Response to Ann again. I read some disquieting historical stuff recently that might have been interpreted to say that about 2700 BP some Proto-Jewish scholars and priests got together to create for themselves a great heroic narrative as a pre-requisite to recognition as the greatest People of all. And while they were at it, why not assert that there is really only one God, etc.? So last week I asked my friend, a comparative theologian, when he thought the idea of monotheism came to evolving humanity. Did it come once, etc? Darrol didn't choose to enlighten me. I really don't want to be a cynic, but I am a skeptic.

---

**Kasitsa Jacobs**

As Ann D., I also derive my spirituality from the moon, the trees, the thunders, etc... because beyond their beauty, in our Mohawk beliefs they are our family. The moon is our grandmother, the trees are our brothers, the thunders our grandfathers.... By listening to their needs and being grateful for what they offer us (for survival, beauty...) we can find our spiritual connection to them. From this connection we derive how we interact with each other in our daily lives.

---

**Heather Eaton**

The search for meaning can only be one aspect of spirituality -because people find meaning in countless ways. In fact few people do anything that is not meaningless - from justice work to rape camps. Do they all count as spirituality? They cannot for me. They are meaningful, but not just. Consumerism is meaningful to many - but is not spiritual. Spirituality is often defined as the art of living, or as Dorothee Solle says - tell me how you live and I will tell you who your gods are and what depth of spirituality you have?

---

**Jenny Onyx**

Not just purpose or meaning, but unity. The spirit that moves through all things and so connects us, that makes us part of a whole.

---

**Jay Violini**

I also agree with what most everyone says. Trying to define something that is so subjective is an oxymoron, though try we do. It is asking/engaging and feeling the questions to which science cannot provide the answers.

---

**John Hazel**

Yes - It really is a personal journey that is critical to personal growth. I sometimes use the stars to navigate, but in a spiritual sense the unimaginable size of space and the way in which the stars, suns and planets whirl inspire the awe that is part of one's spiritual life and appreciation of that life.

---

**Ann Cowan**

I tend to sympathize with Rick Searle's focus on the two questions who am I? and why am I here? As a child I remember the catechism question "What is the chief end of man? Answer: To glorify god in all things" as being meaningless and probably a waste of time when I could be doing something useful. Now I realize how all encompassing that answer is-- if we have a working definition of God! What does it mean to glorify, and manifest the ideal in all things, I wonder?

---

**Rick Kool**

Is spirituality a means, an end, or something entirely unrelated?

---

**Jay Violini**

Rick K., I believe that spirituality is a means to an unachievable end. If it is meaning, purpose or answers to life's BIG questions (where do I fit in this world) we are searching for then spirituality can enlighten us but there will always remain more questions. GK Chesterton said, "We will never know all of the answers as we do not know all of the questions". Ask, learn, ask, ask, and learn. Knowing absolutely while desirable for some is possible for none but spirituality walks along that path.

---

**Rick Searle**

Jay Violini: I understand your point, and strongly agree with you on the matter of spiritual death. Indeed, I do not think it much of a stretch to say that the environmental, social and economic problems of the world today arise from a spiritual crisis (dis-ease) within humanity. To paraphrase Ralph Waldon Emerson: The reason the world lies broken and in heaps is because man (sic) is disunited within himself.

---

**John Hasell**

I agree that "meaning" is part of the considered life at any level, but when it comes to the spiritual dimension, inspired as it so often is by beauty and awe, the essence comes

back to the most fundamental questions about life. I do not think we invent a "God" to explain this but often use a deity to encompass what we find that lies beyond the works of man. It is this that can inspire us to do and be the best of whatever we are capable of in life.

---

### **Jennie Sparkes**

Spirituality for me, has many of the themes that have already emerged in this dialogue. It is nurturing; it creates a sense of one; it is a personal journey but I also think it is a collective journey. It manifests itself in whom we choose to be as individuals and how those choices merge into our global relationship with all. I believe, and I am no scholar in this area... that the life force (a special form of energy that connects us emotionally, not mentally) that gives us the capacity to be independently functioning life forms is our spirit. This spirit connects each of us to one another and to other forms of life on earth. So going back to Ann's question one or many Gods? Assuming the 'connectivity' of the spirit is true, and that this connective energy is our spirit, which connects us to 'God', and then each living creature is part of God. In this case there would be many representatives of 'God', while at the same time only one 'God'. Both could be true simultaneously.

---

### **Ann Dale**

Some of you have mentioned 'energy'. Einstein believed that the energy of each individual when they die goes to the life of the whole, as my beloved son reminded me many years ago. As well as meaning, reflection, breathing, unity, what about energy?

---

### **Lesley Mood**

Referring to Jenny Onyx - energy running through all things is best described in the scenario relating to Jesus when walking through the crowd he felt energy leave him, he turned and asked who touched him the woman replied by graciously thanking him for the energy she needed. That is spirituality, sustainability the two are giver/receiver. Both were refreshed in an intangible, and to anyone else an incalculable way. Being still so as to listen to the going on of the house within and the goings on of others (houses) if you will.

---

### **Heather Eaton**

Rabbi Heschel says that the question is not, 'why am I here' but what is asked of me? That is the beginning of spiritual awakening. - a movement of energy from the universe to the self He also said that is it standing between earth and sky that we are silenced by the sight and taken out of the cloisters of our own thoughts about God... awakening

to the greatness, and ultimate mystery in which we live - a cosmic energy. He also said that there are two types of religious Gods and two types of spiritualities- the Gods of the philosophers and the Gods of the prophets -the first is about being, and the second is about justice and transforming the world. Both engage our energies, and demand different actions of us in the world - the god of the prophets demands, what Heschel calls, a hysteria about injustices.

---

### **Rick Kool**

Heather, of course Rabbi Heschel is a favorite of mine! Here's one from him: "The deed is the test, the trial, and the risk... The sun goes down, but the deeds go on... Even a single deed generates an endless set of effects, initiating more than the most powerful man is able to master or predict... Gazing soberly at the world man is often overcome with a fear of action, a fear that, without knowledge of God's ways, turns to despair." This connects with Michael's idea, which I also feel deeply, about obligation. We have obligations growing out of our relationship with God or the sense of divinity, to act in ways that are in partnership with the world and with others.

---

### **Ann Cowan**

Energy, life force--- no question in my mind that these are ineffable but real. But they do not imply the same levels of consciousness or sentience that one associates rightly or wrongly as exclusively human. In my definition of spirituality, there is an element of choice and belief that goes beyond mere "being" and beyond consciousness of being. There is an element of responsibility attached to it.

---

### **Jenny Onyx**

Yes, definitely energy...may the force be with you. About the connection between religion and spirituality, I have often been struck by the fact that when I am in the presence of people whom I respect as highly spiritually developed (whatever that means), then they seem to be inhabiting the same territory, even though they come from very different religions. That is, a highly developed Buddhist or Jew or Moslem will say and behave in ways more alike that those of the same faith but less "developed". Which makes me suspect that the paths converge after a time.

---

### **Nina-Marie Lister**

Several people have used the word "energy", sometimes as a surrogate for what might be interpreted as a deity, others for transcendence in a more physical sense. I do think that for me, one of the products or sensations that is derived in "spiritual" moments is a burst of energy. Sometimes it is physical, after meditation or an inspired homily (in or

out of a place of worship!) or perhaps it is a feeling of being part of connected conduit, as in nature, or due possibly to the prescience of another being, a person, animal or other unknowable creature (invisible but "felt"). Reflection and connection are also emergent themes here it would seem.

---

### **Sue Freeze**

In terms of both spirituality and energy, I would love for you all to sit in a pasture here with me and observe a sheep eat a blade of grass. I would love to hear an exchange on: Where did the blade of grass just consumed come from? How did the sheep find that specific blade, and how did the blade find the sheep? How did we arrive here to watch that blade of grass be eaten? How are we related to that blade of grass? I would be interested in seeing where it would bring our commonality and our diversity.

---

### **Henry Regier**

In physics 'energy' means the capability to do work, en - ergo. Some years ago Nina Marie and I played a little what-if game. Physics started with matter and motion, then went on to energy and especially energy, then went on to information as with computers and genomes. Note in John's gospel, in the beginning was the word. But someone also said that God is Love. All kinds -- eros, philia, agape? Physics is now finding altruism as operative within Darwinian natural selection. So is physics approaching spirituality asymptotically? A kind of Teilhardian Omega Point. By the way, I feel spiritually comforted with what I've read from you all so far.

---

### **Rick Kool**

Henry, I've always thought that John got it wrong... In the beginning, God **\*\*did\*\*** something. The deed is Prior to the word, I've always felt. So we're into work right off the bat! And it wasn't only that, in Genesis, God **\*\*did\*\*** something! The new Fox translation talks about "in the beginning of God's creating..." And we see this creation unfolding every day, find our place in it, feel it's holiness (hopefully), and then do what we can to further the unfolding.

---

### **Ann Dale**

I am now opening up the dialogue, simply add and reply to one another, let's see where that takes us.

---

**Rick Kool**

There is no doubt to me that spirituality can be connected to the not good. And that even the most spiritual, or religious, can do amazingly horrible things. This is an empirical statement. Again, the question is in the deed, not the belief or feeling. How we see ourselves in relationship to others and to the world takes us out of a spiritual inwardness into the necessary actions in the social sphere.

---

**Ann Dale**

What are the commonalities between the world's religions, if any?

---

**Jay Violini**

Commonalities will be general across some religions and more specific between others. Religions generally try and provide a map on how one should live their life. Some religious teachings are very similar in how one ought to live and also in that which they ought to worship. Again though, I see religions as prescribing social and personal imperatives on how to conduct oneself in thought, word and deed.

---

**Jay Violini**

I should also add that many religions also tell stories and recount "history" in addition to prescribing social and personal imperatives.

---

**Paul Allison**

Ann wrote: What are the commonalities between the world's religions, if any? How about the role of the garden? e.g. \*Garden of Eden for Christians \*Zen gardens for Buddhists \*Islam - The word paradise comes from the Persian for an enclosed garden. The nature found in gardens seems to strike at the very heart of religions and spirituality.

---

**Cory Waters**

World religions express themselves as a set of rules for the masses. They commonly provide a road map to the Promised Land. Unfortunately, each one has so many times claimed exclusivity or monopoly, which is in my view extremely unspiritual and denies the potential in us all, and in our potential to transcend the physical. Perhaps more importantly, they exist to ensure that people are reminded to take time to go out to the

garden during solstice, and that there is magnificent spirit healing to be derived from the energies of other organisms.

---

### **Rick Kool**

Cory, well put... except that I don't think it fair to say that **\*\*all\*** religions have made claims for monopoly on truth... unless we're talking about capitalism, perhaps.

---

### **Lesley Moody**

Commonalities - It appears that each organized religion strives to elevate the present state of humans to something perceived of greater worth or held at a bar larger than life itself. That may be the fall of religion in terms of people losing ground spiritually. The individual inner sanctum is relegated to the depths of the organism and the outside organized belief system prevails. Added to that, the circumstance of society, earning a living, raising offspring, trying desperately to find fulfillment as a more complete human keeps individuals too busy to stand still or be still and give way to their spiritual direction.

---

### **Ann Dale**

Rick S., and others, connection seems to be important. Why do we become disconnected from ourselves, and I guess, from your wise words that have so influenced me, from our spirituality? Henry and Sue, any thoughts?

---

### **Sue Freeze**

Ann, In terms of becoming disconnected from ourselves, I believe it comes as a result of seeing ourselves as separated and isolated from the All Is One concept. When we see ourselves, as islands unto ourselves our lives become huge individual dramas. When we begin to see that we are connected to all of humanity, that even the trees, the clouds, the birds dwell within us and us within them, I believe we become much less lonely and we begin to, bit by bit reconnect. It also helps me that I believe I and all else have a profound and personal relationship with that Energy, or Creator that I believe to be greater than the sum of its parts.

---

### **Heather Eaton**

Rick K., then 'God' is something that calls humanity beyond despair, this is something in common with all world's religions, is that however the deity is envisaged or culturally clothed, there is a transcendent dimension that calls /draws.. to the human and orients



our lives, our deeds - even more than our thoughts. This is why obligation, duty, justice, ethics, morality are often a core of the world's religions - understood differently from context and era.. and which is so noticeably absent from the current divorce of spirituality from religion, where spirituality has often sprawled into an individual feel-good experience - a high - and the 'classics' would often mistrust these experiences (although not the Sufi's and their dances..) What is also in common with all world's religion is a spirituality of the land, earth, seasons, cosmos, relationship to animals, use of plants and animals, etc.

---

### **Rick Searle**

Whoa! This exchange of ideas is too much for me to keep track of. Not sure who to respond to. So many great ideas. Let me attempt to pull a few together (at least for my own benefit). Energy, ethics, nature, sustainability, etc, all come together in a very simple concept, that of compassion. This arises from the realization that we are truly inter-connected, inter-dependent. As such the joys and sorrows of others are mine as well. It is while in nature, that I deeply experience the sensation of inter-connectedness and it infuses the rest of my life. As an ethic, compassion consoles such things as doing no harm to others to the greatest extent possible. This and other precepts have been articulated by Buddhists and Deep Ecologists alike. And I have found them very helpful to living a spiritual & sustainable life.

---

### **Cory Waters**

Rick K., - absolutely, let me stop talking in absolutes! It is not fair to say "all", and even then, perhaps more accurately to point to a vocal minority within a faith community or religion. Rick S., - I think the problems with society indeed stem from a lack of spirituality, and a disconnection between action and sustainability writ large, as well as a disconnect between our own actions and sustainability of individuals. Having been overwhelmed by the magnitude of the ecological crises facing us all, I turn back to religion as a reminder, and a replenished of faith, that we are not in it alone and have the ability to achieve more than we can ask for or imagine by walking in partnership with the Creator.

---

### **Jay Violini**

Why do we become disconnected? Some would point to the fall of mankind from a Christian perspective in answering that. They would argue that their separation from God alienates them from one another as well and when only in right relation with God can one be in right relation with another. Atheistic evolutionists may argue that we are selfish and in order to survive we must look out for ourselves at all costs (survival of the fittest). At times this will encompass being sociable but it may also require advancing our lives at the expense of another. Many philosophers (Malthus etc.) believe that we

ought not to save the weak or help them out as this is their fate and to do so would disrupt world balance (though some would call it imbalance). Others may argue materialism, greed, pain and suffering etc.

---

### **Rick Searle**

Ann D: My research on the question of how we become disconnected within ourselves has taken me into such seemingly divergent fields as child psychology and anthropology. Paul Shepard in *Nature and Madness* places the problem in a "general, culturally-ratified distortions of childhood, of massive disablement of ontogeny as the basis of irrational and self-destructive attitudes toward the natural environment." For numerous reasons, Western culture has abandoned rituals, practices, etc, that affirm a deeply felt experience of the metaphoric, mysterious and poetic world. Another invaluable source has been "I Amness" by Kent and Nicholls push the analysis further, maintaining that the root to the global crisis is essentially a culturally induced identity crisis. Quite literally, we are taught, from the moment of our birth, not to identify with who we feel ourselves to be but to identify with a construct created by parents, significant adults and society at large (mostly through the mass media). To all this, I must add, that Buddhists might also argue that the disconnect arises during death, in particular the bardo states when the soul is tempted from the path of bliss by illusions and subsequently re-born to work out this karma.

---

### **Rick Kool**

Ann, so how do these two things, spirituality and sustainability, relate? It is fair to say that many of George Bush's friends and advisors are serious churchgoers, spiritual people all... and yet they seem to have a hard time seeing the long-term implications of their actions in the world!

---

### **Ann Dale**

Rick K., thank you for that most provocative question, and bringing spirituality and sustainability together, as did Michael. What are the things in common, what sustains both? For me, diversity, there is no one God, no one truth, but many truths. Comments, everyone.

---

### **Rick Kool**

This connection with the land is essential to both spirituality and sustainability. An elder from Hesquiat, on the west coast of Vancouver Island, once asked a group of Euro-Canadian teachers, "when are you white folks going to start living like you plan on staying here." Here together is the sense of the grounding of this elderly lady, coming

from a people with 7000 years of experience in living in a place, asking us to get on with figuring out how we're going to do the same thing.

---

### **Ann Dale**

In response to Rick Searle, I would say that we know enough about sustainability, we have enough science, what we need is more compassion, towards one another and for other species, the plants, the moon and the stars. Kat, any comments?

---

### **Kasitsa Jacobs**

That's where religion and spirituality differ. Many people who consider themselves to be very religious (G. Bush) have little concept of spirituality. Going through the motions, confessing sins to erase them clean, without actually dealing with the consequences of their daily actions. I don't consider my belief system to be a religion but instead it is a way of life. I think as Michael mentioned, that we all have a responsibility to take ownership of our actions for ourselves, the rest of creation, and the future generations.

---

### **Jennie Sparkes**

A comment for Rick and Ralph Waldon: I also believe that the state of relationships (social and environmental) is a reflection of our souls as individually and collectively. In this sense I view 'soul' to be the relationship that we have with our own life energy. I think people, in general, have stopped listening to their own emotions (what they feel), and focus too much on what they and others think. As a result we feel disconnected from ourselves. Meditation is one means of allowing oneself just to feel, instead of think. I think much of society is afraid to explore their own feelings and those of others. We have made this uncomfortable and in doing so strained our relationships with our souls.

---

### **Cory Waters**

Jennie - thank you for your meditation challenge. In my hubbub of life, I am always amazed at those who can slow themselves down long enough to empty their minds. And perhaps that is the disconnect of our consuming, faster than yesterday society. Adrenaline is the addiction which prevents us from pausing, to look at ourselves more closely and expose the disconnect.

---

### **Michael Picard**

I have now had a chance to read up on the discussion. Certainly a fascinating topic. Here are a few thoughts on themes that have arisen. If god and spirituality are beyond

all dualities, how can spirituality be a basis for ethical action? For ethical action relies upon the duality of good and evil (good and wrong, good and bad; these are all different dualities with complex histories, but something like them is required for ethics, which looks to the good in human conduct) Yet spirituality does go beyond dualisms, at least in a lot of traditions. Another dualism that has come up in discussion is concerned transcendence and going beyond the physical. Typically, to point beyond is to point within, so we don't have to leave our bodies to go beyond the physical. There are dualities in the world. We need to live in the world while we can. But that is not to say that transcendence can't come with us, and indeed transform our actions in the world and relations to others. To transcend and to manifest: the way up and the way down. As Heraclites said, the way up is the way down.

---

### **Heather Eaton**

On the topic of sustainability and spirituality, all world religions are patriarchal and have dominated women to varying degrees, and patriarchy is surprisingly sustainable.. and patriarchy is based on a superior view of man (sic) over nature...with women and nature connected together - and often oppressed together.

---

### **Jay Violini**

Heather, all historical religions were founded at a time in which patriarchal societies reigned. Would it be any different today if a new religion were developed and if so how? Sorry, I am off topic. Heather we can discuss this later.

---

### **Ann Dale**

Heather, I always did wonder as a little girl why God had a gender?

---

### **Heather Eaton**

Ann D., as Mary Daly says, if God is male then male is God, and so it was.. and is.. The image of God is so culturally created.. but the spiritual quest, in metaphors of journey, quest, way of life. etc, remains at the heart of religion - not in the institution often... but on the fringes. That is why so many people are in churches and quite unawakened to a spiritual life, and don't make connections. Bush - God bless America is his license to bomb the Middle East.

---

**John Hasell**

Re Heather's comment - The world's religions, at least from prehistoric times, have been patriarchal entirely because the cultures in which they were established were patriarchal. We cannot blame God for this, only "man" .

---

**Kasitsa Jacobs**

Actually in our worldview, the creator has no gender. The Mohawk people are a matriarchal/ egalitarian society. The first person to come from the sky world to Turtle Island (North America) was a woman. This matriarchal perspective is still present today in my community in the strength of our women... in fact; all people working at our environment office (where I work) are women. That natural nurturing instinct extends beyond our children to encompass care for our surroundings.

---

**Jenny Onyx**

Indeed it appears from accumulating (anthropological) evidence that all or most pre-recorded historical religions were based on the feminine principle and its connection with the earth.

---

**Jay Violini**

Ann D., are you proposing that spiritual people possess certain qualities, compassion being one of them? Do "spiritual" people cultivate certain qualities necessary to behave sustainably?

---

**Ann Dale**

Jay, excellent question, everyone, do "spiritual people cultivate certain qualities necessary to behave sustainably?"

---

**Jenny Onyx**

I just had a thought about the difference between religion, spirituality and sustainability. In a sense religion gives the formula(s) for how to live. Sustainability is about maintaining, sustaining life in all its diversity. But spirituality is about transcendence. So individual in the sense of a journey or path of becoming. But always towards our oneness with all.

---

**Nina-Marie Lister**

I would like to echo Jennie's emphasis on "nurturing" as a derived element (for me) from spirituality. I was reflecting on the differences in what I see as the continuum of "religious" to "spiritual" and it occurred to me that, when I have been in a (Judeo-Christian) place of worship, I have often been instructed in a religious sensibility to be compassionate, kind, loving, caring, etc. but never "nurturing". This I think I derive from spiritual moments in nature, where I perceive other creatures and the earth as connected to myself in more profound way. Ironically, we are urged to "save the earth" in a sort of patronizingly utilitarian way (as if the earth and its complex processes needs us to do this, rather than merely selecting us out of the picture eventually!). Yet in a religious sense, "connection" and nurturing" aren't often heard as "stewardship" or "Caring" in a more anthropocentric sense -- maybe this is due to the human-centered/dominant view of at least Judeo-Christian religions. Spirituality seems broader to me in that it (can) embraces a less anthropocentric view to caring WITH nature.

---

**Rick Kool**

I like Jenny and Nina-Marie's post... there has always been a problem for certain religious groups who believe the end is near, or the Messiah is about to come/return. They tend to not worry too much about the here and now, about caring for creation. This business of sustainability is a practical one. Within the Jewish tradition, one obligation is around the idea of 'tikkun olum', the healing of the world. We have to stay engaged in the work of healing at the physical and emotional and spiritual level, and in some ways watch out from drifting too far.

---

**Jennie Sparkes**

I think Jay has hit on a key link. I believe that truly spiritual people nurture themselves and are compassionate with themselves. This is the starting point (inwards) for creating compassionate relationships externally to oneself.

---

**Ann Dale**

Nurturing, compassion and love, are these the qualities that tie spirituality and sustainability together?

---

**Sue Freeze**

One thing about compassion. True compassion does not come from wanting to help out those less fortunate than ourselves but from realizing our kinship with all beings.

---

## **Rick Kool**

Social learning theorists like Bandura would say that it's hard for us to do something without having a model of that behavior. Modeling is very important! So whom do we have to model sustainability? If we take seriously the woman I quoted earlier, we have to look at the practices of people who have lived sustainably in a place, and for long periods of time. Indigenous peoples may have models of sustainability, running from their spirituality that may help us find a direction for the future.

---

## **Henry Regier**

Some 7 years ago I was in a workshop at the Hastings Institute on evolution and spirituality, or something like that. Ernst Mayr, of Lutheran heritage and now perhaps the ranking Darwinian evolutionist of all time, made a comment that I understood to mean that ultimate reality is evolving. If so, there are no fixed benchmarks that one can hold sustainable. So sustainability must mean something in a reality that cannot be predicted, regardless of how much science... So what is 'sustainability'? The Golden Rule, to all of the rest of evolutionary creation?

---

## **Cory Waters**

And, Rick K, for religions that espouse and promise a better life in the afterworld - it leaves little to inspire us to walk in the path of righteousness, today, especially when we can be absolved for our sins whenever we ask. However, I think the Creator aka Judge knows the difference between simply admonishing from deep-rooted, intrinsic and spiritual change.

---

## **Lesley Moody**

Ann D., yes, love actuates the mind which in turn is manifested in our actions toward ourselves, each other the earth ultimately the energies of the universe. It is individual how much we spend of our love and how much we hoard, (by lack of love's expression).

---

## **John Hasell**

As one who has climbed on Chomalungma "Mother Goddess of the Earth" I really appreciate the need for the nurturing aspect of humanity that women, like my three daughters and my wife and mother have so ably demonstrated to me. However the sooner we are able to unite the qualities and attributes of our respective genders, the sooner we can have environmental offices in which the sex of those working there is no longer significant.

---

**Ann Cowan**

Heather's comments had some resonance with me, as did others pertaining to responsibility and justice--there is an Anglican hymn that asks "What does the Lord require?" The response is "have mercy, seek justice, walk humbly with your god." Humility is another point that others have mentioned. I think that means, not pretending to know all the answers, let alone all the questions--the Chesterton reference--, not imposing a belief system on others and having respect for theirs. But I am concerned that this worry we have about imposing beliefs on others, this notion that we must not judge others by standards unique to our own beliefs, leads down the slippery path of moral relativism. the notion that if some folks think an action is ok then it must be--who are we to judge etc. etc. I think that the notion of sustainability often enters the discussion at this point as we can all agree on some level that we must not harm the earth. Is sustainability an acceptable "religion" for the agnostic?

---

**Heather Eaton**

Rick K., I am not sure that we can look to the past to respond to the present in this case. No era has ever faced this level of ecological disaster, and the magnitude of the ecological crisis is only beginning to come to consciousness. Cultures who lived sustainably in the past could not live the same way today. In my view there is much romanticism about the past, and although there is much needed wisdom from those cultures who live sustainably now, mainly indigenous cultures around the world, a new level of consciousness will be required to respond to the current challenges.

---

**Jay Violini**

I tend to partially agree with Heather on that one and Einstein. Einstein said a new way of thinking is required to solve the problems than the way of thinking that created them (something like that). However not all societies behaved in an unsustainable manner at all times. I'm certain we could draw from historical and current social theoretical models for some wisdom. Lots of people advocate returning to a pre-capitalistic era- (feudal societies) etc as a means of behaving sustainably.

---

**Rick Kool**

Heather, yes I agree... but are there things that we have lost/misplaced not thought of that we can learn from people who do not have a tradition of despoiling their place, and then moving on.



---

## **Michael Picard**

As my previous messages suggest, I think sustainability needs spirituality to sustain it, or perhaps it is spirit sustain itself through us. We need to enter new relations with each other and with nature. This would be easy, but for the dross of deadening cultures holding us back. Whole worldviews must be shed, and transformations occur, before we can break through to what is a new birth. Love is the agent that will deliver this new birth. Love is the midwife. This love is personal, sensitive to the unique situation and suffering of individuals, and attentive to them. And it is impersonal and abstract: it extends to the love of the fecundity of being. As the universal creative force, it is that fecundity, source of the multitudes of gods and life forms. Love that unites us to that source, accessible to each at their core, is the love that will fracture the narrow straightjacket of ego and self-serves, for the abundance of care and action we crave and require.

---

## **Cory Waters**

Michael - indeed, creation needs spirituality to put us back on track. It is one theme that helps me get out of bed. And the social imperative of all the world's religions, just ripe for the planting of ecological seeds. The ecological revolution will be one of spiritual transcendence! If only John were here to sing about it.

---

## **Sue Freeze**

I agree with so much of what I am reading, anything I can add is almost redundant. True, we cannot solve a problem on the same level we created it. Part of our journey is the responsibility of becoming conscious. As we become more so, we expand and become more creative. Part of that needs to be our relationship with history. We have knowledge of prior historical events that give us examples of achieving sustainability, such as Charlemagne's contribution in Europe from the 400s to the turn of the last century, but we seem to lack true historical awareness and understanding.

---

## **Jennie Sparkes**

Two thoughts:

Ann D., love is one of the two true emotions (love and fear). I feel love is the emotion that will guide our actions towards sustainability. Currently we focus (in the west) on 'fear of what we don't have' instead of love for what we do. For sustainability, love must manifest itself as nurturing and compassionate actions towards self (first) and other life. Henry, this is not a text book answer re sustainability, but it feels kind of right for me, sustainability is about a set of ideals and assumptions we hold at a specific point in time that we believe to be true for preserving essential (elements of value) elements of our current or past systems (social and env.) for future generations to enjoy and use. As co-

evolution occurs in societies and nature, our thinking also co-evolves, including our ideals and assumptions about what the future truly needs. This truth about sustainability is typically a result of mental models, and we need as a society to learn how to explore what we feel and incorporate this into our course towards sustainability. How do we trust mental model when they are disconnect from what we feel?

---

### **Ann Dale**

How does one wrap up such a rich dialogue. With some of your own words in summary, maybe spirituality is like breathing, essential to human beings? I look forward to talking with all of you on Wednesday, same time, same place.

---

### **Jay Violini**

I love you all Michael, You have listened to one too many Beatle's songs while reading philosophy.

---

### **John Hasell**

Well we certainly have given ourselves much to think about. Thank goodness, or whoever, for a couple of days to catch up with so many ideas.

## **Day 2: How does Spirituality relate to Sustainability?**

---

### **Ann Dale**

Yesterday we discussed the meaning of spirituality to you. Common themes emerged, such as connection, openness, unity, humility, compassion, meaning, sacredness, justice, transcendence, reflection and perhaps even love. Its dimensions include a search for truth; it is personal; responsibility and obligation; nurturing energy and action. My first question today is why be spiritual?

---

### **Sue Freeze**

Why be spiritual?

Being spiritual defines our direction towards every other being, the Universe, and ourselves. The more we live our spirituality, the more conscious we become and the more our spirituality develops. I would like to connect this to sustainability, because I believe that ultimately a spiritual approach becomes a sustainable approach. When we begin to live truly mindfully, respectfully, compassionately and ethically (all of which are natural outflows of spirituality) we become consequentially aware of our actions, their

short and long term impacts, seeking to minimize them and sustainability becomes inevitable as we flow into living in balance and harmony with our natural world of which we are just one part.

---

## **Ann Dale**

Patricia, as an ecologist, what do you think?

---

## **Patricia Roberts-Pichette**

Ann: My very long reply just went off into the ether. I lost it and cannot repeat it. Given my reaction every year to the beginnings of my garden which is small and very private, a reaction I call spiritual for the want of a better name, the wonder, the life, and the insignificance of what I do in creating the effect. The practical outcome is a care for the productive part of the earth, what gives us our food, clothing and shelter, however indirectly. If we do not care for these processes, and our other activities in light of this, I am not sure there will be many humans in 100 years.

---

## **Henry Regier**

Patricia: Recall that the Man and the Biosphere Program in which we collaborated three decades ago had the ankh as its symbol. I always felt that the ankh was chosen to induce us toward good spirituality, etc.

---

## **Patricia Roberts-Pichette**

Hi Henry: Yes Anhk is a very powerful symbol. You would scarcely believe it, but MAB is getting ready for another second coming -- the use of MAB principles in city planning. A most amazing thing is happening in a small group here in Ottawa -- not sure where it will lead. This may seem a long way from sustainability and spiritually, but really it is not. Many of you will know that Ottawa is going through a new planning exercise -- and is supposed to be placing environment as of great importance, but in the plan it seem to be relegated as an afterthought. Arts and culture are to be paramount. I think that in reality the relationship between arts and culture and environment; and they are intertwined in a livable, sustainable city, but that is not yet seen clearly. Without the environmental concern, and a real concern for the people's spirits, the arts and culture are not going to flourish, as the city fathers would wish, despite grand new buildings. Here perhaps is where we see a role for MAB and its philosophy of inclusivity, of bottom up to meeting top down and influencing one another; of scientists and non-scientists (or if you prefer specialists and non-specialists) all having input and respecting each others viewpoints and finding compromises that will work. Here is where sustainability and spirituality can meet.

---

**John Hasell**

Without meaning to put other creatures down, I believe that one critical attribute we have, as human beings, is our ability to operate on a spiritual plane and to illuminate our thoughts and actions in the light of that. We fail to be fully human if we lack that connectedness with the world about us.

---

**Rick Kool**

I think we had best be careful about simply using the term 'spirituality', as this term can attach to a wide variety of states. As we are trying to understand the relationship with sustainability, we could ask the question, will all spirituality, or indeed all religions, bring us equally well to a practice of sustainability. My short answer to the rhetorical question would likely be, no. That being so, then what do we do?

---

**Ann Dale**

For today, we shall simply 'flow' with one another, so think of yourselves as sitting on a dock outside, on a beautiful lake, listening to the loons, the sun is going down, and we are drinking fine wine and ice cold beer.

---

**Rick Kool**

Or better, Ann, given the reality of most of the world's situation, we're sitting on the edge of a toxic waste site, hungry, watching television showing us a world we don't, and can never likely know. And now think about sustainability and spirituality.

---

**Ann Dale**

Rick K., I need to have beauty around me to think, I guess I would be one of the first casualties in a toxic world.

---

**Lesley Moody**

Hi Rick K., Wow...I am too much of an optimist to do lunch at the edge of a toxic waste site. Rather, lets use our spirituality to take us out to lunch at the edge of the lake as Ann stated for it is in our spiritual potential that we will arrive at that friendly compassionate place.

---

**Heather Eaton**

Why be spiritual? Is there a choice? Spirituality is a dimension of existence, and we are physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual beings. The question is, as I see it, why become conscious of the dimension of spirituality.

---

**Jenny Onyx**

Why be spiritual? Because we have no choice if we are to really live, grow, become who we really are and to live in harmony with others and with the planet. It gives me an incredible awareness of my connectedness, and of the absolute imperative to honour the earth and its cycles of life.

---

**Paul Allison**

Why be spiritual? Perhaps so we can experience what you listed Ann: the connection, openness, unity, humility, compassion, meaning, sacredness, justice, transcendence, reflection and perhaps even love. Spirituality's dimensions include a search for truth; it is personal; responsibility and obligation; nurturing energy and action!

Boy wouldn't it be a shame to spend an entire lifetime on this planet without exploring these gifts!

---

**Heather Eaton**

Paul, it is not either or. It is more that everything is changing, and our perception of reality is an illusion much of the time. It is connected to the teachings on detachment, an inner peace that can flow with change. This fits well with aspects of chaos theory, and with the ongoing creativity of life systems. It also fits with the teachings of any spiritual tradition I know, and I know a few, that simplicity of lifestyle is the only authentic way to live a spiritual life.

---

**Henry Regier**

Re Rick Kool's caution and Heather Eaton's of Monday: I imagine a spirit world as part of the noosphere that is even more complex and diverse than the biosphere. I need a guide.

---

**Michael Picard**

Why be spiritual? I will take that as: why take to spirituality as a route to sustainability? Spirituality at first blush seems so individual and subjective, so ineffable, as to be

confined wholly to the personal imperative of sustainability, which is our need to effect some degree of transformation in our private habits, lifestyles and consumer patterns. Perhaps we feel the key to changing these external facts is generating new thinking, new inner patterns of feeling and belief. Developing our spirituality seems like one way to bring about this kind of transformation, which is never as quick, easy or dramatic as words like “spirituality” and “transformation” unfortunately suggest. Yet I wonder whether, beyond the personal imperative, there isn’t a social aspect of spirituality we should bring into the discussion, to relate it to the social imperative.

---

### **Jay Violini**

What itches at me the most is if spirituality is a necessary prerequisite to behaving sustainably than how do we foster spiritual growth. We have discussed the passions (love, compassion, hope, reverence etc.) as being spiritual. How do we cultivate these passions, which are essential to achieve sustainability? I suppose we could argue that simply be behaving in the manner of the good passion will develop the habits essential to sustainable behavior.

---

### **Rick Kool**

Michael, is spirituality and its development a necessary condition for moving us towards sustainability... a sufficient condition... or really a sideline that may or may not be important? You know, I work with people from the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, and I'm not always feeling a strong spiritual connection there!

---

### **Jay Violini**

Michael, I see spirituality as being very social. It represents our sense of participation and membership in humanity and a world much larger than ourselves.

---

### **Michael Picard**

Good question, Rick, I wish I knew. I don’t think it so easy to abstractly condition one on the other. Who’s spirituality? Sustainability of what? Some individual becoming enlightened obviously won’t transform the multitude of social practices that need to change for sustainability to be achieved or advanced. A spiritual society (and I am not sure there is such a thing) doesn’t by its nature have no waste. Some spiritual practices, like burning corpses on wood fires on the banks of the river Ganges, are polluting as well as sacred.

---

**Rick Kool**

Michael, life = wastes, so waste, or the burning of bodies is really not too important. What is important is that we are living beyond the means of nature and most organized religions are just now figuring out what that means and what they should be doing about it. Here, I think religions, with identified statements of belief and action, should be able to help us. We are NOT to be greedy; we are NOT to diminish the ability of the earth to provide for all of life... things like that.

---

**Heather Eaton**

Is cultivating a spiritual practice that teaches us to see the world through new eyes, through the eyes of beauty, truth, justice, wholeness, and wonder. How can this be an option in our time?

One problem or cause of the ecological crisis is the inability to see the earth through awakened spiritual senses, thus sustainability looks like resources management rather than a wondrous and even sacred reality.

---

**Jay Violini**

Heather,

I don't think being spiritual requires sacrificing all luxuries of life. Robert Solomon states: spirituality should not be confused with the renunciation of the material, sensual or social joys of life. It does not require becoming a hermit, an eccentric or ascetic. It does not mean solitude." I don't think you have to alter your worldview completely like St. Francis to grow spiritually and transform one's life.

---

**Heather Eaton**

Jay - it is interesting that you interpret simplicity as giving up luxury, or as sacrifice. These are concepts that are not really about simplicity. Where do greed and luxury connect? Can we take more than we need?

As to the point about worldview, I think it makes a great deal of difference what beliefs and ideas we have about the world or earth and how we act in it. We live in a radically anthropocentric worldview, one that does not value the natural world except as resources, but mainly for profit extraction. And here we are, barely able to bring this to consciousness in a real and effective way. We live in a world where women are not believed to be of equal value to men, and there are treated thus.

---

**Nina-Marie Lister**

To be spiritual is to engage the complexity of humanity. And to do, I think it demands an exploration of our connections with/in the biosphere, or as Henry says, the noosphere, which I too imagine and expect is vastly more complex. Our (uncharted!) brains and our spirits seem to me to be a potential guide here, but often we have to open them using means and ways that much of our Western (industrialist, Newtonian, etc.) training doesn't let us even imagine exist! E.g. meditation, dream-time, etc. -- pathways that other cultures such as First Nations or "lost cultures" seem to have a good sense of...

---

**Paul Allison**

Is the Buddhist philosophy of impermanence in direct contrast with sustainability or is impermanence the only thing sustainable?

---

**Nina-Marie Lister**

Ah Paul, there's the rub! It seems to me that most of what we have screwed up in the North and the West is based on our efforts to resist impermanence through our obsession (insistence) on dominance and control, a love of the static I suppose. I don't know about Buddhism, but I would argue that accepting impermanence, if you understand it as dynamic change, is a prerequisite to behaving sustainably. If we accept Ann D's definition (which I use) as SD = reconciliation of the three imperatives, then accepting dynamic change is a key step in the reconciliation process. Giving up control and going with the flow (of the geese, the wine or the dock...)!

---

**Sue Freeze**

Hi Rick K., I agree with what you say about using the term "spirituality" - it would be better if we had a common definition we could all work within, but maybe if we did our creativity would suffer. Rick and Ann's locations for this discussion are both valid. Thankfully we have oases we can go to for respite and renewal, for if we did not, how could we ever find the strength and courage to continue on, trying to enact our lives with any optimism?

---

**Rick Kool**

Hi Sue... for me, not optimism, but hopefulness, is an obligation that I feel we carry as part of our price for living. As Saul Bellow wrote in Herzog, "Don't cry you idiot! Live or die, but don't poison everything!"



---

**Ann Dale**

Hmmn, as a very jet-lagged moderator now in Ottawa, and dealing with humidity, you guys are re-energizing me. What about impermanence?

---

**Rick Searle**

The question of how do we foster spiritual growth is a very intriguing one. It is not unlike asking, "can worldviews be shifted?" I won't pursue this one. On the former question, I believe that spiritual growth can be fostered. First, as someone has already noted, the spiritual thirst is innate to being human (and I think our species cultural evolution bares this out). Secondly, there is a wealth of excellent research and writing on the power of transformative learning to facilitate deep questioning of personal and collective assumptions, beliefs and attitudes, many of which are spiritual in nature. The key seems to be to find a point of entry with someone, whether that is a love for gardening, picnics in a city park, or sunsets as seen from a high-rise. The point of entry opens the potential to engage the other in a process of learning centered on posing and pursuing worth-knowing questions, entering into dialogue and for reflection/contemplation. I have used these techniques, both in my work and informally, and have found them extremely powerful.

---

**Jenny Onyx**

I want to repeat for you my experience a few years ago when I attended an inter-faith symposium held at a Buddhist retreat. The papers and discussants were all male. I put up a submission from the audience that was applauded by the audience but largely ignored by the panel of male experts from various religions: "The issue I refer to concerns the need to restore a balance between what most philosophical systems refer to as the male principle and the female principle...Recent research points to a universal Goddess centered religion in all our pre-histories...focused on the mysteries of birth, life and death, fertility, the relationship between the phases of the moon and of the sun and of all the cycles of nature including that of human beings...constantly emphasized the harmony of all nature including the harmony of the birth and decay and of renewal...humans are of the earth and must honor and respect her.

All modern religious traditions appear to have emerged at the point in prehistory of the Patriarchal domination. The impact of this was, of course profound. Of particular relevance ...was the shift in the relationship between men and women on the one hand and between humankind and nature on the other. Nature was no longer the mother who nurtured but a set of resources to be exploited. The mind was superior to nature and therefore man designed technology to control land and subjugate nature. The cycle of life, death and rebirth was interrupted and death and decay became fearsome evil things to be avoided and ultimately conquered. But in using nature we also destroy it.

Because women were largely identified with nature, they too became objects of exploitation, ...but also feared as being associated with death and fall from Grace.... while none of this is made explicit in modern theological discussions, nevertheless the patriarchal prerogative remains strong..... If we are to survive as a planet and to repair our relations with each other we all, men and women, within all religious traditions, need to seek a better understanding of and reverence for the feminine principle, and the wisdom of both men and women." I think the failure of many religions to address sustainability comes from this disconnection.

---

### **Michael Picard**

In response to Jenny, Interesting narrative, Jenny. I was always impressed how the female principle was suppressed in philosophy, in the West decisively with Aristotle. For him, ultimate reality contained the things we see before us, as opposed to invisible higher realms Plato refers to. Every individual substance was a composite of form and matter. Although these are relative terms, form or idea is coded masculine and matter as feminine. Completely formless matter, which cannot exist of itself, is feminine, unknowable, infinite, and indefinite. The form is the seed, it is male, it is knowing. It alone passes the life form from parent to offspring; the mother contributes only the lifeless matter (like soil). It is all very objectionable to restate like this, but it is amazing how his entire metaphysics and logic are framed in a gender specific manner.

---

### **Henry Regier**

Jenny Onyx: Concerning the female in all of us but more in some than in others like me! I have worked on environmental issues in the Great Lakes Basin for almost 5 decades. Reflecting on all this in recent years I have a sense that women more than men have guided our joint ways toward sustainability. I've been publishing that view for some years and have yet to receive a contradictory response. On balance, endocrine disruptors now loose in our Basin ecosystem may have a feminizing effect so that may be reason for hope.

---

### **Ann Dale**

Points of entry, the ankh, yeah gods, how can I keep up. It seems to me connection is important, with nature, with others and each other. And place (especially gardens) and nature writ large appear to connect many of us to our spirituality. Jenny, any thoughts on the power of place as a possible 'point of entry'.

---

## **Jenny Onyx**

The power of place as a point of entry and the impossibility of being spiritual in a toxic waste dump???? Not long ago I visited "Smokey Mountain" which is the municipal rubbish dump in Manila where a whole village has its living. The place is a swarm of children and people focused on etching a living from the rubbish, much of it toxic. There was no begging, but the most powerful sense of human spirit of cheerfulness and determination to find the positive in life, in the midst of what must surely be the "poorest of the poor". I was profoundly moved...it was indeed a spiritual experience.

---

## **John Hasell**

In my workshops, particularly when dealing with Team Building or Communications, I often bring out my WIIFHH Meter (What's In It For Him/Her) or Motivational Monitor. This finely calibrated instrument has a needle that swings along a scale that reads from Altruism at one end to Selfishness at the other. It is designed on the theory that nobody does anything unless there is something in it for them. This applies to anyone, including Mother Teresa and Idi Amin. All voluntary and involuntary actions are driven by perceived needs of one kind or another. Anything that helps us to identify the motivations of ourselves and of others is a most valuable thing to have. A WHIFHH Meter is priceless! Inputs are provided to the WIIFHH Meter at all levels of Maslow's Hierarchy. The need to breath, maintain an equitable temperature and to drink and eat are all assessed at the basic level and the need for self-actualization is assessed at the topmost level. The instrument also has a complete range of time horizons built in which are very short at the lowermost levels and tend to extend further and further into the future at the upper levels. (Unfortunately the time horizons for politicians often seem to get stuck at the four-year point after the last election!) A bell rings on the more expensive models of the Motivational Monitor when an intended action will cause harm. Unfortunately this added function is often inaccurate due to the laws of unintended consequences, and it is often overridden by the forces of our baser instincts. My WIIFHH Meter tells me that I recognize my obligation to meet my present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. I appreciate that these future needs include social, economic and other developments many of which it is impossible to imagine, let alone determine accurately. We need to provide options for future developments of all kinds. Why I bring this up is the concept that hitting the Spirituality button on our personal WIIFHH Meters helps us to tune out the Idi Amin tendencies we have and emphasizes the more saintly aspects of ourselves. This still does not answer the critical question as to how we get sufficient numbers to act in concert to make the necessary changes in our way of life to ensure a sustainable future.

---

## **Rick Kool**

John, can we get a set of those meters of yours sent to the Cabinet in Victoria?

---

**Jennie Sparkes**

Hi everyone. I think you cannot 'not' be spiritual. I believe every living entity has a spirit (in an energy form as we spoke of on Monday), which is the 'spark' that ignites the processes that drive our bodies, minds and all life around us. It is my feeling that you can only deny that you are a spiritual being, but that does not stop you from being one. Perhaps this is one of the links that spirituality has with sustainability. People deny too many things to make their lives comfortable. We often use science to justify why it is OK to act or behave in certain ways. Because science is still struggling with the concept of souls/ spirits/afterlife it makes it easy for us to deny its' existence. As long as we deny who we are (spiritual being in many different 'bodily forms') we will deny our relationships with others and nature. Without this sense of connectedness to 'life' and life-yet-to-be we have no incentive to be stewards and act in sustainable ways.

---

**Rick Kool**

I agree with Jennie that connection to life and the future is pretty critical to our feeling that we need to act in certain ways in order to allow the simple possibility of future to unfold. The difficulty has been, as Herman Daily points out, that in the last 50 years the world has gone from being essentially empty of humans to essentially full, and now we're trying to find, in so many ways, how to live in this 'new world'. And what motivates many of us to act is the sense of the obligation to future generations of all life.

---

**Ann Dale**

Ah, Jennie, by denying our spirituality, are we trying then to avoid emotions, and being open, which means also being open to pain?

---

**Jennie Sparkes**

Yes Ann, I believe that people (in general) avoid their emotions like the plague!! In my work in conflict resolution this denial is often the root of conflict. When confronted with internal emotions about something, people don't connect with themselves to ask 'why is it that I am feeling the way I do right now?' instead they react as a means of avoiding or protecting their feelings. They deny learning about who they are instead of living within the emotional plane. As for men, poor men, social norms have evolved that actually place pressures on men to deny the emotional plane that is, what I believe, at the essence of our being. It is refreshing to see more men connecting with this plane of connectiveness to all of life.

---

**Nina-Marie Lister**

By the way, Ann is teasing us -- you all realize she is REALLY on her dock, drinking wine and using her laptop while some of us are in offices pretending... but I digress. I think Patricia's garden image is a great one to illustrate the connection between spirituality and sustainability. Anyone who gardens knows it is therapeutic, healing, connecting, and nurturing (to you not just the plants!) yet it also a profound lesson in acceptance of change and gentle (adaptive?) management. Aggressive control-oriented management doesn't work for the small, limited family garden anyway... isn't that what the earth really is? I love Henry's reminder that the ankh, that ancient symbol of Isis, the moon and female fertility, was the symbol for the MAN and the biosphere programme! Ironic, on so many levels!

---

**Lesley Moody**

The relationship between spirituality and sustainability is the fact that humans can be sensitive to things undetected physically. That sensitivity can be used as an indicator for action given the value/belief system of the human. Therein lies the difficulty of deciding which V/B system to employ. The connectedness is in the ability imagine existence in the physical world that reflects the art beauty creativity of spirituality.

---

**Patricia Roberts-Pichette**

I am having a few problems with defining 'spiritual' and I suspect when we get down to it, each one of us may have different definitions depending on the situation. I do not think I would behaving many spiritual feelings alongside a toxic waste dump most of the time -- but who knows what sort of wonder or connectedness I might feel at this dump site in considering the persistence of life, in spite of its toxic nature; the bacteria and fungi processing it, the insects, birds and small mammals, present brimming with life. On this matter, I do not subscribe to the idea of unhealthy ecosystems. They are all healthy, but for individual species, they may be particularly unhealthy. The ecosystems are doing what they are meant to do - if there is a source of food, something will use it and these somethings form an ecosystem. Thank goodness there are all these organisms that can survive and process (over time no doubt) the most terrible things we humans throw at them. Again, if we are really committed to sustainability, can we afford to continue in this vein? Where are our ethics?

---

**Jay Violini**

Connection to future. Apparently many FN leaders base their policies/decisions on a 7-generation principle. I had this discussion with someone else and I am not sure of its practicality. Most people are concerned about their welfare and the welfare of their

immediate family. Not many are concerned about 2nd/3rd or 4th generations. What motivates me to behave sustainably (if I do which I am not entirely sure) is not a concern for someone I may never know or meet but something else. It is a concern for the bigger picture itself in the here and now. I try to remain sensitive to the nonhuman world.

---

### **Ann Dale**

Jay posed an interesting question, "How do we cultivate these passions (love, compassion, hope, reverence) what are also essential to achieving sustainability?" Paul, can we grow gardens everywhere? and John, can we take everyone in the world on an 'outward bound' experience? Failing that, how do we cultivate these passions, especially in people who have never had an experience with nature?

---

### **Paul Allison**

Yes, Ann I believe we can help grow gardens everywhere in fact NASA is working on this for future space travel. By the way while I was at Oxford University Botanical gardens I jumped the garden wall, fence, hedge and realized the earth is one big garden!

As far as sharing these passions I have seen in my work as a horticultural therapist tremendous changes in peoples lives who become connected to nature. In my work I introduce plants that are used for food, drinks and drugs to act as a bridge and to motivate the clients.

For example a mentally challenged client said that he was not interested in gardening (according to him it was woman's work). However, he loved coffee. I asked him if he would like to grow his own coffee and he replied enthusiastically. Yes! So I brought in some green coffee beans for him to grow. Every week when I returned he would grab me to show his growing coffee plants. He would show visitors his plants and was incredibly excited when the first flowers and beans appeared. This opportunity led to the client to explore other horticultural activities and soon he became the group homes 'gardener'.

Bye the way I think that people do value nature. I read somewhere that more people go to parks and zoos in North America than all the sporting events put together and people spend more on gardening than pizza!

---

**John Hasell**

I love my garden and particularly the untended Garry Oak Meadow parts of it. My wife is an ardent gardener as were my parents, but I still feel that many gardeners are trying to tame nature rather than live with it. Heresy!!!

As to providing spiritual experiences, the only route that seems practical, particularly with the current state of many religions and the basic right to an education that is spreading throughout the world, is for schools to provide opportunities for students to develop spiritual awareness. I would love it if it were possible for everyone to experience an Outward Bound Course - as Singapore is currently attempting to ensure - but this poses financial and temporal problems that I do not see ever being overcome universally!

---

**Nina-Marie Lister**

Ann, in response to your question on engendering spirituality in those who have never known nature: (and others who raised it - sorry, I'm starting to lose track of the postings by name, and my system is getting bogged down again with the traffic) As someone who is active in studying, cultivating and promoting urban ecology, I worry sometimes that we limit our perception of nature as exclusively the domain of "wild" and untouched. SO much of our (and the world's) population is urbanized, or living in urban areas that we need to remind ourselves of the often desperate need to re-connect within the city to nature, which is still omnipresent, although subtler, harder to reveal than, say at Lac Maskinonge, where Ann D. sits today! The water's edge, the riverbed, the storm sewer, these are all attractive in a real sense to urban dwellers, no matter how polluted or damaged they may appear to the rural person. I've also been exploring design ideas that relate to urban ecology, especially as they relate to city planning, (something akin perhaps to what Patricia referred to earlier in Ottawa) and I do think that city kids are some of the best learners and most attentive ears where tuning into nature and natural processes alive in the city. This makes them often more ardent supporters of environmental initiatives than their country cousins, who, surrounded by more natural forested settings, may take for granted their bounty. Truly, I've so often seen and worked with inner-city families, often from many ethno-cultural backgrounds, gather like flies to honey at the saddest creek outlet to engage in a community-driven restoration effort, to plant, to garden, to clean-up. It's quite spiritual actually. Too bad that it takes a crisis to bring us together.

---

**Rick Kool**

Nina-Marie, As a city kid from Boston, I really first deeply connected with nature in city vacant lots... we knew lots about the nature that surrounded us, and for us it was wildness and wonder!

---

**Rick Searle**

Having had a chance to skim over the past few responses, I would like to pick up on today's theme. It seems to me that the starting point should be: is the sustainability problem a manifestation of a spiritual malaise, individual and collective? If we agree that there is a connection, then we have established a foundation upon which to build our understanding. Personally, I am absolutely convinced of this connection (see my paraphrase of Emerson on Monday). Let me now bring forth another wise person, Stan Rowe, who says: when the self recognizes its source, the sanctity of Nature is restored."

---

**Rick Kool**

The connection to the future is an important key... if your version of religion or spirituality doesn't hold much importance to the future, as we spoke of Monday, you're not going to get a very good set of environmental behaviors. Humans can and have, within our Western tradition and for very spiritual reasons, persisted in holy and beautiful projects that spanned generations- the gothic cathedrals, for example. How we again develop that sense of the importance of time and the meaning of our individual lives is an important issue for us, esp. working within faith and spiritual traditions.

---

**Heather Eaton**

I do think there is a difficulty with those who have never marveled at the natural world, experienced the silence of a lake, encountered a moose, or really EXPERIENCED the earth as alive and wondrous. I used to work with street kids in Toronto, and few could relate to anything that was earthy, so to speak. Many of my academic colleagues NEVER get out of institutional or urban spaces. I think that the urge towards resisting ecological ruin and promoting sustainability has something to do with personal experiences of the natural world, that register of great value - not for the self but for the whole of life.

---

**Sue Freeze**

As yesterday, this is hard to keep up with. I find the responses so intense and interesting, I dislike taking time to respond.

Rick K., - Hope is something with which I need to be cautious. If I get too caught up in it, my actions in the present get removed from the imperatives of the tasks at hand because I am trying to manipulate now to create future, instead of letting it unfold based on mindful actions in the here and now.

Ann - I think impermanence, which if we really understood it, would liberate us. Most of us struggle trying to create permanence (which is related to a fear of mortality) and



overlook the expansiveness of impermanence. The most predictable and inevitable element in life is change. Why can't we spend more time learning to live graciously in flux and less time trying to battle for permanence

---

### **Sue Freeze**

Jennie, thank you. Your comment resonates within! In keeping with that Rick S., I think the problem is not malaise, but that the spirit is as yet undeveloped. Given our efforts here today, one more step in development takes place.

---

### **Jay Violini**

Well a good friend once told me if I want to become good at writing then I ought to write. Extending that to passions, I'm guessing that acting compassionately will help me to become more compassionate. I think parents can teach children by example and also through education. I know parents teach their children to share and the benefits from doing so. I think the greatest challenge to cultivating these passions of love, compassion; trust etc is that it requires great risk. I know loving (eros et al) is wonderful but not so easy to do and I would much rather be the recipient of that love rather than the giver. Perhaps that is the problem in a nutshell, waiting for others to take the first step.

---

### **Rick Kool**

Heather E., do you know this from Rachel Carson? Rachel Carson has written: "A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy, who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from sources of our strength."

---

### **Heather Eaton**

Rick K., - I LOVE it - perfect. No I do not remember it, but am very familiar with her writings. I consider spirituality and wonder of life to be intimately connected - and wonder is a power, and it is often activated when there is destruction of the object of wonder - thanks

---

**Nina-Marie Lister**

I wonder if spirituality (and our related or possibly derived sense of ethics) may not in fact be a key to changing our actions and behaving more sustainably for precisely the reasons suggested by Patricia R-P and Henry: in short, because we can't really "ruin" or "collapse" the earth's ecosystems except for ourselves (and a good many species whose needs are similar to our own of course), the one thing we CAN do is change our behaviors fundamentally, from the inside out. I alluded to this the other day when I said that we pride ourselves as capable of both destroying and "saving" the planet. I agree with Patricia, that "unhealthy" ecosystems are a human-oriented judgment. If we persist in pushing earth's ecosystems into increasingly "toxic" (other) states unsuitable for humans and company, we will surely not kill them, just eventually make them uninhabitable for ourselves. The result? We will be not-so-gracefully selected out... possibly by Henry's well-chosen endocrine disrupters! What hubris would lead to such a fitting conclusion for our species: a bunch of feminized global leaders unable to reproduce, sitting on the edge of the toxic waste dump, brimming with methane and sulphur-breathing new life forms!

---

**Heather Hamilton**

Ann D., I have some other questions as well given what I am seeing on the news these days. How can someone who is dying of starvation or aids in Africa be spiritual or even begin to reach toward sustainability for themselves or their families or their countries?

---

**Heather Eaton**

Heather H., I think about this a lot - and to me spiritual awakening is not confined to the good experiences of life - it is a seeing, a knowing, even in the midst of great despair - which does not mean that misery has any intrinsic value, but that there are no experiences where a living spirituality is not present. The relationship between spirituality and ethics, where one makes judgments about moral norms - that living in such dire poverty is unacceptable and should weigh heavily on everyone.

---

**Rick Searle**

Heather's comment about humanity being possessed by a radically anthropogenic worldview which fosters the notion that human needs and wants take precedence over those of the planet cut to the quick of the sustainability challenge. And, as I alluded to earlier, encouraging spiritual growth can be the equally radical approach to transforming that inherently unsustainable worldview into one which truly honours and respects the Ecosphere and engenders humility and caution.

---

**Henry Regier**

Concerning impermanence, that's all we've got. I read recently that death is the end of life.

---

**Ann Dale**

Henry, perhaps a belief in spirituality makes one's own permanence have more meaning?

---

**Jay Violini**

Rick K., I think many religions believe that this world is a temporary place. That will undoubtedly lead many to believe that they ought not to waste time on something that is temporary. Probably those religions that believe in reincarnation have the greatest place to teach about the importance of future generations. That is why I am unsure of the validity of appealing to the future from a religious perspective as a motive to behaving sustainably but who knows.

---

**Rick Kool**

Good point, Jay... it may depend if you think that the end is soon, or much later! But even Brigham Young, whose Mormon's believed that the end-time is near, enjoined the Saints (as they're called) to take care of the Garden that God gave them (the Utah Valley), using the Genesis 2 story as his guide. I'm sure that Brigham would be pretty pissed off if he saw the state of the Utah valley these days!

---

**Jennie Sparkes**

John you posted about 45 min ago that you believe that one critical attribute we have, as human beings, is our ability to operate on a spiritual plane and to illuminate our thoughts and actions in the light of that. I believe that a critical attribute we have as humans is our capacity to communicate, including about our emotional or spiritual planes. I am not sure that other animal and life forms don't operate on a spiritual plane, we just can't communicate with them to know. I also agree in part with your other comment that we "fail to be fully human if we lack that connectedness with the world about us" and would like to expand it to include..."the connectedness with the world within us" as well.

---

**John Hasell**

Jennie. Thank you - that is why I mentioned not wanting to put other creatures (fauna or flora) down as we do not know what they experience in a spiritual sense but they certainly are a part of our spiritual experiences. I also agree that we need to understand our own inner world as well as the one about us. I often think that we need to start by caring for ourselves before we can really care for others and then care for the world about us and the temporal world to come. Right on - we can communicate, I only wish I could do it better!!

---

**Michael Picard**

The question, why be spiritual, has led some to assert that spirituality is not an option. I think almost it is all about option. If we are all already spiritual, then I guess spirituality is not part of the solution. We already have it, but we don't yet have solutions to the problems of sustainability. Or if we have solutions, we are not implementing them, and this despite our spirituality. If we need to become more spiritual, or more conscious of our spirituality, in order to move toward sustainability, then once again it is all about choice, about opening up. Our given spirituality may be part of the problem.

---

**Rick Kool**

Michael's point is a good one- our form of spirituality, and the things that we (in both western and eastern civilizations) worship and have imbued with Holy Spirit, may be part of the problem.

---

**Heather Eaton**

Michael - the potential of a developed spiritual life is always present - but we can choose to develop it or not, engage in the disciplines or not. In many eastern traditions to be spiritual is to engage in spiritual practices, and often in the west it is about beliefs - a bit simplistic - but if we considered spirituality as a dimension of life, all life, of the universe, that the universe is a physical, psychic and spiritual reality, then the challenge is to be come aware, awake, rise up, climb the mountain, go to the desert, go on the journey - or whatever metaphor works.

---

**Jay Violini**

Michael, I'm not sure our given/chosen spirituality is part of the problem; rather it remains yet too narrow in its application. I don't think spirituality in any sense can be a problem though in some cases it may not yet have reached the depths or heights of sustainability. Well personally this brings me back to Corporations and how I believe

and you Ann and myself discussed that they are Aspiritual by definition and behavior. Their aversion to spirituality diminished the human, nature, and animals. Spiritual people cannot be spiritual at work and this may be a big part of the problem.

---

### **Patricia Roberts-Pichette**

Michael: Not sure that spiritually has to be the basis for sustainability but on an individual basis may certainly have an influence. We have not yet touched on the aspect of greed, of the whole desire, perhaps push by economists to consume, increase the bottom line by consuming more and come of what we do not need; of obtaining more 'things' so we will be happy. Does wealth or 'things' produce happiness? Certainly they do not in our current western worldview produce sustainability. This is where the matter of sustainability and acquisitiveness collide. It also brings up the question of ethics. What has happened to Canadian society with respect to ethics, or should I say moral behavior? Is our western society moral?

---

### **Jenny Onyx**

Michael, But then the logic is that if our existing spirituality is part of the problem, we may as well stop being spiritual.... that makes no sense. I think we have to see spirituality as a journey, a movement towards enlightenment or wholeness or connection, and part of that journey will be a growing awareness and reverence for the earth and for life. But while spirituality may not be an option, we are not all at the same point in the journey.

---

### **Michael Picard**

Heather wrote: "if we considered spirituality as a dimension of life, all life, of the universe, that the universe is a physical, psychic and spiritual reality, then the challenge is to be come aware, awake, rise up, climb the mountain, go to the desert, go on the journey" I agree with what you said. I was struck by this point, which evokes one definition of spirituality. I wonder how that definition in particular is related to the sustainability and sustainable development?

---

### **Jay Violini**

I think Hawken was one who spoke of restoring rather than sustaining. If we are so far behind that even behaving sustainably from here on out will not approach equilibrium at best. Not sure what this has to do with spirituality but behaving sustainably may not be enough though a good start I suppose.

---

**Ann Dale**

I think I now accept that perhaps spirituality is innate, given the beautiful quote by Carson, it melted all my resistances, my fears evaporated:) And this gives me hope, if it is indeed innate; we need only to re-awaken it, something that may be doable in my lifetime? Thoughts?

---

**Henry Regier**

Jennie Sparkes: Some decades ago Ortega Y Gasset wrote a book "On Hunting" in which he inferred that the prey eventually communicated surrender or a gift of itself to the predator before accepting the fatal shot. Aboriginal hunters with whom I have communicated may hold similar views.

---

**Ann Dale**

Ah, Henry, when we said goodbye to our beloved Kara Mia, she turned her head three times to our dear vet who had come to the lake for us, and literally you could see her give him permission, and after, we all wept. So, it is not just predator/prey, but with trust and love, can cross species. And perhaps that is what it is all about, tapping into that openness we all had as children, re-awakening it, and giving it light again.

---

**Jay Violini**

Aye Ann, I know I never shot another animal after I felled a squirrel from the tree and he lay on his back still breathing. At the age of 10 or so that was the end of my killing. That squirrel paid the price to teach me a lesson about life and transformed me in ways I do not yet know. I suppose than spiritual teachings/life lessons are not something we can necessarily willfully create.

---

**Isabel Cordua-von Specht**

I'm sorry everyone, The Royal Roads external internet connection crashed at this point in the dialogue and we were unable to continue. We will reconvene on Friday, and trust the problem will have been resolved and won't recur on our final day of discussion. Thank you all for your contributions today! We hope to weave some of these loose ends together on Friday. Ann ... enjoy your wine on the dock.

## Day Three: The Connections - Spirituality & Sustainable Development

---

### Ann Dale

My apologies for our black-out on Wednesday, and Nina-Marie, and friends, I found a wonderful bottle of red wine called "Annie's Lair" that I highly recommend. It seems we may have agreement that spirituality is not a prerequisite to sustainability, but could be called a facilitating condition. We have identified as key dimensions of spirituality a connectedness to nature and each other; a sense of wonder and respect for life; mindfulness; and a sense of responsibility and obligation to live in harmony and balance, which could assist in fostering sustainability. And indeed, it may be innate? Today, I suggest we stick with one topic and explore it in depth. What are the connections between spirituality and sustainable development and how can we mobilize these connections for the benefit of both? John, would you briefly re-introduce the WIIFHH?

---

### John Hasell

In my workshops, particularly when dealing with Team Building or Communications, I often bring out my WIIFHH Meter (What's In It For Him/Her) or Motivational Monitor. This finely calibrated instrument has a needle that swings along a scale that reads from Altruism at one end to Selfishness at the other. It is designed on the theory that nobody does anything unless there is something in it for them. This applies to anyone, including Mother Teresa and Idi Amin. All voluntary and involuntary actions are driven by perceived needs of one kind or another. Anything that helps us to identify the motivations of ourselves and of others is a most valuable thing to have. A WHIFHH Meter is priceless! Inputs are provided to the WIIFHH Meter at all levels of Maslow's Hierarchy. The need to breath, maintain an equitable temperature and to drink and eat are all assessed at the basic level and the need for self-actualization is assessed at the topmost level. The instrument also has a complete range of time horizons built in which are very short at the lowermost levels and tend to extend further and further into the future at the upper levels. (Unfortunately the time horizons for politicians often seem to get stuck at the four-year point after the last election!) A bell rings on the more expensive models of the Motivational Monitor when an intended action will cause harm. Unfortunately this added function is often inaccurate due to the laws of unintended consequences, and it is often overridden by the forces of our basic instincts. My WIIFHH Meter tells me that I recognize my obligation to meet my present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. I appreciate that these future needs include social, economic and other developments many of which it is impossible to imagine, let alone determine accurately. We need to provide options for future developments of all kinds. Why I bring this up is the concept that hitting the

Spirituality button on our personal WIIFHH Meters tunes out the Idi Amin tendencies we have and emphasizes the more saintly aspects of ourselves.

---

### **Jenny Onyx**

On rereading our postings, which I enjoyed very much, I seemed to detect several emerging paradoxes. One is the relationship between future generations (one of the criteria of sustainability) on the one hand and the here and now (being in the here and now seems to be part of the spiritual experience, or rather being aware of the whole, but not focused on a linear future). Another is the apparent contradiction between the recognition that human attempts to control nature for our own ends has been disastrous for the planet, and yet we have been debating how to impose a spiritual sustainability awareness on others. That issue of control I think is a difficult and central issue that we need to address. Perhaps spirituality provides a way forward to sustainability rather than being a precondition. Or perhaps an awakening of the need for sustainability creates a new emergent spirituality. Or perhaps spirituality is part of the glue that permits a reconnection between our various silos.

---

### **Henry Regier**

A year ago I was invited to cogitate on the meaning of sustainable development with respect to fish and fisheries. After reflecting on decades of direct personal experience with different kinds of 'fisheries' (commercial, commercial industrial, artisanal, recreational, ceremonial, non-lethal, observational naturalistic, etc.) and what was being offered as approaches to sustainability, I sensed empirically that we were already moving beyond 'sustainable development' as a slogan to 'reciprocal responsibility' and/or to 'caring sharing.' On re-reading the many items of the last two e-dialogues, I infer that my notion of 'caring sharing' related implicitly to some connection of selected connotations of spiritual and of sustainable as elaborated in our two preceding e-dialogues. Maybe.

---

### **Ann Dale**

Jenny, do I "hear" you correctly, that spirituality and sustainability are compliments?  
Henry, can you be sustainable without being spiritual?

---

### **Jenny Onyx**

Yes, I am beginning to wonder what the difference is. The two concepts seem to be converging, in a way that I had never thought about before. Under what conditions could we imagine a sustainable world, which was not highly spiritual? Or own



sustainable practices that did not entail spiritual growth?? Perhaps an autocratic regime of compliance? But that would not be self generating, and hence not 'sustainable'.

---

### **Henry Regier**

Ann: sustainable and spiritual - each term is rich in connotations and some within a set are mutually inconsistent, I sense. Suppose each set is demarcated by an encompassing circle and that the two circles can overlap, as in a Venn Diagram. I interpret the contents of the preceding e-dialogues, and especially my own! to imply that the region of overlap or connection is not large.

---

### **Rick Kool**

Sustainability and spirituality... both are calls to action, but of a very different kind of action. The work of living within the means of nature, of living simply, may have its own spirituality. So is sustainability just another way of living spiritually? As I asked Michael last time, is it a \*necessary\* way to live spiritually? Can we even claim to be following a spiritual tradition if we are \*not\* living sustainably? And if that might be so, can any of us make such a claim?

---

### **Patricia Roberts-Pichette**

Well, about the relationship between spirituality and sustainability. Should be easy to say the connection is direct, if we all agree on the summary Ann has made. If it is direct, and we all have a spiritual life (whether we recognize it or not) how come we cannot make the connections, why do so many of us leave our spirituality at the door when it comes to work, or seem to think our CEOs, senior management, or senior politicians leave their's behind when they make decisions for the betterment of the country, the betterment of the company, the betterment of the shareholders? It seems that it is unbusinesslike to talk of spiritual values, to talk of ecological values, because there are no immediate financial gains from taking them into consideration. They we have potable water problems and smog days. What happens when something like a spiritual value 'is taken into consideration'? That usually means 'yes we agree, unless it diminishes the bottom line'. It is usually conceived as more expensive or too much trouble ... I have recently had such an experience in Ottawa with the Planning Board. A healthy 50-70 year old elm, and a somewhat younger ash stood on city property alongside a section on which a house was to be built. I explained the importance especially of the elm, and was told my concerns would be taken into consideration. No doubt they were, but the trees were cut down, being in the way of the builder (they were not really), but now it is too late, they are gone. There is a lot more to this example (tree roots to help stabilize a very unstable slope, shade, and the rareness of healthy elms), but this bit will do to illustrate.

---

**Rick Kool**

Henry, Could you spell out a bit more about 'reciprocal responsibility'... what kind of responsibility do the parties have to each other?

---

**Lesley Moody**

Reciprocity is an earmark of social balance/social capital. That furnishes a "link" as it is communication device among humans. It is borne of individual beliefs/values.

---

**Jennie Sparkes**

I believe that social capital is a key connection between the spiritual realm and the sustainability of the planet and its inhabitants. Social capital is about the capacity of society to collaborate towards a common purpose. This capacity is dependent upon the values a group in society holds. If the values reflect an ethic of caring, stewarding and nurturing towards other life-forms this will contribute to sustainability of both the social and ecological systems while maintaining economic activities at a level that do not accelerate the entropy of the natural system. Values, I believe, are a reflection of who we believe we are as an individual. I believe that a growing segment of society relies on media to define 'who they are' and opposed to their own inward journey. As a result values are based on what is popular as opposed to what holds truth as being right, or just or fair. This knowing comes from your spirit, not TV (except for the Simpsons!)

---

**Rick Kool**

"collaborating towards a common purpose..." This is what we're looking for, isn't it. There is a movement towards this collaboration, but still it is very small in the scheme of things. And yet, the "diffusion of innovation" literature tells us that repeatedly, new ideas, once a critical mass is generated, become inevitable. So we are all looking for those places where we can increase numbers and increase, as Jenny says, this collaboration!

---

**Jenny Onyx**

Yes, Jennie, social capital. But especially it is the notion of reciprocal responsibility. In Patricia's example (and I know many similar) it the lack of reciprocal responsibility, and I guess the playing out of the disconnection we have all observed.

---

## **Jennie Sparkes**

I agree that reciprocity is key. Many authors in the field of social capital identify it as the cornerstone for establishing networks and trustworthiness. The question goes back to what is it we reciprocate. While reciprocation can be asymmetric, the exchange must be of value to the party receiving the exchange. Maybe the problem is that our society (western) does not seem to place value on 'caring'. Maybe we are living in the aftermath of the 70's 'I'm number one' mentality where it was taught if you don't look out for yourself nobody else will.

---

## **Heather Eaton**

Although I have studied and taught, and practiced a lot in the area of spirituality and ecology, I have come to believe that the relationship is primarily ethical. A living spirituality puts ethical demands on one's life, and living sustainably and socially ethically are central. There is not one world religion that does not value ecological health, at least for human survival. Historically all held aspects of earth life as sacred. So for me the primary relationship between spirituality and sustainability is ethical, and the demand to find sustainable ways of life. The question for our culture is how far are people willing to simplify their lives, drive less, eat more regionally, have fewer possessions, etc. Again this to me is neither sacrifice nor a loss of pleasures - just a curb on the enormous over-consumption of the culture.

---

## **Rick Kool**

So if, as Heather points out, this is all about ethics, then where better to begin our work towards sustainability than within those people who lay claim to ethical traditions within the churches. I really think that we have to make efforts, esp. outside of the mainstream churches and outside of the neo-hippie youth, to connect religion and sustainability and the ethics that underlie it. So we have to go to the Muslim schools, the Pentecostal and Evangelical academies, the Talmud torah schools, and the associated institutions, and find a way to engage parishioners and congregants in this important discussion!

---

## **Jay Violini**

Ann Dale asked "Can you be sustainable without being spiritual"? It all depends on how you define spirituality. To me there are one-shot spiritual experiences, which are rare and make very transformative impacts on our being (i.e. me shooting the squirrel etc.). I sure wasn't behaving sustainably at the time but it was what I would call a spiritual experience and one that probably made me more sustainable thereafter. Now every time I walk or pet the dog or another animal I hope someone is not thinking I am being spiritual. I think it was Confucius who spoke of meaningless empty rituals. If it is not sincere, heartfelt and thoughtful it can not be spiritual. Surely a spiritual experience will

alter my experience for a moment if not forever. So to answer, I believe that people can behave sustainably without having a spiritual experience at that very moment. That does not mean that their sustainable behavior was not once initiated by a spiritual experience though.

---

### **Henry Regier**

Jay: Your squirrel story reminds me of the autobiographical story of Aldo Leopold who watched the green light in the eye of the she-wolf dim while she lay dying from his bullet.

---

### **Cory Waters**

"What are the connections between spirituality and sustainable development" Could the process of focus on nurturing spirituality, rather than sustainability, create opportunity for elevation of collective human consciousness? I think the (North American) masses are becoming inured to calls of environmental crises. A focus on the spiritual - the interconnectedness of "us" (human & non) - will foster respect and enlightenment, and thereby lead to sustainable behaviors. We can't keep doing as we are once we've been awakened. Major religions, as a (not the) path or tool of mainstream spiritual development, must play a strong part in the teaching of the connections and raising consciousness. The threats to creation are the biggest single threat to our earth today, and in the future. We are the only species with the ability to kill us all. How can we mobilize these connections for the benefit of both? I think spiritual movements - voluntary simplicity, deep ecology - foster spiritual development, and mobilize sustainable behaviors. I question the notion that we need to mobilize both at the same time, but that fostering spirituality will benefit sustainability. I think a focus on sustainability misses the call to spirituality, and doesn't have the potential transcendent experience that western civilization requires to snap us out of our collective trance.

---

### **Paul Allison**

Perhaps it helps to recognize the three million years of co-evolution of the human nervous system with the environment. Here we can learn from the environmental psychologists. There is nothing more profitable in our lives than communing with nature. Human beings are originally members of nature; therefore it is after we blend ourselves with nature that we are able to feel the joy of living. To commune with nature we need to make ourselves free and jump into her. Then simply look into what we see with our own eyes, hear with our ears, and feel with our skin, and to learn as much as we can from her. Tomatiro Makino

---

## **Kasitsa Jacobs**

Everyone always talks about the three pillars to sustainability (social, environmental, and economic) but I see it more as four pillars (or as was once suggested - the four poles of a tee pee) - the fourth pillar being spirituality. In the path that we're on today, it seems that sustainability is just something one strives for to satisfy voters or shareholders.... or to look good to your neighbors. There is something missing in this reasoning, and that's the inherent sense of responsibility to everything around us and the future generations. Without the spiritual aspect I think sustainability is an empty goal.

---

## **Cory Waters**

Kasitsa - what a wonderful image, thank you for the fourth pillar. Triple bottom line reporting is a strong motivator to ensure ethical business behavior. It is so un-vogue to incorporate spirituality, but I think TBL is an awakening of the corporate sector to the responsibility businesses have, as for too long it is the economic incentives that have driven us to the point where we are. I agree with Rick that it is about engaging faith communities. This is what I have been trying to do with the Anglican Church, but it is essential to first demonstrate that their operations - the way their buildings function - is an expression of their spiritual obligation to creation. By auditing the energy and water consumption of churches, we are laying a foundation for them to be mindful, amidst the chaos of their operations, of their impact on Creation. It gets them to model desired behavior. Then, once we've snapped them out of the trance (and snapping parish treasurers out of it is a pretty big accomplishment), we leave them asking "what now". So we have a resource we just printed called the "Footprint Files", a tool to incorporate and strengthen the call to sustainability, and our spiritual and ethical obligation as partners in creation, to walk the walk with the Creator. I also hope, no - have faith - that faith communities are NEEDED in society, to remind us of the need for faith. If we believe in a Creator, who loves us, and binds us, it is much easier to get up in the morning and face the world's trials than, I believe, it ever could be if you thought it was me vs. the world's problems.

---

## **Ann Cowan**

I'm wondering if one's spirituality is a "motivation" for sustainability, which to me means a responsible and caring attitude to the earth. When we talk about spirituality, we associate it with a sense of being or awareness beyond the individual, which implies a responsibility beyond our own selfishness. Are there other motivations for sustainability?

---

**Rick Kool**

A good question, Ann Cowan! What \*are\* our motivations for sustainability?

---

**Heather Eaton**

Rick K, all the religious traditions have an ethical core, but it is not easy for some to extend their ethical core with a radical ecological viewpoint. Also, I think there are many connections between ecology and spirituality, but the central one between spirituality and sustainability, the motivating one, is ethics, as I see it. Also, if I look to the groups who are trying to affect change, the motivators and reasons are mixed, but their actions join to become an ethical force - such as the pro-democracy movement, or even the local group trying to stop a roadway. The join forces around ethical action. So I suppose I am trying to point to what connects people around action, rather than ideas.

---

**Jenny Onyx**

Heather, At one level I understand the centrality of ethics. But at another level I don't understand it at all. Is ethics devoid of feeling? The ethic of caring for example, I would see as central. But there are many different, and incompatible systems of ethics are there not? Is this not (partly) the basis of war?

---

**Heather Eaton**

Jenny - it depends what is meant by ethics, and there are lots of different streams of ethics. The will to power is an ethic, as is the common good. So much depends on what is the ethical framework. However, it is a luxury to discuss ethical frameworks. When there is little or no water, when food is scarce, when land, people and animals are suffering, then people will act for survival - and as Thomas Homer-Dixon points out, environmental scarcity is one major cause of conflict now, and will only increase in the future, Therefore the need to reflect in actions and try to foresee the undesirable consequences now is crucial. If we would awaken a sense of the sacredness of the earth, this is an ethic and can influence all actions. It is a competing value system with corporate profit.

---

**Ann Dale**

It seems to me that you are "saying" that spirituality brings out the "light" and not the "dark" forces, and allows us to think we can make a difference and act. Is that important, a sense of empowerment to believe one can make a difference to a more sustainable world?

---

**Rick Kool**

Ann D., re: empowerment We have a prayer for Canada that we say every week in our synagogue. One verse begins "Banish hatred, despair and cynicism..." One cannot act positively without hope, or in a state of despair and cynicism. We need to do the work we do because of a feeling of hopefulness and faith in ourselves, the world, and the future.

---

**Jay Violini**

Motivations for sustainability: I believe that your motives can be selfish but if so they may not be spiritual. Thus again I suppose sustainability and spirituality need not be linked in that regard. The reason I say this is I can plant a few trees simply because I want the world to look better for me or pick up some debris from the ocean for aesthetic purposes alone. In addition I may opt to bike to work instead of driving thus behaving sustainably but my motives may be vain in their origin. Unfortunately the same vanity and selfishness that can lead to sustainability also impact the environment in many negative ways. However, I think genuine sustainability with the conscious thought of behaving sustainably must be spiritually driven. I also think this motive being more genuine will stand the test of time and is required to make lasting transformational change. Self-awareness and recognition of one's motives may be a start but only if they are trying to become less selfish as a result of becoming more self-aware.

---

**Michael Picard**

On reflection, I resist the idea that spirituality is necessary for sustainable development, or that one is somehow not spiritual if one is not living sustainability. I suspect that no understanding can come from this stipulation, which sets one up only to exclude and correct. It is setting oneself up to impose a notion of sustainable development on others, to interfere with the spiritual freedom of conscience of others. I am NOT accusing anybody here of doing that. Only saying that to seek understanding by believing in such a necessary connection may well backfire. Sustainability is a political objective. That is, it can't be moved toward without social debate and dialogue, without mobilizing citizens and interest groups, without pressuring powerful decision-makers. To require a concern with these political objectives is to potentially subvert spirituality, which is contaminated by temporal power. I can't believe I just argued that! In order to save face a little, I will cite my admiration for Gandhi's view that politics and spirituality are inseparable, and ask: Does sustainability require a politicization of the spiritual?

---

**Heather Eaton**

Michael - Gandhi wrote - if you think that religions have nothing to do with politics, then you do not know the nature of religion. Anna Bramwell says that 'ecology is a political category' - also true - and true that sustainability will require all the aspects you mentioned. P.s. I wrote you a brilliant spiritually illuminated reply last Wednesday that would have clarified EVERYTHING, and alas, it was lost in cyberspace forever....

---

**Rick Kool**

"Does sustainability require a politicization of the spiritual?" In as much as, to me at least, the spiritual always asks me to \*do\* things, and deeds in the world involve others singly or in groups, and often I am looking for working communally with others, then the spiritual may need some sense of the political. Hannah Arendt, id I dredge back in my memory, might have worked on something like that.

---

**Henry Regier**

We've had the Abrahamic religions (Jewish, Christian, Muslim, etc.) around now for some 2700 years ago. From our shared perspective of spiritual sustainability could we in all good conscience give this combined tradition a passing grade? I was on the Canadian delegation to the UN Cairo population conference in 1994: the patriarchs of the more patriarchal Abrahamic religions became nasty in the cause of providing God/Allah with ever more human voices to praise Him. Some were hostile to empowerment of women even with respect to non-sexual education.

---

**Ann Dale**

Henry, I couldn't agree more, I have the same problem with ethics, in that if your religion or your spirituality, or your ethical base is not 'grounded' in a sense of the sacredness of the earth, then it seems to serve, often, the self-interests of maintaining the status quo? And the status quo is clearly not sustainable. Comments?

---

**Heather Eaton**

Henry, they all get a failing grade on numerous social and ecological fronts!!! I think that most religions today in their institutional form have disconnected from the spiritual impulse at the heart of their specific religious experiences. So it is only the spiritual impulses that are redeemable today as most are in a regressive stance against modernity, and post modernity.



---

**Jay Violini**

I believe that religion ought to teach sustainability if the writings of said religion do in fact advocate that absolutely. For political purposes religious educators ought to focus on the sustainable teachings of scripture. I'm not sure that it is "spiritual" presenting one account of the scriptures to advocate a cause if there are contradictory teachings within the same text but it may prove to be successful from an environmental perspective.

---

**Paul Allison**

Ann, I think ironically the 'dark' is also a motivation for a spiritual connection. Ecologist E.O. Wilson uses the word 'trauma' when discussing of the loss of the Ancient forest soils. Earlier in the dialogues participants referred to death and loss as a means of making a connection. Perhaps becoming aware that we are not really in control is empowering!

---

**Cory Waters**

"Is that important, a sense of empowerment to believe one can make a difference to a more sustainable world?" Absolutely. Taking a page from Doug McKenzie-Mohr (Fostering Sustainable Behavior) - sorry Ann, I know you're not a fan of social marketing - if we don't believe changing our actions will make a difference, we won't change them. We also need to see others model desired behaviors. The seeding of social movements requires empowerment, or at least its perception, to sustain the movement.

---

**Patricia Roberts-Pichette**

Sustainable development has become a meaningless concept, but a good one to wrap around political decisions as being good for the recipients. One cannot leave politics out of this - yes Gandhi was right. The leadership has to come from our political leaders, not the religious leaders our multicultural society has long since passed most of them by and replaced them by rampant materialism (consumerism?). Social capital as we call it, should be our salvation, building on the 4-poles of a tepee, and maybe if we were more careful about our choices, we could prevent these smoggy days, and contaminated drinking water -- not expect technological fixes after the fact. How can our collective historical experience be brought to bear? How can our ethics catch up with our technological advances?

---

**Jay Violini**

Patricia, I think all people are leaders if they choose to recognize that fact. I wouldn't limit elected officials as being solely responsible for advocating sustainable behavior.

Obviously they can legislate certain behavior though which of course they should (I believe) and thus ought not to deny their responsibility to citizens who want to live in a world that considers the environment in the decision making process. Teachers, priests, parents, friends all play their part.

---

### **Patricia Roberts-Pichette**

Jay, of course they are all leaders. What I am getting at is where is the national leadership. What is seen as of national importance? Where are the decisions that affect us all taken? They are political and they are the sum of the pressures put upon them by all the groups you mentions and by individuals.

---

### **Jenny Onyx**

That is another paradox. Empowerment is the awareness that we can make a difference. But living simply/spiritually is NOT about imposing our will on others. We cannot willfully create...in our arrogance we think we can, but then we instead destroy.

---

### **Ann Dale**

Ah, but Jenny O, I am beginning to learn that life is really lived at the edges of paradoxes.

---

### **Jenny Onyx**

Ah yes, Ann....and that is the adventure of it. We should be wary of easy answers.

---

### **Jay Violini**

Ann and Jenny, I believe that spirituality is the synthesis of these opposites which create the paradoxes we find ourselves amidst.

---

### **Sue Freeze**

At 4:30 this AM, a small group of friends gathered, climbed a hill and participated in a Solstice ritual as we celebrated the rising of the sun together. We were a diverse group, coming from different cultural, spiritual and religious backgrounds, yet we felt the power of connectedness as we, knowing there are thousands the world over today doing something similar, raised our energy out into the world, believing that the planet and all on it are the beneficiaries of such positive energetic emanations. One bond my small

group of friends shares is our mutual concern for the earth and our personal responsibility for our steps on it. We all define our paths differently, but we all feel that what we do, thoughtfully, spiritually and consciously does have the capacity to contribute to positive change.

As Pema Chodrin reminds us, our thoughts, words, deeds and actions influence our individual health, just as they affect the health of every being and everything around us. I feel that if this can be remembered and acted upon as we each go out and touch the world in our diverse and deliberate ways, we will, rather than imposing spirituality/sustainability awareness on others, find spiritual, sustainable solutions that allow all of us to ultimately live in peace and harmony with each other and our planet.

I believe that our current global conditions mirror our collective spiritual intelligence, and I believe through treading with awareness, our spiritual intelligence can grow and SD can evolve.

---

### **Lesley Moody**

I think you have it Sue!!

---

### **Michael Picard**

Here is how I see the relation of spirituality and sustainability. Spirituality is (among other things to other people) the experience of profound interconnectedness with all things, a basic identity that one participates in oneself. Becoming aware of that interconnectedness, a sort of ontological reciprocity is a spiritual experience. It is an awareness of literal selflessness. Out of this awareness comes compassion for the other, which in an odd way is in our own interest, although not in a selfish way. To realize our shared being is to be moved by a common interest. That is why I agree so much with what idea that sustainability involves collaborating to a common purpose. The existence of the commonality is the metaphysical basis of the obligations owed to nature and all life forms, with whom we are in some sense one. This obligation to the common good is the basic ethical constraint on natural beings like ourselves, who in being able to identify with the future and nature, and therefore serve it. So ethics to me is the outcome of the actual interconnectedness we have which in being experienced orients us to the good. Ethics is more the outcome of spirituality, as compassion is the outcome (free response) of wisdom.

---

### **Jenny Onyx**

Michael, Thank you. Beautifully put. I think the occasional spiritual highs are important markers, or transforming moments, but for the rest of the time it is the hard slog, and

important at least to remember the lessons of those insights. Then it is the collective responsibility to each other and the common good and the planet that is sustaining.

---

### **Michael Picard**

Ethics to me is a constraint on behavior. That is not necessarily external behavior, but a lot of it is. It can also be an imposed constraint, but I won't find any disagreeing I think that a freely chosen constraint is, all things being equal, preferable. Culture, states, parents, peer and professional groups, impose constraints on behavior. I myself wouldn't have it any other way (I'm too much of a realist). But we also need to develop the cultural and social habits to think for ourselves as well, even to reason with parents, governments, peers, groups and religious authorities to ensure that there are constraints on all of our behavior that reflects the values of life and earth. This is not a call to battle, but a dispatch of emissaries. We need to develop reasons and arguments to share certain values, not to convert, change or destroy faiths. We need them on our side, so let's help them find within themselves the values that will preserve human and natural life.

---

### **John Hasell**

I believe that spirituality provides a critical personal space that enables each of us to think beyond our immediate environment and to allow our WHIFF Meters to operate at the scale required to factor in the deeds so necessary for sustainability. We cannot do what is required alone, so, as the Sierra Club so often reminds us, we have to think globally while acting locally. Getting the Churches and other faiths on a side to which they tend to lean anyway is one path, but eventually political action in conjunction with corporate commitment is required if anything is to change our current disastrous course. I cannot think about sustainability without thinking of the usually unesthetic appearance and non-spiritual aspects of the plastics that so much seem to define modern "civilization". This squandering of unrenowable hydrocarbons epitomizes for me the unsustainability of our present existence. Walk through Nepal or other remote areas of the world and the ditches and fields are littered with the stuff. The argument that we should continue to burn non-renewable resources (let alone Amazonian Forests which will grow again once the planet is free of homo non-sapiens!) because clever "man" will invent other sources of energy well before all the oil is gone is in itself unsustainable.

---

### **Jennie Sparkes**

I believe that faith communities can play an essential role in contributing to sustainability. On one hand these institutions can be 'keepers of the stories' that pass from one generation to another about fairness, compassion, caring, love, forgiveness, humility and other virtues. They can be models of community caring and create networks for social cohesion. This is an important role in society and for achieving

sustainability. On the other hand, if the 'stories' are used to coerce, have power over or control, I do not see this as contributing to society or sustainability.

---

### **Cory Waters**

Another reason to further sustainability by engaging churches is that, instead of preaching to the sustainability-converted, you are speaking/preaching/influencing a new audience. They represent a wider cross-section of society than the enviro's. They ARE the businesspeople, the corporate suits, and you get them in a setting which they are open to reflection and self-examination. You challenge them to return to work on Monday, and walk the talk. My church has local and provincial elected politicians, CEO's, judges, and a bunch of kids and young families. Yes, it is WASPish, but sure not the same faces I see at community markets and drum-ins. Champions of sustainability need to promote its urgency in new and effective settings. The spiritual opportunity at churches, I submit, is a stronger opportunity to recruit converts than standing on the street corner holding pamphlets...

---

### **Ann Dale**

Are there any connections between feeling a spiritual void and consumption? And artificial separations, such as the heart from the head, us from nature, does this affect decision-making?

---

### **Paul Allison**

Thank you all for the dialogue. I am off to the garden which happens to be the set of the filming of X Men 2 What a world we live in!

---

### **Cory Waters**

"Are there any connections between feeling a spiritual void and consumption? And artificial separations, such as the heart from the head, us from nature, does this affect decision-making?" It absolves us from decision-making, from acting ethically. It justifies the status quo.

---

### **Lesley Moody**

Ann, Yes I believe there is a huge connection between spiritual void and consumption. It an alternate means to self-fulfillment, but because it is not the authentic spiritual vein it is insatiable therefore, greater the void (given the individual) the greater the consumption. Religions of the world are really expressed aspirations to which most

ordinary people either cannot achieve for whatever reason and find themselves in a quandary. Instead if the masses were to take back their spiritual barometer an individualism and communalism may begin to have balanced occupancy.

---

### **Ann Cowan**

I like the notion of overlap Henry raised. I also have a sense that the space within the overlap is growing as people begin to understand notions of wholeness or integrity in their lives--there is a growing dissatisfaction with disconnectedness in life, work and values.

---

### **John Hasell**

We tend to fill our lives with what we consider important and which will give us satisfaction. If we are operating on one of Maslow's lower levels, our time horizons are short, instant gratification predominates and we consume! At higher levels, our horizon expands physically and temporarily and we do those things that provide us with longer-term satisfaction. That is why I consider the sense of connectedness with nature, life and future generations that we have been discussing as important aspects of spirituality is so important to any realistic approach to sustainability.

---

### **Jenny Onyx**

Ann, I think I am moving to a slightly new (for me) perspective. Yes, we are becoming increasingly oppressed by the disconnection we feel, but cannot articulate often, between the economic, the social, the environmental, and indeed between the many aspects of our lives. That creates a sense of loss of wholeness, a spiritual void. Reclaiming the spiritual allows the reconnection with the whole. So spirituality is not the fourth leg, but rather the energy that enables the others to come together...perhaps the seat of the stool

---

### **Jennie Sparkes**

Yes Jenny, I agree! Perhaps it is not the stool seat, but the air that surrounds and touches upon every molecule of the three legs.

---

### **Cory Waters**

Jenny - or the glue that binds.

---

**Ann Dale**

Or, Cory, the love that holds.

---

**Jay Violini**

Jenny O., I agree with you with regards to the daily grind in lieu of the absent spiritual "markers". I think we have to "attack" unsustainable behavior from many fronts of which spirituality is but one. I believe that sustainable behavior should also be "fun" and practical to appeal to the non-spiritualists. Not that I'm a complete hedonist mind you but I am practical and simply telling someone they ought to bike to school to save the environment may be impractical from a personal stance. Arriving at school all sweaty, the extra time incurred and the risk of my bike being stolen are reasons enough for me to drive my single passenger vehicle back and forth like so many others. Thus I think sustainable behavior need also be practical. Corporations won't behave sustainably if it doesn't cut costs or turn profits anymore than I will bike to school if it doesn't benefit me in some regard. Maybe this relates to the WWHIM thing which I haven't looked at fully but I would probably say to hell with being sustainable in that act and rather choose my spots elsewhere to make amends to nature.

---

**Jennie Sparkes**

Ann, I know a few people who go shopping to deal with feelings of loss, disappointment anger. It is a convenient means of avoiding unwanted feelings, and as one friend once told me it is a way of feeling connected with other people when they are feeling all alone.

---

**Ann Dale**

I am going to wrap this up now. Please post your last messages. I would like to thank everyone for your reflection, your wisdom, your caring and respect. It has been an honour and a joy to moderate this e-dialogue. Take care, Ann

---

**Jennie Sparkes**

It was wonderful sharing thoughts with each of you. Thank you Ann for moderating.

---

**Lesley Moody**

I feel very privileged to have had a share in this. Take care everyone.

---

**Heather Eaton**

Thanks to everyone for this engaging conversation. I hope to meet you all some day. Thanks to Ann and good luck to Jodi.

---

**Jenny Onyx**

I think I have run out of ideas to contribute, so I will end now. Thank you all for a fascinating experience. I was frustrated at first by the rapid flow of ideas, but little opportunity to explore in depth. More like a global brainstorm. Interesting and useful in itself for some purposes. But I found that by reading the postings between each day, I was able to see patterns and respond in a deeper way. I hope others found the process similarly helpful. Thank you to Isabel and Jodi and Ann.

---

**Jay Violini**

Thanks all. Jay

---

**Michael Picard**

Thanks everyone for your thoughts. I have enjoyed this and found it very stimulating. And contrary to the impression I might have left I don't think love is all you need. Happy sailing everyone!

---

**John Hasell**

Thank you all for allowing me to share in this discussion - much food for the mind and spirit. My personal WIIFM Meter is reading HIGH

---

**Cory Waters**

Thank you Jodi for the privilege of participating, and to Ann for moderating. God bless, God speed and happy solstice! Glory to God, Whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask for or imagine..... Amen

---

**Sue Freeze**

Thank you everyone for all that you have expressed. I appreciate the gift of your thoughts and ideas. It was an honour to be able to participate.