



Sacred Earth Network

Newsletter

Winter 2005-06

Number 21

This has been both an exciting and unusual year. Unusual in that we had to make the best use of our time in a funding drought. Exciting in that Sacred Earth Network (SEN) is re-inventing itself in relatively uncharted territory. Our mission, "building a sustainable culture by connecting with the Earth and remembering indigenous wisdom" is not exactly on everyone's lips. But we continue to be told by all who have been touched by our work to "keep it up" and "what you are doing is extremely valuable." We were able to facilitate three deep ecology workshops, make 7 public presentations, and give out about \$4000 in small grants to Native American and Native Siberian healers, leaders, and wisdom-keepers. Hal Litoff, who is the trustee for the "Save Our Spirits" fund, donated the bulk of the small grants. Hal says, "I try my best to listen to the Spirits when thinking about giving. There are so many causes but it is critical that we preserve and protect sacred environments, traditional cultures, and the remnants of Ancient Wisdom during this period of closing down and transition." (Thank you Hal!).

At the end of one of the workshops a participant remarked: "Our usual lives are going so fast. It was so good to slow down. I like how music, art/drawing, shamanic journeying, visualization, and physical activity were all part of this retreat. They are all essential." And another said, "if only we could live like this all the time. I'm inspired that we could actually create this kind of culture."

Of course, this sort of feedback makes us want to continue. One of the benefits of this kind of year was



David Mowa, a Hopi Indian determined to live a traditional lifestyle, with a piece of "miracle" blue corn that grows in their extremely arid landscape. David took part in an exchange with Siberian elders and medicine people in 2003. (Photo taken 10/05 by Bill Pfeiffer)

that we were able to create a strong organizational foundation for the years to come.

Jon McGovern, Lorrie Klosterman, and Elizabeth Coe have joined the SEN board of directors. Thanks to Deborah May, I was able to travel to Arizona and New Mexico at the end of October and solidify Native American support for SEN's Indigenous Peoples Exchange. The last person I visited, on the beautiful Canoncito Reservation outside of Albuquerque, was Leon Secatero, a remarkable Navajo elder who traveled with me to Siberia in 2003.

According to Leon: "These exchanges are part of Indian prophecies. It is very important for us, separated by vast distances, to continue to re-connect our life and ways."

The beginning stages of organizing another two exchanges in 2006 are underway. Long time SEN staffer Susan Cutting has joined us as a consultant to ensure that all goes well, particularly on the Siberian side. A few people have asked how does the Indigenous Peoples

Exchange relate to environmental advocacy. In a recent letter to a potential funder, I wrote:

Empowered indigenous communities provide the best line of defense for protection of their lands--lands that have historically been the ones containing large tracts of healthy undisturbed ecosystems (currently under threat the world over). The exchange of information, experience, culture, and history between the two current focus groups, Native American and Native Siberian, --long separated-- is vital for the process of

strengthening them both individually and collectively.

Overall, it's really good to be back in Petersham (formerly known as Nichewaug). Earthlands, the environmental education center right down the road attracts such interesting people, the land surrounding us is a constant revelation, and most of our neighbors on Glasheen Road are seriously interested in doing their best to practice sustainability

John Ryan was a neighbor and now he is SEN's administrative director. We are so fortunate to have his expertise in so many areas. SEN's terrific web site is his doing. Write him to offer any help/suggestions or just to send a note of support: john@sacredearthnetwork.org.

The generosity of all the people mentioned on the back page has enabled us to raise \$35,000 from Trust for Mutual Understanding so 2006 looks like it will be full of activity. It's the old story of it takes money to raise money. THANK YOU! We look forward to reporting back to you to let you know how it all goes.

-Bill Pfeiffer



Healthy, Green Shoots

One of the most inspiring things about 2005 has been learning about so many incredible people involved in the cutting edge of transformational change. Ven. Dyhani Ywahoo, a spiritual teacher and Cherokee elder (Tsalagi) says that "It is indeed true that the forest is renewed even by the devastation of fire. Springing forth out of the ruins of a collapsing society are the healthy, green shoots of sacred activity greeting a new dawn." This is a very hopeful outlook. What follows are a few snippets of writing--healthy, green shoots--that have been particularly compelling and provocative to us. Please feel free to comment on them or anything else in this newsletter. We want to know what you are thinking and feeling!

Thom Hartmann, a SEN advisor, wrote an article in response to the "how-come-you-did-not-offer-more-solutions" feedback to his powerful book *Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*. In the book and in the article he explains why it is so important to work on the level of "cultural shift." The following

is a passage from the article:

Missing the point of a book like [Last Hours] is quite easy to do, because this book makes a radical departure from the normal fare of self-help and environmentalism. It presents the problems, delves into the cause of the problems, and then presents as a solution something that many may think couldn't possibly be a solution because it seems unfathomably difficult: change our culture, beginning with yourself.

Such a solution is among the most perplexing to grasp because culture, at its core, is invisible. Like the air we breathe and walk through, its presence is only felt when it's resisted: at all other times it's part of the nothing-around-us that we rarely consider and almost never question.

The idea of cultural change is also often unpalatable because any sort of real, individual, personal change in beliefs and behaviors is so difficult as to be one of the rarest events we ever experience in our own lives or witness among those we know. It's easy to send ten dollars off to the Sierra Club; it's infinitely more difficult to reconsider beliefs and behaviors held since childhood, and then change your way of life to one based on that new understanding, new viewpoint, or new story. But if such deep change is what we really need, I see no point in pretending that something simpler will do it.

For the whole article see:

www.thomhartmann.com/something.shtml

For All

Ah to be alive
on a mid-September morn
fording a stream
barefoot, pants rolled up,
holding boots, pack on,
sunshine, ice in the shallows,
northern rockies.

Rustle and shimmer of icy creek waters
stones turn underfoot, small and hard as toes
cold nose dripping
singing inside
creek music, heart music,
smell of sun on gravel.

I pledge allegiance

I pledge allegiance to the soil
of Turtle Island,
and to the beings who thereon dwell
one ecosystem
in diversity
under the sun
With joyful interpenetration for all.
Gary Snyder



The Wisdom of Chumpi



John Perkins, another SEN advisor, has become quite well known for the NY Times bestseller *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*, a contemporary political thriller. What most people don't know is that he has also written six previous books on shamanism. One of them, *The Spirit of the*

Shuar, is about the many years he spent with the "last unconquered people of the Amazon." In it he quotes one of his most powerful shamanic teachers, Chumpi. Although the following passage may seem strange, even bizarre, to the Western mind, Chumpi speaks from the vantage point of a human being completely immersed in the natural world (something rare indeed!). In so doing he indirectly asks a crucial question: If we modern humans decide war is not a viable way to settle disputes how are we going to curb our population? Here is what he said:

They call me Chumpi. Just that. No Spanish name. Some say it's because I was born before the Spanish arrived. Hah! Perhaps that's so. Some say it's due to my powers as a shaman, a shapeshifter, my arutam [ones inner power connected to Universal power] Who knows? I am Chumpi.

Often when I take ayahuasca with one of my patients, we journey together. I can see what she needs, and I help to guide her--or my spirit helpers do, the anaconda, jaguar, bat, Tsunkqui [Shuar goddess of the waters], and the power of my arutam. Then the arutam enters her, she feels it in her heart, and I just go along; I learn as much so that I may heal her and help in many ways. It's always an education for me! But she must do her own work; I am always careful not to get in the way.

This happened with John Perkins several times. I was training him, as I also trained Peem and my nephew, Mariano Chumpi. They're all powerful young men and I've suggested to them that they work together. Joining hearts to help Nunqui [Goddess of the Earth and plants], Tsunkqui, and Ayumpum [Shuar god of lightning] do their jobs, uniting people and nature--something that has come naturally to the Shuar, at least in the the times before the mission, yet seems so difficult for the gringos.

You know, there's nothing more important than for people to shapeshift into nature. We must feel our hearts as the same hearts as those of the anaconda, the jaguar, the river, and the chonta tree. We must also feel our

Shamanism and Ecology in the Altai Mountains of Siberia

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Top left graphic: Photo of Altai mountains by Sergei Usik

Bottom left graphic: Migration Symbol from *Meditations with the Hopi*

Top right graphic: from *Bear Tribe's Self-Reliance Book*, Sun Bear et al.

souls as the same, and our bodies as well. This is the spirit of oneness, part of the power of arutam.

I know that the priests teach otherwise, saying that humans are above all the others. How can this be? Is not Tsunkqui a woman, a human? Is she not a goddess, and also the water, the turtle, the caiman? Is not Tsunkqui sometimes, too, a man? And Nunqui---is she not the roots of the plants during the day and the trunk, branches, and leaves at night, as well as a woman? Ayumpum is the lightning, the condor, and also the ayahuasca vine-- a man on earth, a god, and so much more! Etsaa---is he not a man, a great warrior, hunter, and teacher, and also the sun that warms us, our hearts and bodies all day long?

What about the God of the priests? Is He not also the river and the mountain, the jaguar and the fish? Does He not love all these things---the stones, birds, and insects--- as much as he loves me or the priests?

Was I not a tree? Will I not be one again? And the bat--I know that soon my human form will disappear when I shapeshift into a bat. Does that mean I have sunk lower, become something less than I am now? Of course not. We are one, the same. The priests see us as different, but that's an illusion. They tell us that our ayahuasca and datura remove us from reality. It's just the opposite. We see the reality in our oneness. That's the power of arutam---feeling the oneness. The priests hallucinate and in their confused state declare that man is above all others. We are not separate from these things in nature; we are them, and they are us.



That's why the Shuar had headhunting wars; it was a way to keep peace and fulfill our promise to Etsaa---peace for all nature and among nature, which is the same. You see, we know that men will keep on creating babies and using up more of the land, kill more animals, and cut more trees--- there's nothing to stop us. Only we people can take that responsibility. We can either by having fewer babies or by going to war. Our young men used to sing an initiation song about sacrificing themselves for this purpose. "I was born to die fighting, born to sacrifice myself for Nunqui, born to sacrifice myself for my children's children."

Look at us now! The Ecuadorian government and the missionaries have prohibited headhunting wars, A few still shrink heads but not the way we used to. And just see what's happened! Look at all the Shuar. Our

population has spread like a strangler fig vine. We can no longer live off the land, from hunting and gathering alone. There are too many people!

The only wars we have are the ones with Peru! And there's no peace for the plants and animals. They suffer. They are us, we are them. So we suffer. The Shuar have become beggars, begging for food and education, begging visitors for shirts and stupid wrist watches, begging...becoming like the others out there who have lost their way. The only hope is for us to regain arutam, to feel our connection."

Permaculture and the Goddess



Starhawk, is an amazing change agent and Witch (she uses this term with pride as she explains that the Witches are the practitioners of the Old Religion of the Goddess which began in pre-Christian Europe). In her most recent book, *The Earth Path*, which combines practices in Earth-based spirituality with science and permaculture principles, she states:

A Witch must not only be familiar with mystic planes of existence beyond the physical realm; she should also be familiar with the trees and plants and birds and animals of her own backyard, be able to name them, know their uses and habits and what part each plays in the whole. She should understand not just the symbolic aspects of the moon's cycle, but the real functioning of the Earth's water and mineral and energy cycles. She should know the importance of ritual in building human community, but also understand the function of mycorrhizal fungi and soil microorganisms in the natural community in which human community is embedded.

Left middle graphic: from Bear Tribe's *Self-Reliance Book*, Sun Bear, Wabun, & Nimimosh

Right middle graphic: the Nile goddess from 4000 BCE

In fact, everybody should. Our culture is afflicted with a vast disconnection, an abyss of ignorance that becomes apparent whenever an issue involving the natural world arises. As a society, we are daily making decisions and setting policies that have enormous repercussions on the natural world. And those policies are being set by officials and approved by a public who are functionally eco-illiterate...

[However], studying the language of nature can be a dangerous undertaking. For to become literate in nature's idiom, we must challenge our ordinary perceptions and change our consciousness. We must, to some extent, withdraw from many of the underlying assumptions and preoccupations of our culture. The first set of assumptions are those about the Earth and are role in it as humans. [The dominant] view sees human beings as separate from and above nature.

...A corrective view might arise from the understanding that we are not separate from nature but in fact are nature. Indigenous cultures have always seen themselves as part of nature. Mabel Mckay, Cache Creek Pomo healer, elder, basketmaker, used to say, 'When people don't use the plants, they get scarce, You must use them so they will come up again, all plants are like that, If they're not gathered from, or talked to and cared about, they'll die.'



Permaculture, “invented” by two Australians in the 70’s, is a modern formulation of indigenous principles of land use. In essence, how can we have human culture but have much less impact using far less energy? Permaculture experts Dave Jacke and Jono Neiger organized a wonderful summer gathering in New Hampshire bringing together about 50 people passionately involved in permaculture. A special guest was David Holmgren, one of the co-founders of permaculture mentioned above. One of the themes that kept surfacing in the discussions was the phenomenon known as “Peak Oil:” we do not need to run out of petroleum as a civilization to experience tremendous changes in “business as usual.” As soon as demand starts to outstrip supply, even slightly, the price of petroleum will start to skyrocket, affecting everything in the industrial world. (The first tremors of Peak Oil may be upon us. After Hurricane Katrina, Saudi Arabia admitted

that it simply could not increase production to make up for the loss of Gulf of Mexico oil rigs.) Holmgren was asked in a recent interview what is the role of permaculture in response to Peak Oil. His answer was characteristically visionary:



Well, permaculture, as I've said in my book, in a world of constantly rising energy and resultant affluence permaculture is always going to be restricted to a small number of people who are committed to those ideals which have some sort of ethical or moral pursuit. It's always going to be a fringe thing. In a world of decreasing energy, permaculture provides, I believe, the best available framework for redesigning the whole way we think, the way we act, and the way we design new strategies. It doesn't mean to say that everyone's going to have a vegetable garden or some other permaculture technique. But the thinking behind permaculture is really based on this idea of reducing that energy availability and how you work with that in a creative way. That requires a complete overturning of a lot of our inherited culture.

For the full transcript see:
<http://www.energybulletin.net/524.html>



Middle left graphic: from *Meditations with the Hopi*
Bottom right photo: Bill Pfeiffer harvesting corn with Hopi friends (10/05)

Evolution's Arrow:

The Direction of Evolution and the Future of Humanity



Although the writing is a bit dry and focused on convincing the scientific community of its value, *Evolution's Arrow* by the Australian John Stewart, may be the clearest statement of why a sustainable future is not a hopeless fantasy. In SEN's work, we help individuals *feel* the evolutionary momentum of which they are a part. It's nice to have a scientific basis for why it is critical for each of one of us to evolve to our highest potential, and have fun in the process. Below is a summary of Stewart's profound work. For the full book, which concisely supports the summary's claims, see www4.tpg.com.au/users/jes999/.

Evolution's Arrow is part of a significant evolutionary shift in which increasing numbers of individuals are seeing themselves as having a conscious role in the future evolution of life on Earth. *Evolution's Arrow* uses the methods, tools and findings of science to demonstrate that the evolution of life is directional. Evolution is not an aimless and random process, it is headed somewhere. This has significant implications for humanity.

Whenever life emerges on any planet, two great evolutionary trends begin.

The first trend is towards the formation of cooperative organizations of greater and greater scale. Human societies are currently the largest scale cooperative organizations of living processes on this planet. [Cooperating for survival, not for sustainability, yet... Ed.] Our societies are made up of individuals who are in turn made up of trillions of cells that are in turn made up of the descendants of simpler cells.

Our societies are the result of many repetitions of a process in which living entities team up to form larger scale cooperatives. Self replicating molecular processes teamed up to form simple cells, they eventually teamed up to produce complex cells, they in turn teamed up to

produce multicellular organisms such as bees, termites and humans, and they teamed up to produce societies.

Human cooperative groups began on a small scale as families, families teamed up to form bands, they teamed up to form tribes, tribes teamed up to form the first agricultural communities, they teamed up to form cities, and so on. Strikingly, the cooperative groups that arise at each step in this long evolutionary sequence become the organisms or entities that then team up to form the cooperative groups at the next step in the sequence.

It is easy to see what has driven this unmistakable direction in evolution – at every level of organization, cooperative teams will always have the potential to win out over isolated individuals.

The details of the evolution of life on any planet will differ, but the direction will be the same – towards unification and cooperation over greater and greater scales. Eventually, evolution on any planet will reach the same significant threshold that we have reached on Earth. It is clear that for us, the next great step in this sequence is the formation of a cooperative, sustainable and creative global society.

The second great evolutionary trend on any planet is towards greater evolvability. Life gets better at evolving and adapting. Its ability to find solutions to adaptive problems improves progressively.

Initially living processes discover better adaptations by trial and error. They find out what behaviors are effective by trying them out in practice. But eventually organisms will evolve the capacity to form mental representations of their environment and of the impact of alternative behaviors. This enables them to foresee how their environment will respond to their actions. Rather than try out alternative behaviors in practice, they can now test them mentally. They begin to understand how their world works, and how it can be manipulated to achieve their adaptive goals.



Top left and bottom right graphics: from *Buffalo Woman Comes Singing*, Brooke Medicine Eagle.

In an important further development, some individuals will begin to undergo a critical shift in consciousness. Instead of experiencing themselves as isolated and self-concerned individuals, they will begin to see and experience themselves as participants and actors in the great evolutionary process on their planet. They will realize that:

-a life dedicated to the pursuit of narrow desires and pleasures cannot be worthwhile. They will see that their desires are evolution's way of programming them to be adaptive and successful in past environments. In many cases their desires and pleasures no longer serve this purpose effectively – and often produce maladaptive behaviour;

-the main game on their planet is and always has been the evolutionary process;

-they can be conscious participants in the evolutionary processes that will shape the future of life on their planet. They can play an important role in the actualization of the next great steps in evolution on their planet;

-the successful future evolution of life on their planet depends on their conscious participation in the evolutionary process. Unlike past great evolutionary transformations, the step to a unified and sustainable planetary society will occur only through the conscious efforts of organisms, and not otherwise. Conscious organisms will need to envision the planetary society and design strategies to get there. If it is left to chance, it will not happen – in the past, chance took millions of years and many failures and false starts to produce cooperative organizations such as complex cells;

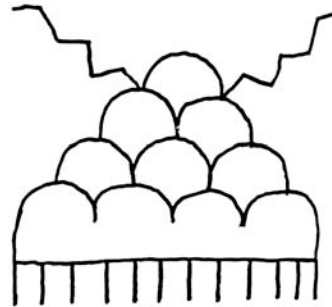
-their actions can have meaning and purpose insofar as they are relevant to the wider evolutionary process. To the extent that their actions can contribute positively to the evolutionary process, they are meaningful to a larger process outside themselves that has been unfolding long before they were born and that will continue long after they die;

-the evolutionary perspective therefore provides them with an answer to the great existential question that confronts all conscious individuals: What should I do with my life?

- their awakening to the evolutionary perspective and the awakening of others like them is itself a critically important evolutionary event on their planet.

To maximize their evolvability, they will need to develop themselves psychologically to become self-evolving beings - organisms that can adapt in whatever directions are necessary to advance the evolutionary process, unrestricted by their biological and social past.

As more and more individuals make this transition, a wave of evolutionary activism will emerge, directed at the unification of living processes on the planet to form a creative and sustainable planetary society. Evolution's Arrow also notes that humanity has reached the major evolutionary threshold referred to above. Individuals are beginning to emerge who have decided to consciously contribute to the evolutionary process by doing what they can to actualize such a global society.



Meaning "the entire Universe in perfect harmony and balance," the Hopi Navoti symbol contains thundercloud, rain, and lightning. From *Light on the Return Path*, Kimmey.

John Stewart and the previous writers are all pointing to something profound. They are asking us to stretch like never before, both individually and culturally. SEN's primary goal is "mending the Sacred Hoop," (a Native American prophecy whereby people of all races and backgrounds would come together to restore balance on Mother Earth) but we are reminded by Brian Swimme, the brilliant mathematical cosmologist, to evoke the revelatory powers of the Universe to get there. Traditional peoples have that evocation built into their lifeway and culture. SEN's exchanges, workshops, and expeditions aim to draw out the deep veins of creativity that all people possess so that collectively we can see past the narrow confines of our cultural blinders (straightjacket!). This is a celebratory experience and the destruction of the natural world is an incredible motivator for waking up from our amnesia. When we know in our bones that Earth is alive and full of meaning, we can use our time energy and wisely. Come join us in the exploration and the empowerment. True sustainability is an ecstatic experience!

Join us April 21–23, 2006 in Tennessee for

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Sacred Earth Network (SEN) is a non-profit (501(C)(3)) international organization based in Petersham, Massachusetts. We are part of a planetary groundswell deciding to build a balanced and sustainable culture despite numerous negative trends. Our focus is connecting with the Earth and remembering indigenous wisdom.

Our activities are rooted in two core beliefs:

- * that all of Nature is sacred and must be treated with respect and honor, and
- * that it is possible to "Restore the Hoop of All Nations" on this miraculous, interconnected living system we call Planet Earth.

Many, if not most, people in the industrial countries seem to be lost in a trance of consumerism that ignores the sacredness of Nature and the critical issues of the day. These countries "economic interests" completely disregard disappearing species, climate change, radioactive waste, and the whole plethora of threats to the biological foundation of Planet Earth. Correspondingly, a certain socialized numbness, denial, and resignation can plague even the most active among us.

Medicine is needed. To this end, we have been leading workshops, expeditions, and indigenous peoples exchanges that help both seasoned activists, and those just beginning to realize our interdependency, to practice ways of re-connecting and plugging in with renewed joy and vigor.

A special thanks to the following organizations and individuals for their generous support in 2005:

Davis Chapman Hawkowl recently resigned from SEN's board of directors after almost 15 years of devoted service. He just became the proud father of a baby boy, Galen. We want to congratulate him and wish him and his wife Julie the very best of luck.
Thank you Davis!

The Roy A. Hunt Foundation
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