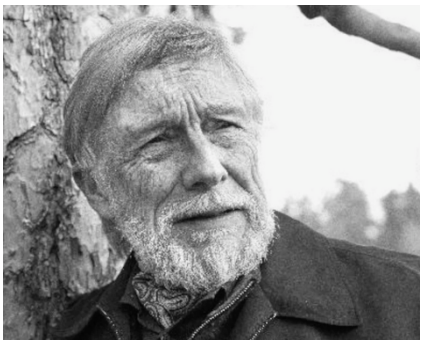

GARY SNYDER began his career in the 1950s as a noted member of the "Beat Generation," though he has since explored a wide range of social and spiritual matters in both poetry and prose. Snyder's work blends physical reality and precise observations of nature with inner insight received primarily through the practice of Zen Buddhism. While Snyder has gained attention as a spokesman for the preservation of the natural world and its earth-conscious cultures, he is not simply a "back-to-nature" poet with a facile message. In *American Poetry in the Twentieth Century*, Kenneth Rexroth observed that although Snyder proposes "a new ethic, a new esthetic, [and] a new life style," he is also "an accomplished technician who has learned from the poetry of several languages and who has developed a sure and flexible style capable of handling any material he wishes." According to Charles Altieri in *Enlarging the Temple: New Directions in American Poetry during the 1960s*, Snyder's achievement "is a considerable one. Judged simply in aesthetic terms, according to norms of precision, intelligence, imaginative play, and moments of deep resonance, he easily ranks among the best poets of his generation. Moreover, he manages to provide a fresh perspective on metaphysical themes, which he makes relevant and compelling."

Snyder's emphasis on metaphysics and his celebration of the natural order remove his work from the general tenor of Beat writing—and in fact Snyder is also identified as a poet of the San Francisco Renaissance along with Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser. Snyder has looked to the Orient and to the beliefs of American Indians for positive responses to the world, and he has tempered his studies with stints of hard physical labor as a logger and trail builder. Altieri believed that Snyder's "articulation of a possible religious faith" independent of Western culture has greatly enhanced his popularity. In his study of the poet, Bob Steuding described how Snyder's accessible style, drawn from the examples of Japanese haiku and Chinese verse, "has created a new kind of poetry that is direct, concrete, non-Romantic, and ecological. . . . Snyder's work will be remembered in its own right as the example of a new direction taken in American literature." *Nation* contributor Richard Tillinghast wrote: "In Snyder the stuff of the world 'content'—has always shone with a wonderful sense of earthiness and health. He has always had things to tell us, experiences to relate, a set of values to expound. . . . He has influenced a generation." [. . .]

If Snyder was influenced by his Beat contemporaries, he also exerted an influence on them. Kerouac modeled his character Japhy Ryder in *The Dharma Bums* on Snyder, and the poet encouraged his friends to take an interest in Eastern philosophy as an antidote to the ills of the West. Just as the Beats were gaining nation-wide notoriety, Snyder moved to Japan in 1956 on a scholarship from the First Zen Institute of America. He remained abroad almost continuously for the next twelve years. Part of that time he lived in an ashram and devoted himself to strenuous Zen study and meditation. He also travelled extensively, visiting India and Indonesia, and even venturing as far as Istanbul on an oil tanker, the Sappa Creek. His first two poetry collections, *Riprap* (1959) and *Myths & Texts* (1960), are miniature narratives capturing Snyder's travels and life working in the natural world; they also represent a vigorous attempt to achieve freedom from the "establishment" mores of urban America. After returning to the United States, Snyder built his own house—along the Yuba River in the northern Sierra Nevada Mountains—where he has lived since.

This introduction is taken from the *Poetry Foundation*:
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/gary-snyder

Gary Snyder on the ascent up Matterhorn Peak.

This first selection is not from Gary Snyder, but from Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*. Although the character Japhy Ryder is based on Gary Snyder, it is important to note that the character in Kerouac's novel is not the person, Gary Snyder. Still, I include it in this introduction to Gary Snyder's work because the character does perhaps suggest something about Gary Snyder and the novel did introduce a generation of Americans to Zen and to Gary Snyder. The novel chronicles a time when Kerouac and Snyder where getting into Zen. The main characters are the narrator Ray Smith, based on Kerouac, and Japhy Ryder. One of the most important episodes in the book is of Smith, Ryder and Henry Morley (based on real-life friend John Montgomery) climbing Matterhorn Peak in California. The novel has long been one of my favorite books and this passage is perhaps the most memorable. I think it does suggest something important about Zen, and is also poignant in retrospect, considering that the scene does reveal something about the lives of these two writers. In a sense Kerouac didn't make it to the mountain peak, dying at age 47 in 1969 from the consequences of alcoholism, while Snyder went to Japan, studied Zen, and became one of the great American writers and an important environmental activist. —Tim Freeman

The Dharma Bums
Chapter 11

At about noon we started out, leaving our big packs at the camp where nobody was likely to be till next year anyway, and went up the scree valley with just some food and first-aid kits. The valley was longer than it looked. In no time at all it was two o'clock in the afternoon and the sun was getting that later than more golden look and a wind was rising and I began to think. "By gosh how we ever gonna climb that mountain, tonight?"

I put it up to Japhy who said: "You're right, we'll have to hurry."

"Why don't we just forget it and go on home?"

"Aw com on Tiger, we'll make a run up that hill and then we'll go home." The valley was long and long and long. And at the top end it got very steep and I began to be a little afraid of falling down, the rocks were small and it got slippery and my ankles were in pain from yesterday's muscle strain anyway. But Morley kept walking and talking and I noticed his tremendous endurance. Japhy took his pants off so he could look just like an Indian, I mean stark naked, except for a jockstrap, and hiked almost a quarter-mile ahead of us, sometimes waiting a while, to give us time to catch up, then went on, moving fast, wanting to climb the mountain today. Morley came second, about fifty yards ahead of me all the way. I was in no hurry. Then as it got later afternoon I went faster and decided to pass Morley and join Japhy. Now we were at about eleven thousand feet and it was cold and there was a lot of snow and to the east we could see immense snowcapped ranges and whooee levels of vallyeland below them, we were already practically on top of California. At one point I had to scramble, like the others, on a narrow ledge, around a butte of rock, and it really scared me: the fall was a hundred feet, letting you bounce a minute preparatory to a nice goodbye one-thousandfoot drop. The wind was whipping now. Yet that whole afternoon, even more than the other, was filled with old premonitions or memories, as though I'd been there before, scrambling on

these rocks, for other purposes more ancient, more serious, more simple. We finally got to the foot of Matterhorn where there was a most beautiful small lake unknown to the eyes of most men in this world, seen by only a handful of mountain-climbers, a small lake at eleven some odd feet with snow on the edges of it and beautiful flowers and a beautiful meadow, an alpine meadow, flat and dreamy, upon which I immediately threw myself and took my shoes off. Japhy'd been there a half-hour when I made it, and it was cold now and his clothes were on again. Morley came up behind us smiling. We sat there looking up at the imminent steep scree slope of the final crag of Matterhorn.

"That don't look like much, we can do it!" I said glad now.

"No, Ray, that's more than it looks. Do you realize that's a thousand feet more?"

"That much?"

"Unless we make a run up there, double-time, we'll never make it down again to our camp before nightfall and never make it down to the car at the lodge before tomorrow morning at, well at midnight."

"Phew."

"I'm tired," said Morley. "I don't think I'll try it."

"Well that's right, " I said. "The whole purpose of mountain climbing to me isn't just to show off you can get to the top, it's getting out to this wild country."

"Well I'm gonna go," said Japhy.

"Well if you're gonna go I'm goin with you."

"Morley?"

"I don't think I can make it. I'll wait here." And that wind was strong, too strong, I felt that as soon as we'd be a few hundred feet up the slope it might hamper our climbing.

Japhy took a small pack of peanuts and raisins and said "This'll be our gasoline, boy. You ready Ray to make a double-time run?"

"Ready. What would I say to the boys in The Place if I came all this way only to give up at the last minute?"

"It's late so let's hurry." Japhy started up walking very rapidly and then even running sometimes where the climb had to be to the right or left along ridges of scree. Scree is long landslides of rocks and sand, very difficult to scramble through, always little avalanches going on. At every few steps we took it seemed we were going higher and higher on a terrifying elevator, I gulped when I turned around to look back and see all of the state of California it would seem stretching out in three directions under huge blue skies with frightening planetary space clouds and immense vistas of distant valleys and even plateaus and for all I knew whole Nevadas out there. It was terrifying to look down and see Morley a dreaming spot by the little lake waiting for us. "Oh why didn't I stay with old Henry?" I thought. I now began to be afraid to go any higher from sheer fear of being too high. I began to be afraid of being blown away by the wind. All the nightmares I'd ever had about falling off mountains and precipitous buildings ran through my head in perfect clarity. Also with every twenty steps we took upward we both became completely exhausted.

"That's because of the high altitude now Ray," said Japhy sitting beside me panting. "So have raisins and peanuts and you'll see what kick it give you." And each time it gave us such a tremendous kick we both jumped up without a word and climbed another twenty, thirty steps. Then sat down again, panting, sweating in the cold wind, high on top of the world our noses sniffling like the noses of little boys playing late Saturday afternoon their final little games in winter. Now the wind began to howl like the wind in movies about the Shroud of

Tibet. The steepness began to be too much for me; I was afraid now to look back any more; I peeked: I couldn't even make out Morley by the tiny lake.

"Hurry it up," yelled Japhy from a hundred feet ahead. "It's getting awfully late." I looked up to the peak. It was right there, I'd be there in five minutes. "Only a half-hour to go!" yelled Japhy. I didn't believe it. In five minutes of scrambling angrily upward I fell down and looked up and it was still just as far away. What I didn't like about that peak-top was that the clouds of all the world were blowing right through it like fog.

"Wouldn't see anything up there anyway," I muttered. "Oh why did I ever let myself into this?" Japhy was way ahead of me now, he'd left the peanuts and raisins with me, it was with a kind of lonely solemnity now he had decided to rush to the top if it killed him. He didn't sit down any more. Soon he was a whole football field, a hundred yards ahead of me, getting smaller. I looked back and like Lot's wife that did it. "This is too high!" I yelled to Japhy in panic. He didn't hear me. I raced a few more feet up and fell exhausted on my belly, slipping back just a little. This is too high!" I yelled. I was really scared. Supposing I'd start to slip back for good, these screes might start sliding any time anyway. That damn mountain goat Japhy, I could see him jumping through the foggy air up ahead from rock to rock, up, up, just the flash of his boot bottoms. "How can I keep up with a maniac like that?" But with nutty desperation I followed him. Finally I came to a kind of ledge where I could sit at a level angle instead of having to cling not to slip, and I nudged my whole body inside the ledge just to hold me there tight, so the wind would not dislodge me, and I looked down and around and I had had it. "I'm staying here!" I yelled to Japhy.

"Come on Smith, only another five minutes. I only got a hundred feet to go!"

"I'm staying right here! It's too high!"

He said nothing and went on. I saw him collapse and pant and get up and make his run again.

I nudged myself closer into the ledge and closed my eyes and thought "Oh what a life this is, why do we have to be born in the first place, and only so we can have our poor gentle flesh laid out to such impossible horrors as huge mountains and rock and empty space," and with horror I remembered the famous Zen saying, "When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing." The saying made my hair stand on end; it had been such cute poetry sitting on Alvah's straw mats. Now it was enough to make my heart pound and my heart bleed for being born at all. "In fact when Japhy gets to the top of that crag he will keep climbing, the way the wind's blowing. Well this old philosopher is staying right here," and I closed my eyes. "Besides," I thought, "rest and be kind, you don't have to prove anything." Suddenly, I heard a beautiful broken yodel of a strange musical and mystical intensity in the wind, and looked up, and it was Japhy standing on top of Matterhorn peak letting out his triumphant mountain-conquering Buddha Mountain Smashing song of joy. It was beautiful. It was funny, too, up here on the not-so-funny top of California and in all that rushing fog. But I had to hand it to him, the guts, the endurance, the sweat, and now the crazy human singing: whipped cream on top of ice cream. I didn't have enough strength to answer his yodel. He ran around up there and went out of sight to investigate the little flat top of some kind (he said) that ran a few feet west and then dropped sheer back down maybe as far as I care to the sawdust floors of Virginia City. It was insane. I could hear him yelling at me but I just nudged farther in my protective nook trembling. I looked down at the small lake where Morley was lying on his back with a blade of grass in his mouth and said out loud "Now there's the karma of these three me here: Japhy Rider gets to his triumphant mountaintop and makes it, I almost make it and have to give up and huddle in a bloody cave, but the

smartest of them all is that poet's poet lying down there with his knees crossed to the sky chewing on a flower dreaming by a gurgling plage, goddammit they'll never get me up here again."

Chapter 12

I really was amazed by the wisdom of Morley now: "Him with all his goddam pictures of snowcapped Swiss Alps" I thought. Then suddenly everything was just like jazz: it happened in one insane second or so: I looked up and saw Japhy running down the mountain in huge twentyfoot leaps, running, leaping, landing with a great drive of his booted heals, bouncing five feet or so, running, then taking another long crazy yelling yodelaying sail down the sides of the world and in that flash I realized it's impossible to fall off mountains you fool and with a yodel of my own I suddenly got up and began running down the mountain after him doing exactly the same huge leaps, the same fantastic runs and jumps, and in the space of about five minutes I'd guess Japhy Ryder and I (in my sneakers, driving the heals of my sneakers right into sand, rock, boulders, I didn't care any more I was so anxious to get down out of there) came leaping and yelling like mountain goats or I'd say like Chinese lunatics of a thousand years ago, enough to raise the hair on the head of the meditating Morley by the lake, who said he looked up and saw us flying down and couldn't believe it. In fact with one of my greatest leaps and loudest screams of joy I came flying right down to the edge of the lake and dug my sneakered heals into the mud and just fell sitting there, glad. Japhy was already taking his shoes off and pouring sand and pebbles out. It was great. I took off my sneakers and poured out a couple of buckets of lava dust and said, "Ah Japhy you taught me the final lesson of them all, you can't fall of a mountain."

"And that's what they mean by the saying, When you get to the top of the mountain keep climbing, Smith."

"Dammit that yodel of yours was the most beautiful thing I ever heard in my life. I wish I'd had a tape recorder to take it down."

"Those things aren't made to be heard by the people below," says Japhy dead serious.

"By God you're right, all those sedentary bums sitting around on pillows hearing the cry of the triumphant mountain smasher, they don't deserve it. But when I looked up and saw you running down that mountain I suddenly understood everything."

"Ah a little satori for Smith today," says Morley. . .

* * *

Kerouac, Jack. 1958. *The Dharma Bums*. New York: Signet, pp. 63-69.

Buddhism and the Possibilities of a Planetary Culture

BUDDHISM HOLDS that the universe and all creatures in it are intrinsically in a state of complete wisdom, love, and compassion, acting in natural response and mutual interdependence. The personal realization of this from-the-beginning state cannot be had for and by one- "se1f,"— because it is not fully realized unless one has given the self up and away.

In the Buddhist view, that which obstructs the effortless manifestation of this is ignorance, which projects into fear and needless craving. Historically, Buddhist philosophers have failed to analyze out the degree to which ignorance and suffering are caused or encouraged by social factors, considering fear-and-desire to be given facts of the human condition. Consequently the major concern of Buddhist philosophy is epistemology and "psychology" with no attention paid to historical or sociological problems. Although Mahayana Buddhism has a grand vision of universal salvation, the actual achievement of Buddhism has been the development of practical systems of meditation toward the end of liberating a few dedicated individuals from psychological hang-ups and cultural conditionings. Institutional Buddhism has been conspicuously ready to accept or ignore the inequalities and tyrannies of whatever political system it found itself under. This can be death to Buddhism, because it is death to any meaningful function of compassion. Wisdom without compassion feels no pain.

No one today can afford to be innocent, or to indulge themselves in ignorance of the nature of contemporary governments, politics, and social orders. The national politics of the modem world are "states" which maintain their existence by deliberately fostered craving and fear: monstrous protection rackets. The "free world" has become economically dependent on a fantastic system of stimulation of greed which cannot be fulfilled, sexual desire which cannot be satiated, and hatred which has no outlet except against oneself, the persons one is supposed to love, or the revolutionary aspirations of pitiful, poverty-stricken marginal societies. The conditions of the Cold War have fumed most modem societies—both communist and capitalist—into vicious distorters of true human potential They try to create populations of *preta*—hungry ghosts with giant appetites and throats no bigger than needles. The soil, the forests, and all anirna1life are being consumed by these cancerous collectivities; the air and water of the planet is being fouled by them.

There is nothing in human nature or the requirements of human social organization which intrinsically requires that a society be contradictory, repressive, and productive of violent and frustrated personalities. Findings in anthropology and psychology make this more and more evident. One can prove it for oneself by taking a good. look at Original Nature through meditation. Once a person has this much faith and insight, one will be led to a deep concern with the need for radical social change through a variety of nonviolent means.

The joyous and voluntary poverty of Buddhism becomes a positive force. The traditional harmlessness and avoidance of taking life in any form has nation-shaking implications. The practice of meditation, for which one needs only "the ground beneath one's feet," wipes out mountains of junk being pumped into the mind by the mass media and supermarket universities. The be1ief in a serene and generous fulfillment of natural loving desires destroys ideologies which blind, maim, and repress—and points the way to a kind of community which would amaze "moralists" and transform armies of men who are fighters because they cannot be lovers.

Avatamsaka (*Kegon* or *Hua-yen*) Buddhist philosophy sees the world as a vast, interrelated network in which all objects and creatures are necessary and illuminated. From one standpoint, governments, wars, or all that we consider "evil" are uncompromisingly contained in this totalistic realm. The hawk, the swoop, and the hare are one. From the "human" standpoint we cannot live in

those terms unless all beings see with the same enlightened eye. The Bodhisattva lives by the sufferer's standard, and he or she must be effective in aiding those who suffer.

The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both. They are both contained in the traditional three aspects of the Dharma path: wisdom (*prajña*), meditation (*dhyana*), and morality (*shila*). Wisdom is intuitive knowledge of the mind of love and clarity that lies beneath one's ego-driven anxieties and aggressions. Meditation is going into the mind to see this for yourself—over and over again, until it becomes the mind you live in. Morality is bringing it back out in the way you live, through personal example and responsible action, ultimately toward the true community (sangha) of "all beings." This last aspect means, for me, supporting any cultural and economic revolution that moves clearly toward a truly free world. It means using such means as civil disobedience, outspoken criticism, protest, pacifism, voluntary poverty, and even gentle violence if it comes to a matter of restraining some impetuous crazy. It means affirming the widest possible spectrum of non-harmful individual behavior—defending the right of individuals to smoke hemp, eat peyote, be polygamous, polyandrous, or homosexual. Worlds of behavior and custom long banned by the Judaeo-Capitalist-Christian-Marxist West. It means respecting intelligence and learning, but not as greed or means to personal power. Working on one's own responsibility, but willing to work with a group. "Forming the new society within the shell of the old"—the I.W.W. slogan of 70 years ago.

The traditional, vernacular, primitive, and village cultures may appear to be doomed. We must defend and support them as we would the diversity of ecosystems; they are all manifestations of Mind. Some of the elder societies accomplished a condition of Sangha, with not a little of Buddha and Dharma as well. We touch base with the deep mind of peoples of all times and places in our meditation practice, and this is an amazing revo1utionary aspect of the Buddhadharma. By a "planetary culture" I mean the kind of societies that would follow on a new understanding of that relatively recent institution, the National State, an understanding that might enable us to leave it behind. The State is greed made legal, with a monopoly on violence; a natural society is familial and cautionary. A natural society is one which "Follows the Way,'" imperfectly but authentically.

Such an understanding will close the circle and link us in many ways with the most creative aspects of our past. If we are lucky, we may eventually arrive at a world of relatively mutually tolerant small societies attuned to their local region and united overall by a profound respect and love for the mind and nature of the universe.

I can imagine further virtues in a world sponsoring societies with matrilineal descent, free-form marriage, "natural credit" economics, far less population, and much more wilderness.

* * *

Snyder, Gary. 1996. "Buddhism and the Possibilities of a Planetary Culture," in *Engaged Buddhist Reader*, Arnold Kotler, ed. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, pp. 123-126.

Selections from *Turtle Island*. (Winner of Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1975)

PRAYER FOR THE GREAT FAMILY

Gratitude to Mother Earth, sailing through night and day—
and to her soil: rich, rare, and sweet
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Plants, the sun-facing light-changing leaf
and fine root-hairs; standing still through wind
and rain; their dance is in the flowing spiral grain
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Air, bearing the soaring Swift and the silent
Owl at dawn. Breath of our song
clear spirit breeze
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Wild Beings, our brothers, teaching secrets,
freedoms, and ways; who share with us their milk;
self-complete, brave, and aware
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Water: clouds, lakes, rivers, glaciers;
holding or releasing; streaming through all
our bodies salty seas
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to the Sun: blinding pulsing light through
trunks of trees, through mists, warming caves where
bears and snakes sleep—he who wakes us—
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to the Great Sky
who holds billions of stars—and goes yet beyond that—
beyond all powers, and thoughts
and yet is within us—
Grandfather Space.
The Mind is his Wife.

so be it.

after a Mohawk prayer

BY FRAZIER CREEK FALLS

Standing up on lifted, folded rock
looking out and down—

The creek falls to a far valley
hills beyond that
facing, half-forested, dry
—clear sky
strong wind in the
stiff glittering needle clusters
of the pine—their brown
round trunk bodies
straight, still;
rustling trembling limbs and twigs listen.

This living flowing land
is all there is, forever

We *are* it
it sings through us—

We could live on this Earth
without clothes or tools!

AVOCADO

The Dharma is like an Avocado!
Some parts so ripe you can't believe it,
But it's good.
And other places hard and green
Without much flavor,
Pleasing those who like their eggs well-cooked.

And the skin is thin,
The great big round seed
In the middle,
Is your own Original Nature—
Pure and smooth,
Almost nobody ever splits it open
Or ever tries to see
If it will grow.

Hard and slippery,
It looks like
You should plant it—but then
It shoots out thru the
fingers—

gets away.

WHY LOG TRUCK DRIVERS RISE
EARLIER THAN STUDENTS OF ZEN

In the high seat, before-dawn dark,
Polished hubs gleam
And the shiny diesel stack
Warms and flutters
Up the Tyler Road grade
To the logging on Poorman creek.
Thirty miles of dust.

There is no other life.

BEDROCK

for Masa

Snowmelt pond warm granite
we make camp,
no thought of finding more.
and nap
and leave our minds to the wind.

on the bedrock, gently tilting,
sky and stone,

teach me to be tender.

the touch that nearly misses—
brush of glances—
tiny steps—
that finally cover worlds
of hard terrain.
cloud wisps and mists
gathered into slate blue
bolts of summer rain.

tea together in the purple starry eve;
new moon soon to set,
why does it take so
long to learn to
love,
we laugh
and grieve.

O WATERS

O waters
wash us, me,
under the wrinkled granite
straight-up slab,

and sitting by camp in the pine shade
Namao sleeping
Mountains humming and crumbling
Snowfield melting
soil
building on tiny ledges
for wild onions and the flowers
Blue
Polemonium

great
earth
sangha

TOMORROW'S SONG

The USA slowly lost its mandate
in the middle and later twentieth century
it never gave the mountains and rivers,
trees and animals,
a vote.
all the people turned away from it
myths die; even continents are impermanent

Turtle Island returned.
my friend broke open a dried coyote-scat
removed a ground squirrel tooth
pierced it, hung it
from the gold ring
in his ear.

We look to the future with pleasure
we need no fossil fuel
get power within
grow strong on less.

Grasp the tools and move in rhythm side by side
flash gleams of wit and silent knowledge
eye to eye
sit still like cats or snakes or stones
as whole and holding as
the blue black sky.
gentle and innocent as wolves
as tricky as a prince.

At work in our place:

in the service
of the wilderness of life
of death
of the Mother's breasts!

THE WILDERNESS[1]

I am a poet. My teachers are other poets, American Indians, and a few Buddhist priests in Japan. The reason I am here is because I wish to bring a voice from the wilderness, my constituency. I wish to be a spokesman for a realm that is not usually represented either in intellectual chambers or in the chambers of government.

I was climbing Glacier Peak in the Cascades of Washington several years ago, on one of the clearest days I had ever seen. When we reached the summit of Glacier Peak we could see almost to the Selkirks in Canada. We could see south far beyond the Columbia River to Mount Hood and Mount Jefferson. And, of course, we could see Mount Adams and Mount Rainier. We could see across Puget Sound to the ranges of the Olympic Mountains. My companion, who is a poet, said: "You mean, there is a senator for all this?"

Unfortunately, there isn't a senator for all that. And I would like to think of a new definition of humanism and a new definition of democracy that would include the nonhuman, that would have representation from those spheres. This is what I think we mean by an ecological conscience.

I don't like Western culture because I think it has much in it that is inherently wrong and that is at the root of the environmental crisis that is not recent; it is very ancient; it has been building up for a millennium. There are many things in Western culture that are admirable. But a culture that alienates itself from the very ground of its own being—from the wilderness outside (that is to say, wild nature, the wild, self-contained, self-informing ecosystems) and from that other wilderness, the wilderness within—is doomed to a very destructive behavior, ultimately perhaps self-destructive behavior.

The West is not the only culture that carries these destructive seeds. China had effectively deforested itself by 1000 A.D. India had effectively deforested itself by 800 A.D. The soils of the Middle East were ruined even earlier. The forests that once covered the mountains of Yugoslavia were stripped to build the Roman fleet, and those mountains have looked like Utah ever since. The soils of southern Italy and Sicily were ruined by latifundia slave-labor farming in the Roman Empire. The soils of the Atlantic seaboard in the United States were effectively ruined before the American Revolution because of the one-crop (tobacco) farming. So the same forces have been at work in East and West.

You would not think a poet would get involved in these things. But the voice that speaks to me as a poet, what Westerners have called the Muse, is the voice of nature herself, whom the ancient poets called the great goddess, the Magna Mater. I regard that voice as a very real entity. At the root of the problem where our civilization goes wrong is the mistaken belief that nature is something less than authentic, that nature is not as alive as man is, or as intelligent, that in a sense it is dead, and that animals are of so low an order of intelligence and feeling, we need not take their feelings into account. A line is drawn between primitive peoples and civilized peoples. I think there is a wisdom in the worldview of primitive peoples that we have to refer ourselves to, and learn from. If we are on the verge of postcivilization, then our next step must take account of the primitive worldview which has traditionally and intelligently tried to open and keep open lines of communication with the forces of nature. You cannot communicate with the forces of nature in the laboratory. One of the problems is that we simply do not know much about primitive people and primitive cultures. If we can tentatively accommodate the possibility that nature has a degree of authenticity and intelligence that requires that we look at it more sensitively, then we can move to the next step. "Intelligence" is not really the right word. The ecologist Eugene Odum uses the term "biomass."

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[1] Transcript of a statement made at a seminar at The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, California.

Life-biomass, he says, is stored information; living matter is stored information in the cells and in the genes. He believes there is more information of a higher order of sophistication and complexity stored in a few square yards of forest than there is in all the libraries of mankind. Obviously, that is a different order of information. It is the information of the universe we live in. It is the information that has been flowing for millions of years. In this total information context, man may not be necessarily the highest or most interesting product.

Perhaps one of its most interesting experiments at the point of evolution, if we can talk about evolution in this way, is not man but a high degree of biological diversity and sophistication opening to more and more possibilities. Plants are at the bottom of the food chain; they do the primary energy transformation that makes all the life-forms possible. So perhaps plant-life is what the ancients meant by the great goddess. Since plants support the other life-forms, they became the "people" of the land. And the land—a country—is a region within which the interactions of water, air, and soil and the underlying geology and the overlying (maybe stratospheric) wind conditions all go to create both the microclimates and the large climactic patterns that make a whole sphere or realm of life possible. The people in that realm include animals, humans, and a variety of wild life.

What we must find a way to do, then, is incorporate the other people—what the Sioux Indians called the creeping people, and the standing people, and the flying people, and the swimming people—into the councils of government. This isn't as difficult as you might think. If we don't do it, they will revolt against us. They will submit non-negotiable demands about our stay on the earth. We are beginning to get non-negotiable demands right now from the air, the water, the soil.

I would like to expand on what I mean by representation here at the Center from these other fields, these other societies, these other communities. Ecologists talk about the ecology of oak communities, or pine communities. They *are* communities. This institute—this Center—is of the order of a kiva of elders. Its function is to maintain and transmit the lore of the tribe on the highest levels. If it were doing its job completely, it would have a cycle of ceremonies geared to the seasons, geared perhaps to the migrations of the fish and to the phases of the moon. It would be able to instruct in what rituals you follow when a child is born, when someone reaches puberty, when someone gets married, when someone dies. But, as you know, in these fragmented times, one council cannot perform all these functions at one time. Still it would be understood that a council of elders, the caretakers of the lore of the culture, would open themselves to representation from other life-forms. Historically this has been done through art. The paintings of bison and bears in the caves of southern France were of that order. The animals were speaking through the people and making their point. And when, in the dances of the Pueblo Indians and other peoples, certain individuals became seized, as it were, by the spirit of the deer, and danced as a deer would dance, or danced the dance of the corn maidens, or impersonated the squash blossom, they were no longer speaking for humanity, they were taking it on themselves to interpret, through their humanity, what these other life-forms were. That is about all we know so far concerning the possibilities of incorporating spokesmanship for the rest of life in our democratic society.

Let me describe how a friend of mine from a Rio Grande pueblo hunts. He is twenty-seven years old. The Pueblo Indians, and I think probably most of the other Indians of the Southwest, begin their hunt, first, by purifying themselves. They take emetics, a sweat bath, and perhaps avoid their wife for a few days. They also try not to think certain thoughts. They go out hunting in an attitude of humility. They make sure that they need to hunt, that they are not hunting without necessity. Then they improvise a song while they are in the mountains. They sing aloud or hum to themselves while they are walking along. It is a song to the deer, asking the deer to be willing to die for them. They usually still-hunt, taking a place alongside a trail. The feeling is that you are not hunting the deer, the deer is coming to you; you make yourself available for the deer that will present itself to you, that has given

itself to you. Then you shoot it. After you shoot it, you cut the head off and place the head facing east. You sprinkle com meal in front of the mouth of the deer, and you pray to the deer, asking it to forgive you for having killed it, to understand that we all need to eat, and to please make a good report to the other deer spirits that he has been treated well. One finds this way of handling things and animals in all primitive cultures.

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Snyder, Gary. 1969. *Turtle Island.* New York: New Directions Books.

Selections from

Mountains and Rivers Without End

The notion of Emptiness engenders Compassion.

—Milarepa

An ancient Buddha said "A painted rice cake does not satisfy hunger." Dogen comments:

"There are few who have even seen this 'painting of a rice cake' and none of them has thoroughly understood it.

"The paints for painting rice-cakes are the same as those used for painting mountains and waters.

"If you say the painting is not real, then the material phenomenal world is not real, the Dharma is not real.

"Unsurpassed enlightenment is a painting. The entire phenomenal world and the empty sky are nothing but a painting.

"Since this is so, there is no remedy for satisfying hunger other than a painted rice-cake. Without painted hunger you never become a true person."

Dogen, "Painting of a Rice-Cake"

Endless Streams and Mountains
Ch'i Shan Wu Chin

Clearing the mind and sliding in
to that created space,
a web of waters streaming over rocks,
air misty but not raining,
seeing this land from a boat on a lake
or a broad slow river,
coasting by.

The path comes down along a lowland stream
slips behind boulders and leafy hardwoods,
reappears in a pine grove,

no farms around, just tidy cottages and shelters,
gateways, rest stops, roofed but unwalled work space,
—a warm damp climate;

a trail of climbing stairsteps forks upstream.
Big ranges lurk behind these rugged little outcrops—
these spits of low ground rocky uplifts
layered pinnacles aslant,
flurries of brushy cliffs receding,
far back and high above, vague peaks.
A man hunched over, sitting on a log
another stands above him, lifts a staff,
a third, with a roll of mats or a lute, looks on;
a bit offshore two people in a boat.

The trail goes far inland,
somewhere back around a bay,

lost in distant foothill slopes
& back again
at a village on the beach, and someone's fishing.

Rider and walker cross a bridge
above a frothy braided torrent
that descends from a flurry of roofs like flowers

temples tucked between cliffs,
a side trail goes there;

a jumble of cliffs above,
ridge tops edged with bushes,
valley fog below a hazy canyon.

A man with a shoulder load leans into the grade.
Another horse and a hiker,
the trail goes up along cascading streambed
no bridge in sight—
comes back through chinquapin or
liquidambars; another group of travelers.
Trail's end at the edge of an inlet
below a heavy set of dark rock hills.
Two moored boats with basket roofing,
a boatman in the bow looks
lost in thought.

Hills beyond rivers, willows in a swamp,
a gentle valley reaching far inland.

The watching boat has floated off the page.

At the end of the painting the scroll continues on with seals and poems. It tells a further tale:

"—Wang Wen-wei saw this at the mayor's house in Ho-tung town, year 1205. Wrote at the end of it,

'The Fashioner of Things
has no original intentions
Mountains and rivers
are spirit, condensed.'

'. . . Who has come up with
these miraculous forests and springs?
Pale ink
on fine white silk.'

Later that month someone named Li Hui added,

'. . . Most people can get along with the noise of dogs
and chickens;
Everybody cheerful in these peaceful times.
But I—why are my tastes so odd?
I love the company of streams and boulders.'

T'ien Hsieh of Wei-lo, no date, next wrote,

> '. . . The water holds up the mountains,
> The mountains go down in the water . . .'

In 1332 Chih-shun adds,

> '. . . This is truly a painting worth careful keeping. And it has poem-colophons from the Sung and the Chin dynasties. That it survived dangers of fire and war makes it even rarer.'

In the mid-seventeenth century one Wang To had a look at it:

> 'My brother's relative by marriage, Wen-sun, is learned and has good taste. He writes good prose and poetry. My broth- er brought over this painting of his to show me . . .'

The great Ch'ing dynasty collector Liang Ch'ing-piao owned it, but didn't write on it or cover it with seals. From him it went into the Imperial collection down to the early twentieth century. Chang Ta-ch'ien sold it in 1949. Now it's at the Cleveland Art Museum, which sits on a rise that looks out toward the waters of Lake Erie.

Step back and gaze again at the land:
it rises and subsides—

ravines and cliffs like waves of blowing leaves—
stamp the foot, walk with it, clap! turn,
the creeks come in, ah!
strained through boulders,
mountains walking on the water,
water ripples every hill.

—I walk out of the museum—low gray clouds over the lake—
chill March breeze.

Old ghost ranges, sunken rivers, come again
stand by the wall and tell their tale,
walk the path, sit the rains,
grind the ink, wet the brush, unroll the
broad white space:

lead out and tip
the moist black line.

Walking on walking,
underfoot earth turns.
Streams and mountains never stay the same.

We Wash Our Bowls in This Water

"The 1.5 billion cubic kilometers of water on the earth are split by photosynthesis and reconstituted by respiration once every two million years or so."

A day on the ragged North Pacific coast get soaked by whipping mist, rainsqualls tumbling, mountain mirror ponds, snowfield slush, rock-wash creeks, earfulls of falls, sworls of ridge-edge snowflakes, swift gravelly rivers, tidewater crumbly glaciers, high hanging glaciers, shore-side mud pools, icebergs, streams looping through the tideflats, spume of brine, distant soft rain drooping from a cloud,

sea lions lazing under the surface of the sea—

We wash our bowls in this water
It has the flavor of ambrosial dew—

Beaching the raft, stagger out and shake off wetness like a
bear,
stand on the sandbar, rest from the river being

upwellings, sideswirls, backswirls
curl-overs, outripples, eddies, chops and swells
wash-overs, shallows confluence turbulence wash-seam wavelets, riffles, saying

"A hydraulic's a cross between a wave and a hole,
—you get a weir effect.
Pillow-rock's a total fold-back over a hole,
it shows spit on the top of the wave

a haystack's a series of waves at the bottom of a tight
channel
there's a tongue of the rapids—the slick tongue—the
'v' —
some holes are 'keepers,' they won't let you through;
eddies, backflows, we say 'eddies are your friends.'
Current differential, it can suck you down
vertical boils are straight-up eddies spinning,
herringbone waves curl under and come back.
Well, let's get going, get back to the rafts."
Swing the big oars,
head into a storm.

We offer it to all demons and spirits
May all be filled and satisfied
Om makula sai svaha!

Su Tung-p'o sat out one whole night by a creek on the slopes of Mt. Lu. Next morning he showed this poem to his teacher:

The stream with its sounds is a long broad tongue
The looming mountain is a wide-awake body
Throughout the night song after song
How can I speak at dawn.

Old Master Chang-tsung approved him. Two centuries later Dōgen said,

"Sounds of streams and shapes of mountains.
The sounds never stop and the shapes never cease.
Was it Su who woke
or was it the mountains and streams?
Billions of beings see the morning star
and all become Buddhas!
If *you*, who are valley streams and looming
mountains,
can't throw some light on the nature of ridges and rivers,

who can?"

* * *

Snyder, Gary. 1996. *Mountains and Rivers Without End.* Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint.