

Culture of Peace: Toward peaceful coexistence with nature

By Will Sears

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As the administration is considering eliminating the watchdog for our environment, the Environmental Protection Agency, we are called to consider our role with nature. When we speak of creating a true and comprehensive culture of peace, there is usually an unacknowledged “elephant in the room.” This is the enormous and incessant violence our human species directs toward the natural world and the other life forms that rightfully share this planet with us.

Fundamental to a culture of peace are the values of unity, respect, inclusion and compassion. Just as we owe these values to our fellow humans, we owe them to the other living beings that share the earth with us, from the smallest bacterium to the largest sequoia. They all have an equal right to be here. They have evolved with us over at least an equal amount of time and each has an essential role in the intricately co-dependent web of life. They have, unlike us, lived with each other in a generally harmonious balance for eons.

Nature is not separate from us. It is in us and all around us. Its living members share the same origins and DNA. We cannot exist without it. When we harm it we harm ourselves.

For millennia, humanity has engaged in an evermore inclusive and accelerating siege, subjugation and outright genocide upon other inhabitants of our delicate planet. Beyond affecting other life forms, these relentless attacks have contributed to the destruction of the soil, the aquifers, rivers and oceans; even the very atmosphere upon which we and all other life depend.

These assaults on Nature have been so complete, omnipresent and continuous that we seemingly go about our lives unaware of their extent or even existence. They have been justified, encouraged, supported and waged by our governments and our legal, religious, agricultural, business and health institutions — in short, by our very culture itself.

While temporary success in this behavior has resulted in the spectacular rise to dominance of the human race, we are slowly coming to realize that, by continuing to pursue it, we will ultimately doom nature as well as ourselves.

Our justifications for this violence stem from our notions of “ownership” of the earth and by assuming that we are separate from, and superior to, all other life forms; that they have limited consciousness and that we have rightful dominion over them.

Many modern scientists are discovering that animals of all kinds exhibit complex consciousness and intelligence. They are being shown to have thoughts, feelings, emotions, empathy, communication, knowledge, memory and understanding that, while different, can often be seen as equal or superior to ours. There is evidence that many of these attributes of intelligence exist in plants as well. Consciousness of some sort may be a universal and necessary means of adapting to life in a changing and challenging environment.

By extending to the natural world the values of unity, inclusion, respect and compassion, we can move from an unsustainable and unwinnable state of destruction and domination to a restored state of partnership and balance. In ecological terms, balance is equivalent to peace.

Around the world, steps are being taken to redress this imbalance. Some Latin American countries are beginning to recognize the rights of nature in their constitutions and almost every country in the world has signed on to the Paris Climate Agreement.

Southern Oregon is ahead of the curve with its movements to remove dams on the Klamath and expand the Cascade Siskiyou National Monument. KS Wild has had huge success in protecting our wild places. Lomakatsi, along with the Ashland Forest Resiliency Stewardship Project, is restoring our degraded landscapes. Organic farming is rapidly expanding. Clean energy is being developed and Ashland is committed to increased sustainability in its Climate and Energy Action Plan.

We have strong environmental programs through the Geos Institute, Southern Oregon Climate Action Now (SOCAN) and Rogue Climate. Antibiotic and agri-chemical use is decreasing. Ashland is a “Tree City” and a “Bee City.” Southern Oregon University is replete with clubs, classes and programs furthering ecology and sustainability. We are beginning to inculcate a true and comprehensive Ashland Culture of Peace.

Like that movement toward peace, progress toward more sustainable and compassionate environmental policies have been stemming, not from the higher levels of government, but from those powerful levels that we can affect the most, the personal and community.

We are moving together toward a new paradigm in which unity with nature becomes the highest form of human evolution.

Will Sears is the Ashland Culture of Peace commissioner representing the environment. He is a long-standing director of the local Lomakatsi Restoration Project. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC's Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.



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