

## HOW TO LIVE IN HARMONY WITH THE EARTH AND WITH OTHER SPECIES

by

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Saving the environment is on everyone's mind. Global warming is undeniable, and it is clear to all except the most antediluvian reactionaries that humanity must soon face up to the need for drastic change to prevent catastrophe. People come up with ways to save gas, to cut back on energy use, to reduce waste, and to use other conservation methods. It is great that more people are making efforts to conserve. I am all in favor of this. The only problem with this conservationist approach is that so many groups focus on saving a little bit, while ignoring some of the most important things that people can do to help the environment.

Everyone talks about the need to end our dependence on fossil fuels. It would be nice for someone to invent a new source of non-polluting energy to replace fossil fuels. But until that time comes, what the earth would most benefit from is to adopt the American Indian approach of living in harmony with the earth and with other sentient beings. The idea that the earth is our mother, that we owe our very existence to her nurturing resources, is a way of putting environmental issues into perspective.

Traditional Native American animist religions stress that every thing has a spirit, and that the spirit of humans is no more worthy than the spirit of other things. In my opinion, this is a much more healthy viewpoint than the view of the Abrahamic religions that god created man in his own image. The idea that humans are superior to other life forms, and that we have the right to exploit other species and the earth as a whole for our benefit is a selfish, self centered view that has led to the present environmental crisis facing the earth. The idea that man should "go out and dominate the earth," and "be fruitful and multiply," as it commands in the Bible, is a dangerous and outdated idea that needs to be rethought so that changes can be made.

These changes involve shifting our way of living in some simple but really fundamental ways, and changing our attitudes about life. If we make these changes, we will see that our decisions about our own lives can make a huge difference. All the suggestions below are all within our technological capability at this time. We do not need to wish for new inventions to accomplish these goals. Each of these things requires only the human will to see them accomplished.

The first thing we have to fundamentally understand is that the environmental crisis is, to a large extent, simply the result of an explosive growth of human population within the

last hundred years. Look at the numbers of humans that existed on the earth from our earliest beginnings as a species about 200,000 years ago. For most of human history, populations were held in check by diseases and high infant mortality rates. It took all of human history up to the year 1830 for human population to reach one billion. Then, after the nineteenth century discovery that many diseases were caused by germs, the institution of public sanitation programs and medical advances led to a sharp decline in the infant mortality rate. Fewer children died, and more lived to reproductive age. As a consequence, it took only one century for human population to double, from one billion in 1830 to two billion in 1930. Yet in the period since 1930, with the expansion of these public sanitation measures and medical advances around the world, a population explosion has occurred. In a mere seventy-five years, humanity swarmed from two billion in 1930 to over six billion today.

And yet, despite this dramatic change, ideas from the era of high infant mortality rates continue to hold sway. Societies continue to promote the idea that everyone should get married and have children. Religions continue to promote the idea that the only purpose of sex is reproduction, and that any other kind of sexual behavior besides male-female intercourse is sinful.

This encouragement of reproduction must stop if humanity is going to survive. No species can increase in such vast numbers without throwing off the whole ecological balance. We are like a cancer on the earth, growing so rapidly that we are killing off numerous other species and doing unfathomable damage to the earth. Though the RATE of population increase has slowed in recent years, the numbers are so large that the raw increases keep getting bigger. And nobody is paying much attention to this great looming catastrophe.

1. What can be done to reduce the world's population (not reduce the population GROWTH rate, which is the current focus, but to reduce the raw numbers themselves).

Here are a few ideas that we can do, right now:

A. Make a determination not to reproduce, and encourage others not to reproduce. Make non-reproduction the high status thing to do.

B. Persuade governments to provide people with financial incentives not to reproduce, and social rewards for those who did not reproduce

C. Don't just tolerate homosexuality, but actively encourage those people who have a homosexual or bisexual inclination to pair up in same-sex couples. At the present time, so many such persons are pressured by their families to get married heterosexually and reproduce more children. This social pressure must cease. Especially encourage homosexual and bisexual youth, before they start reproducing, that their orientation is a good thing for the future of the earth.

D. Unfortunately, no amount of social encouragement will be successful in persuading the majority of people to become homosexual. Heterosexual desire is endemic. For these people, who will remain heterosexual despite social encouragement of homosexuality, the strong need is to give social encouragement and financial incentives for birth control and abortion. The present situation, where shortsighted religious zealots try to prevent young people from having abortions or having access to birth control, is counterproductive to

the future well-being of the earth.

E. Adopt a homeless older child, of whom there are millions in the world, instead of reproducing. This is not only ecological, but also humane.

F. Allow deformed and sickly infants to die in peace, instead of cruelly trying to prolong their life when nature did not mean them to live. Biologists understand that the vast majority of mutations are not beneficial, and to allow those individuals with crippling disabilities to continue living to the point that they put their genes into the gene pool, is unfair to upcoming generations which will inherit these unfavorable mutations.

G. Encourage euthanasia for seriously ill persons who are within the last couple of years of their expected lifespan. It is insane to waste so much of the world's medical resources and know-how on prolonging the lives of persons who will die within a year or so, when young healthy people cannot get even basic health maintenance and disease prevention resources. Ask any doctor, and they will tell you that the vast majority of people in the medical care system are within two years of death. Certainly, we should use medical knowledge to help people of all ages remain healthy, and as long as a person is beneficial to society and can enjoy life for themselves they should be encouraged to live. But when it gets to the point that life is a painful chore, then it is counterproductive to waste resources on such persons whose time has come. Prioritize health resources more rationally, to benefit young people who have their whole lives ahead of them, instead of terminally ill people who find it difficult to let go of life after they have had the benefit of living a full lifetime. It is cruel to use extraordinary medical measures to keep persons alive who are on the brink of death, especially if they are in pain or discomfort or their mind is gone.

2. Stop eating large animals like beef and pork. There are more cows in the world today than there are humans. Thousands of acres of forests are being cut down to make pastureland for these large domesticated animals (as well as forests being cut down for increasing populations to farm). As they digest grass, cows burp up methane gas in prodigious amounts, and this is a catastrophe for the ozone layer. Pigs and cows create so much feces that giant farms pollute the rivers and lands around them. Even more important, pigs and cows are intelligent animals, and killing them for food is close to cannibalism. In parts of Africa, eating apes is considered a delicacy, which is part of the reason the great apes are teetering so close to extinction, and apes share 99% of our genes. Persuade governments to pass laws prohibiting the killing of large animal species, beginning with apes, and then going on to include cows, sheep and pigs. Prosecute those who kill large animals under the murder laws.

3. Eat small things. Poultry, fish and seafood are better than eating large mammals. Even better are vegetarian meals. Insects are the great untapped source of protein for human consumption. Insects are, by very very very large margins, the most numerous species on earth. They will not be in danger of going extinct, and we could eat them to our heart's content and not wipe them out. In places like Thailand, insects are considered to be delicacies; adopt a Thai diet.

4. Protect forest lands. Plants supply the oxygen on which we animals survive. Stop the rape of the rainforests to supply the wood needs of the world's burgeoning populations

(that is, again, the need to massively reduce the population). Build our buildings out of stone and concrete, including sprayed concrete on wire mesh frames, rather than wood. Plant tree seedlings in areas that are already deforested.

5. Move close to where you work, and walk to work or ride a bike or even a bus rather than using an automobile. People talk endlessly about saving gas, but the easiest way is to cut out daily commuting to a faraway workplace. Pass zoning laws making it easier for people to move as their jobs move (for example, by prohibiting landlords from charging fees and penalties if someone changes jobs and wants to move before their lease is up).

If people did just these five things, the environmental crisis would be greatly reduced within one generation. Each thing that is mentioned above is within our technological capability at this time. We do not need to wait for new inventions to accomplish these goals. Each of these things requires only the human will to see them accomplished. What the earth would most benefit from is a massive reduction in the numbers of human beings in the world, as well as the large domestic animals that people are so fond of breeding and eating.

Why not set as a goal to reduce the world's population back to the more sensible levels of 1930, only one lifetime, seventy-five years ago? Was there some great lacking of human numbers in 1930 that we could not tolerate in the 21st century? If not, why don't we aim to reduce human population to about two billion people within the next seventy-five years?

And concerning large domestic food animals, there should be an even more massive reduction in numbers. This goal would be comparable to the massive reduction in numbers of horses in the United States and Western Europe in the decades after the invention of the automobile. Horses were no longer needed as transport and as beasts of burden after the 1920s, and their numbers are not a threat to the environment today. Perhaps with the exception of milk cows and goats, can't we consider doing the same with large domestic animals like cows and pigs that are bred solely for the purpose of human consumption? It might be acceptable to keep some cows and pigs as pets, like horses are largely kept today, or as examples to be kept in zoos as evidence of human foibles of the past.

It is important to recognize that humans only started domesticating large animals about five to seven thousand years ago, which is a very short time when considering the entire span of our history as a species. When humans started enslaving large animals to do labor for the benefit of their human owner, this was the beginning of slavery. We call them "draft animals" or "beasts of burden," but such animals were really nothing different from slaves. Animal slavery became the model for human slavery.

Only two centuries ago human slavery was endemic around the world. Now, as a result of the abolitionist movement, the consensus is that the practice of enslaving another human is barbaric. Humanity has risen above this former state, to a new level of moral

awareness. Now, it is time for us to evolve to a newer awareness regarding the enslavement of animals. It is time for a new anti-slavery movement to protest the enslavement of animals.

Certainly those poor animals who are forced to do labor against their will deserve at least as much sympathy as the animals that are kept for no other reason than to be slaughtered for human food. Cannibalism and slavery have no place in the 21st century world. We have risen above that.

So, while people should try to conserve and not waste energy and materials, there is the larger need to consider promoting some of the really serious ways to live in harmony with the earth and with other species. Think radically; it is the only hope for the future of the world.