



Worms Are, Therefore I Am, by Satish Kumar

Perhaps the reason that we do not get enough enlightenment these days is because we do not take the time to sit under a tree.

To be an Earth Pilgrim is to revere Nature as our sacred home, and see all our life as a sacred journey to become at one with ourselves, with others and with Nature. The starting point for being an Earth Pilgrim is humility in the face of Nature's immense generosity and unconditional love. Take the apple tree. We eat the fruit that has been freely given -- and finding a bitter pip, we spit it out. Here the pip immediately starts to cooperate with Nature. The soil provides hospitality for the seed, which is nourished by the rain and the sunshine. Soon the pip has literally grounded itself and realised itself as another tree bearing innumerable apples and countless pips. When people ask me about reincarnation, I point to the apple tree. And when offering its fruit, the apple tree does not discriminate between human and animal, educated and uneducated, between black or white, man and woman, young and old. All are equal, and all receive.

Over the past century, we have struggled to rid the world of many -isms: imperialism and the rule of one people over another; sexism and the subjugation of women by men. But one mighty -ism still remains: species-ism, by which humanity claims the right of domination over the rest of creation. Yet the Earth is a community, where no one species is inferior or superior. All species are our kith and kin, as St Francis appreciated when he reached out to Sister Water and Brother Fire. In our modern world, the assertion of human superiority has been reinforced by the misperception that we are somehow separate from Nature, that the environment is something outside of us. But the root of the word Nature is from the Latin to be born -- just like the Nativity -- and when we are born we become part of Nature. Instead of the arrogance of Descartes' 'I think, therefore I am', we need to broaden our horizons. Without our parents, our friends as well as distant strangers, our lives would be impossible -- so 'You are, therefore I am'. And without Nature, we could not live -- and so we should truly say 'the Earth is, therefore I am'. Gerald Manley Hopkins praised the less lovely parts of Nature: "long live the weeds and the wilderness yet", he wrote. As a gardener, I have a particular debt of gratitude towards the humble worm, so I say "long live the worms" and make my own declaration of dependence, "The worms are, therefore I am."

--Satish Kumar

