



Eco-Tips Magazine

Stories for people who care about ecology... recognition of those who do.

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The Last Ecological Frontier

By: Dr. Michael Tobias

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Awash in environmental lament but ignited by technological zeal and innovative economic choices from every quarter, much theory and activism today hinges upon solutions to those problems afflicting human health and happiness. Our consumerism, multiplied by the intensity of our technologies, and number of individual households, and the sheer proliferation of our biological numbers all translates into known burdens upon every ecosystem that leave us bereft of natural experiences with increasing frequency; that exert profoundly unsettling medical impacts on our bodies and minds and those of our loved ones; that foul every service which nature would otherwise provide; and which result in a vastly unsettling burden upon the imagination: the deep-rooted realization that we are in trouble as a species, no matter what we do.

This is that pivotal point often heard today which declares its melancholy by a simplistic mantra: pessimism versus optimism, as we all fall beneath the blizzard of data swarming the media, infecting our hearts, and undermining the collective will to address the massive problems perverting the earth with unprecedented acceleration - from the extinction of millions of



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species, to the fragmentation of a planet which, for the last 65 million years has largely enjoyed brilliant stability.

There is, however, one thing that few ecologists are talking about which would, in essence, turn around this escalating calamity. "Non-violence limps," said Mahatma Gandhi, "but it is the only way." Non-violence ("ahimsa" in Sanskrit, whose ancient linguistic and conceptual articulation of this all-embracing ethical philosophy was at the heart of Jainism and Buddhism) is the last ecological frontier, and the one we can all manifest by our individual actions. You will not, by yourself, save ice sheets in Antarctica from melting, but you will, if you decide to, save individuals whose lives are no less emotional, brilliant, neurologically complex, and spiritual than your own loved ones. I am referring to those nearly 100 billion animals that are slaughtered under unimaginably cruel circumstances every year for human consumption, where healthier, ecologically-sustainable alternatives exist that would provide a life-raft for all those cows, chickens, turkeys, horses, donkeys, sheep, dogs, cats, monkeys, marine and fresh-water vertebrates and invertebrates, goats, ostriches, deer, pigs, and others.

This vegan paradigm should be law, but is not, as yet. Leonardo da Vinci, George Bernard Shaw, the poet Percy Shelley, 100 million East Indians, and nearly every known ethical tradition has embraced non-violence, many at the level of vegetarianism. The nearly 20 million Jains have been particularly adroit in their scientific analysis of pain and the ethical topography of cruelty that is both needless and tragic; that undermines any and all pretense to environmental problem solving. You can't in good conscience call yourself an environmentalist if you are not, at least, a vegetarian. This is Ecology 101. But it is more than that: it is religion, ethics, humanity 101. It is the core of our evolution: not hunting, predation, and violence, but gentle gathering, benign pastoralism. The muscle-man mentality is a throw-back to all those eras of psychotic and pugilistic mood-swings that have no place in 21st century civilized society. If we are to survive a human demographic profile likely to surpass nine billion people, we had better recognize that the only lasting legacy worthy of ourselves, and of our children, is the ultimate solution, namely, unconditional love.

As one who spends his life committed to saving endangered species, I am constantly reminding my colleagues that the rarest Amazon parrots are no more or less valuable than a pigeon, a sparrow, a chicken. Until such time as we embrace all life forms with the courage of our kindness, the visionary passions of our gentleness, and the imaginative power, the veritable "megatonnage" inherent to the human heart, we will continue to fail at all those things which matter most to mother nature, namely, the arcadian ideals of a paradise on

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earth.

Some may cringe at the notion that idealism is actually a practical methodology for overcoming climate change; that unconditional love has anything to do with restoring every local commons that has been abused, trashed, and violated. In truth, it seems basic to my way of thinking that unless we rally behind the conviction of love -unstinting love given without discrimination- we will collectively commit an ironic form of mass suicide. For at the very moment that we see the greatest collective awareness about the perils our species has unleashed on nature, we all are witnessing the most catastrophic trespass in the annals of biology against all other species, but none more grievously and in such numbers as against those so-called "farm animals" that we are condemning with greater and greater frequency and indifference. Among the mammals, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization data suggests we are slaughtering over fifty billion per year, and those are just the ones that are counted.

If it is ecological integrity, sanity, and wholistic health that calls to your soul but you are increasingly thwarted by all the bad, seemingly insoluble problems; or if your skepticism declares that it is foolhardy to imagine a world where people are kind to cows and sheep when they scarcely speak to their neighbors, let alone rally to the cause of child slaves in Asia or Africa, or starving millions every night, then go back and have a major re-think: you can, you must recognize that you alone have the power to solve these problems, and it begins at home, around the dinner table, and in your absolute refusal to collaborate in the slaughter of innocents that comes fancy wrapped in your grocery store. Vegetarianism is your way to fight back with non-violence, and to begin today.

It is the most exhilarating, liberating, important ecological revolution that we can collectively engage. It can change your life quietly, lovingly, and thoroughly, while helping all others.

Dr. Michael Tobias, President of the [Dancing Star Foundation](#), is an author, ecologist and filmmaker. His most recent book, [SANCTUARY: Global Oases of Innocence](#), with co-author Jane Gray Morrison, was published by Council Oak Books and officially launched in Washington, D.C. this past summer at the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Tobias and Morrison's most recent Dancing Star Foundation feature film documentary, [HOTSPOTS](#) will premiere over public broadcasting beginning in December 2008.

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