

The Ecology of the Soul

Unlock Your Seven Powers for Spiritual Success

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This book draws a parallel between the outer ecology of the earth and the inner ecology of the human spirit, seeing the ‘balance of Nature’ in a spiritual as well as a physical sense. The Ecology of the Soul is about self transformation. You’re here because you want to change yourself for the better, to achieve that inner peace and power that you know to be your natural state of being, but which right now feels very far away.

There are already a myriad of books telling you how to become the person you want to be, how to have whatever you want – how to become happier, richer, thinner, how to gain love, wealth, success, profound and lasting contentment – how, in short, to overcome your personal circumstances and shortcomings and turn yourself into a peaceful, powerful, prosperous, highly evolved human being. Generally, their message boils down to gaining control of your mind. Some of them talk about a global awakening of consciousness and humanity’s readiness for that evolutionary change, and most of them address the spiritual dimension, in that to change yourself for the better you have to understand yourself, by which I mean, your ‘Self’, your true, essential nature. And to do that you have to pay attention to what’s going on inside your head,

to spend time in ‘introspection’, which leads very quickly to an awareness that there is much more to your essential Self than just what’s happening at the mind level. Call it spirit, call it Soul. You can’t embark on a journey of self change without awakening to the relationship between the physical and the non-physical – the spiritual – and indeed accepting the existence of the non-physical.

One of the basic facts of human existence is that there is always a dissatisfaction, an awareness that things – we ourselves and our circumstances – could be better. No one on this earth at this time can rightly say that they are completely fulfilled because that means perfection, and perfection is impossible in an imperfect world. You wouldn’t disagree that the world is imperfect, right? Could be better, right?

So if we have at least established that ‘most people’ feel there is something lacking, somewhere in their lives, either in their own personal makeup or in their situation (usually both), then we have established that there is a need to fix it. Whether you personally accept the existence of that need and choose to do something about it is entirely up to you. If you do, you are not alone. There are millions out there like you, which explains why self help, self transformation and self improvement books sell in their millions, why religion is still powerful and meaningful, and why there are so many courses and classes teaching yoga, meditation, t’ai chi ch’uan – a vast range of self transformational or semi-spiritual, or even properly spiritual, knowledge and practices that demand you focus on your inner space.

Why Ecology?

Yes, but what does this have to do with Ecology? The imperative for sustainability, going green, the environment, saving the pandas, the

rainforests, the oceans, the whales, the planet? Why is the book called ‘The Ecology of the Soul’?

Because ecology is an inner as well as an outer phenomenon. The word is made up of two Greek words – ‘eco’ means ‘home,’ and ‘logos’ means wisdom, knowledge or words. The Wisdom of Home. If our inner ecology is in balance and harmony, our behaviour and hence outer ecology become balanced and harmonious. We can’t change our behaviour without changing our thoughts, because thought creates action. It’s that crucial link that ‘most people’ miss, and that this book concentrates on; how to change our thinking to make the practical change in behaviour by which we become the inhabitants of the new world.

For make no mistake, the new world is definitely coming. We aren’t all going to die out. It’s our very instinct for survival that ultimately makes us embrace the idea of the new world; if we don’t make the profound and powerful changes in ourselves – for that is really all we have power over – then we’re part of the outgoing system, which is doomed. No question.

Understanding The Ecology of the Soul – the balance of our inner eco-system of mental and spiritual powers – gives us a set of principles for thought and action that help prepare us for what’s coming. It empowers us to change into the kind of people we need to be, both to make our way through the last stages of the old world, and to help make the new.

The fact that there are people – and companies – working on new socio-economic models such as the ‘Triple Bottom Line’ and ‘Eco-Capitalism’ gives us hope; and with that hope, we can turn to the only thing that we do know for sure we have power to change – ourselves. A socio-economic system, after all, is made up of the people that created it, that live in it and by it, and once those people

change and start demanding things that the old system can't supply, then that system changes. We ourselves are the drivers, the building blocks. We're at the beginning of the change process, not the end. Can't change the outward world unless and until we change our inner selves.

A bit about me

Who am I, and why should you be interested in what I have to say, specifically? My own personal journey has taken me through a number of phases in my life, each one of which has added to previous experience and all of which are now contributing to the creation of this psycho-spiritual system, and to the writing of this book.

I was born in the grimy, depressed and war-ravaged industrial north-east of post-WW2 England, the son of a Church of England priest, a clever and thoughtful but withdrawn and deeply unhappy man. His beliefs and spiritual desires were so at odds with his own abilities and the institution to which he had devoted them that he was driven into profound depression. He identified with the Church, the Church was moribund and my father was in pain. His marriage too was a source of disappointment and discontent. My mother succumbed to what was then known as a 'breakdown', partly because of the strain on their marriage and partly because both my parents were brought up in the pre-Second World War English middle class, where a 'stiff upper lip' and a wilful ignorance, a refusal to acknowledge structural problems of personality and relationships, were the norm, if not an actual requirement. It was all about keeping up appearances. The conflict between what she thought ought to be happening and what was actually happening, and her efforts to fool herself, to pretend that all was as it should be, drove her to become a patient in the same mental hospital where she worked, and where my father was a patient.

It so happened that it was that same mental hospital, in Powick in Worcestershire UK, in which two pioneering psychiatrists, Ronald Sandison and Arthur Spencer, had set up an experimental psychiatric treatment programme based on the use of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) in the early 1950s. I was very alive to my father's debates and discussions with his friends and colleagues about how new thinking about the nature of God, mind and spirit could be accommodated in the Church (they were threatened and enthralled by the Bishop of Woolwich John Robinson's *Honest to God*, published in 1963). Also, literally as soon as I was confirmed into the Church of England at the age of 16 I began to question its tenets and its relevance. I was already aware that there were other ways of understanding the workings of the spirit and the psyche than those with which I had been brought up. The Christian way, as administered by the Church of England, just didn't cut it for me.

One school holiday when I was 16, I spent a week in Powick looking at what was going on. I was interested in the work of another pioneering psychiatrist, R.D. Laing, whose book *The Divided Self* (1960) was at the time provoking a whole new understanding of schizophrenia, and whose *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (1964) had acute relevance to my own experience. It is also significant that by the time he reached *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise* in 1967, Laing's work – to me, anyway, a 16-year old on the brink of the New Age revolution – seemed to demonstrate a clear connection between 'altered' mental states and spirituality. Hence my interest in LSD as a medicine, just at the time it was entering popular culture as a recreational or 'creational' drug. Let's just say that in the day I spent on the Powick LSD ward I saw more humane healing than I did anywhere else in that godforsaken place.

This is not an autobiography. Suffice it to say that whatever sort of 'awakening' that began at Powick led me to travel, both to the US

and India, fast becoming more and more aware of the importance of the spiritual dimension in my life. I went up to Cambridge University to study History, and there I took up a lifelong practice of Hatha Yoga, which I later taught. In the mid-1970s I spent six years of intense meditation and spiritual practice – 4am meditation every day of the year, radical vegetarianism, celibacy, renunciation of the material trappings of ‘normal’ life, commitment to service – as member of an institution that rejoices in the Hindi name ‘Brahma Kumaris Ishwaryia Vishwa Vidyalaya’, which literally translates as ‘The World Spiritual University of the Virgin Daughters of Brahma’. Their teaching is Raja Yoga, still the single most influential and seminal philosophy that underpins this book’s understanding and experience of the Soul.

Parallel with this, after taking my history degree from Cambridge, I did the sort of thing that was much more common then than it is now, and became a carpenter and cabinetmaker. That taught me the nature and the value of craftsmanship and led me to an awareness of design, and eventually to writing and editing magazines about it. That has been my profession for more than 20 years. The ‘full circle’ part of it is that the design process can be applied to our path of self transformation, our journey to enlightenment. We design ourselves, create ourselves. Or in this case, re-create ourselves.

A question of habit

You will probably have gathered by now that this book is not an academic project. I haven’t studied learned text after learned text, though part of the reason why I talk about myself is to persuade you that my experience and study, such as they have been, have brought me to a comparatively coherent synthesis of the concepts of mind and soul, and of the ramifications of action, of power, peace and inner stillness. It’s an understanding I’ve been working on all my adult life.

Not to be academic, but I will quote you a paper written as long ago as 1994 by a very dear friend of mine called Guy Claxton, an educational psychologist and cognitive scientist, for the academic journal *Environmental Values*. Entitled 'Involuntary Simplicity: Changing dysfunctional habits of consumption', it suggests that 'some methodologies of self-transformation associated with spiritual traditions such as Buddhism may have much to offer the environmental movement.'

'Voluntary simplicity' is an idea that goes back to 1936 and is the subject of Duane Elgin's book of the same name from 1981, saying essentially that we can't change habits of consumption without changing our belief systems. But where Guy's proposition did it for me is the concept of habit as *involuntary* action. It's a strange idea that much of our action is involuntary, ie performed in a state of unknowing, or at least, unthinking. But think about it. That's what habit is, right? Things that you do without having to think. To change, you have to get inside, change your mental habits, your spiritual processes; and then our habitat changes as a matter of course. That's what this book is about.