

## **Ecopsychology: Deep Reconnection to the Natural World, A Critical Awakening for Modern Times**

*"We are all connected. We are rediscovering at a deeper level our connections to each other, and these connections are based on energy and information. All of this has real roots now emerging from physics, the new cosmology, the new biology, and the new research on consciousness. That is the key, to discover that our sense of connection is not purely imaginary. It's not something to be dismissed. It is there. It is real. It is to be cultivated."*

—Ervin Laszlo, Ph.D.

### **Overview**

We live in an exciting and fragile time. With the spectre of environmental crisis growing ever more clear, we humans are being pressed to awaken to a deeper level of who we are and our place in the biosystems of the planet we live on.

This class seeks to nurture and fully ignite the knowing that already exists in each one of us: we are intimately interconnected with all life on the earth, and that our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health are dependent on the health of our home, planet earth, *and* that we each have the power to take action toward creating a more sustainable future.

### **Goals**

- To expose and familiarize students with the thinkers and writers in the emerging field of ecopsychology and related fields;
- To set a clear context of why a deep and conscious connection with nature is critical for our modern times;
- To open students to their own relationship with the natural world through the cultivation of body-mind ways of knowing, reflective and experiential practices;
- To awaken and support each student in their unique contribution in co-creating a sustainable collective future.

### **Pedagogy**

This class will employ selected weekly readings, experiential exercises, class discussion and short reflective weekly papers as an ongoing method for metabolizing new information. A key component of this class will be learning at a body-centered, somatic level. Ideally, one daylong or multi-day 'nature immersion' session will be held, as a deep dive into actually re-connecting with nature, in the shared context of the class community. A final paper will synthesize the learning of the class at the end. Listening and sharing with class members is also a major component of how learning for this class occurs.

## Structure

This class contains six main sections.

**1. *An Overview and Definition of Ecopsychology:*** why this field has evolved, its roots in ancient human knowing and why it is important to re-discover and re-integrate this ancient knowing today.

**2. *The Human/Nature Split:*** thoughts on what it is, where it began and why it happened and its repercussions and implications on us (both individually and collectively) and on the planet.

**3. *Introduction to Transpersonal Psychology:*** a map of human development that sheds light on where we've been as a species and where we could be heading, from the perspective of development of consciousness.

**4. *The Power of Attention:*** current scientific thinking about our ability to pay attention, how our culture reinforces imbalances in the ways we pay attention, and how we can re-balance our ways of paying attention for optimal function and flexibility.

**5. *Neuroscience and Developmental Psychology:*** understanding the physiological and psychological mechanisms behind bonding and healthy relationships.

**6. *Wrap-Up:*** With a map of human development that includes the transpersonal to inspire and guide us, we can use our attention as a tool to practice connecting to nature in order to attune ourselves to nature's wholeness. We are then able to consciously shift and develop ourselves toward greater wholeness and awareness. We can now act in the world and behave toward each other in ways that are more empathetic, generative and creative. This is the foundation of creating culture that is eco-centered and life-sustaining.

## Outcomes

Students will be given the opportunity to discover at both an intellectual, cognitive level and at a somatic, intuitive, inner level, the profound benefits of their own connection to nature and why it matters for us individually and for health of all life on earth. They will discover the importance of holding the value of this connection in a shared human community (the class . . . and beyond?) and how this shared culture of care can deepen our ability to live joyously, problem-solved holistically, and participate in the creation of culture that honors the earth and works with earth's systems to sustain human life. Students will also be empowered to take action to make the biggest difference they can in their world.

**Readings may include excerpts from the following and/or more:**

Abrams, D. (1996). *The spell of the sensuous: perception and language in a more than human world*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.

Bateson, G. (199?) *Mind and nature: a necessary unity*.

Berry, T. (1999). *The great work: our way into the future*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.

Buzzell, L. & Chalquist, C. (ed.) (1996). *Ecotherapy: healing with earth in mind*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books

Elgin, D. *Awakening earth: exploring the evolution of human culture and consciousness*.

Fehmi, L. & Robbins, J. (2007) . *The open focus brain: harnessing the power of attention to heal mind and body*. Boston, MA: Shambalha Publications, Inc.

Devall, B. & Sessions, G. (1985). *Deep ecology; living as if nature matters*. Layton, UT: Peregrine Smith Books.

Korten, D. (2006). *The great turning: from empire to earth community*. San Francisco, CA: Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Louv, R. (2005) *Last child in the woods: saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Alonquin Books.

Plotkin, B. (2008). *Nature and the human soul: cultivating wholeness and community in a fragmented world*. Novato, CA : New World Library.

Rosak, T. (1992). *The voice of the earth*.

Rosak, T., Gomes, M. & Kanner, A. (ed.) (1995). *Ecopsychology: restoring the earth, healing the mind*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books.

Shepherd, P. (197?) *Nature and madness*:

Siegel, D. (2007). *The mindful brain: reflection and attunement in the cultivation of well-being*. New York & London: W.W Norton & Company.

Sobel, D. (2008). *Childhood and nature*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Swimme, B. (2001). *The universe is a green dragon: a cosmic creation story*. Rochester, VA: Bear & Company

Tolle, E. (2003). *Stillness speaks*. Novato, CA : New World Library.