

HOW I CAUGHT DEEP ECOLOGY – REFLECTIONS ON THE 40th ANNIVERSARY

Sept. 9 , 2022 by John Seed

Back in 1982, somewhere between the Nightcap and Franklin actions I was searching to understand the ubiquitous psychological or spiritual sickness that allows modern humans to imagine that we can somehow *profit* from the destruction of our own life support systems. Paul Ehrlich: “We are sawing off the branch that we’re sitting on”. James Lovelock: “Its as if the brain had decided it was the most important organ in the body and started mining the liver.”

Somehow I found myself reading an article by the zen master Robert Aitken Roshi (years later he would invite me to offer a Council of All Beings for his Diamond Sangha on the Big Island of Hawaii) titled "[Gandhi, Dogen and Deep Ecology](#)". Something woke in me to see the words “deep ecology” and Roshi’s short description, so I requested and he sent me a photocopied article cited in footnote 7: philosopher George Sessions’ essay, "[Spinoza, Perennial Philosophy, and Deep Ecology](#)," (unpublished paper, Sierra College, 1979). This added to my mounting excitement and I wrote to Sessions who acceded to my request and sent me a photocopy of a paper he had cited: "[The Deep Ecology Movement](#)" by California sociologist Bill Devall.

After reading this, I knew I was onto something of immense importance and soon thereafter caught a train 12 hours to Sydney, borrowed a friends library card that gave me access to the stacks at Sydney University’s Fisher Library and plunged into a couple weeks of intense study, following the trail from Devall’s footnotes.

The culprit was anthropocentrism, human centeredness, and the illusion of separation from the natural world to which it gave rise!

I had become infected with deep ecology and now, exactly 40 years later, it has not finished with me yet. It felt like I had become infected by a big, true idea.

Interesting metaphor, infection.

In July this year Joanna Macy, now aged 93, held a webinar titled "[Climate Change as Spiritual Practice](#)" where she said:

“What I’m aware of is how many people are showing up now, and often, kids and young people too, and then people more like my age too, that there is a deep love of Earth. See, what science is showing is that our Earth is a living system and that along with that systems thinking, deep ecology helps you live and own these larger realms of who you are and be able to be so grateful for that, that you can feel them working through you. ...

This came to me in my mid-40’s I guess, when I encountered a deep ecologist, rainforest activist in Australia named John Seed, he’s still alive. The rest of us caught it from him. Because he was defending the rainforest from logging and he was able to stand there facing the police and the loggers and it changed the sense of who he was. He was the rainforest defending itself. Now once you have that shift in identity, that this larger identity acts through you, because the Earth needs human hands, the Earth needs human voices...”

Back in 1982, burning with born-again zeal, a convert to the Church of the Immaculate Biosphere, I made hundreds of copies of Devall’s paper and sent them far and wide, produced a line of bumper stickers that read “SUBVERT THE DOMINANT PARADIGM” and then wrote my own interpretation of deep ecology, "[Beyond Anthropocentrism](#)” first published in May 1983 in George Sessions’s "[Ecophilosophy 5](#)”.