

## 8 MANDALA



"In an earlier period we have been profoundly concerned with divine-human relations. In more recent centuries we have been concerned with interhuman relations. Our future destiny rests even more decisively on our capacity for intimacy in our human-Earth relations."

Thomas Berry, **The Great Work**

"Today more than ever before, life must be characterized by a sense of Universal Responsibility, not only nation to nation and human to human, but also human to other forms of life."

Dalai Lama, in **Buddhism and Ecology**

## **Circles**

### **Takao Matsushima:**

Since we created the Sanctuary, and set up the Morning Light website, we've had contact with a number of people interested in creating their own sanctuaries, and we've even heard of a few sanctuaries that have been created already. The exciting thing is, the sanctuary idea is spreading. People who are concerned about the environment understand the spiritual connection with it. They are making connections with each other and the special places where they live. We've been asked about the set-up and the administration of the Sanctuary, and we tell them what we've done, but the answers are essentially the same: there is no one way to organize things. Do what seems right to you and keep it simple.

We've been told about a sanctuary on an island on the west coast. The local residents have put a sitting platform on a cliff looking out over the sea and other islands. It's in an undeveloped public park, and the local authorities agreed it was good thing to do. The platform is close to an existing trail, and around it, they marked a small sanctuary with fishnets and floats. They made an entry gate with big pieces of driftwood, and put up a sign indicating the sanctuary is for silent sitting.

There's another shelter on the east coast. Again, a group of people went through the regular channels to build a small shelter in a local park. It's in a wide marsh that's a favourite birdwatching location. The Parks Department agreed to build the shelter with the funds raised by the local group.

The last platform I've heard about is on top of a cliff on the California coast. It's a very different style: a steel cube with glass on all sides, and top and bottom. You sit on the glass, just above the ground. They say you feel as if you're floating, with the surf below you and the sky all around you. It must be a wonderful feeling. Although not for anyone with a fear of heights.

There may be other Sanctuaries out there that we don't know about, and it's possible there are other groups who had the same idea before we did. We know many spiritual retreat centres have had open-air meditation circles, or meditation areas, for a long time. The basic concept is not a new one. What's new about the Sanctuary of the Morning Light is that it's open to the public, it's free, and its purpose, to describe it very simply, is to help people make their own connection to the natural world, rather than to find themselves in a particular faith or religious belief system.

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### **Roger Maltenby:**

I learned about a couple of more remote sanctuaries on the Colorado Plateau. In one, they made a circle of benches on the slickrock overlooking the Colorado River. The idea is that people can sit facing in, for a sense of community and togetherness, or they can sit facing out to connect with the desert all around them.

The sanctuary is marked by braided ropes laid on the rock and held in place by stones. They've got old climbing ropes like we have, and rafter's rope and some native woven rope.

I've also been told about a hidden, private platform that a river guide on the Colorado has set up in a narrow side canyon. It's not easy to get to. You have to climb the walls of the canyon to get to it. The neat thing about the place is that the high walls of the canyon create almost a church-like atmosphere, and the whole place lights up when the sun is overhead in the middle of the day.

The person who told me about that platform also told me about a rafting group that sat beside the river for ten minutes of silence before starting the day on the river. He's seen other individuals sitting by themselves at other times of the day, and he noticed an interesting trend. If one or two people sat silently, others who saw them tended to join in. After a few minutes, there might be five or six people sitting silently by the river. At first he thought people like that were praying, but then he realized they were just sitting. Just soaking in the atmosphere of the river and the canyons.

To me, that's the very best way to sit. Of course, rafters have been sitting beside the river soaking up the atmosphere long before now. Usually, or at least often, with a coffee or a glass of wine or whatever, at the end of the day. That's OK. You can hardly go down the Colorado, on any stretch of it, without feeling a spiritual connection with the land and the river.

### **Alicia Tyndall:**

The concept of the Sanctuary is at the centre of a circle. It is like a stone dropped into a still pond, and the ripples are spreading outward. They are mixing with other ripples, and there is a circular transmission of ideas. The Sanctuary inspired other people to create their own. Now we are learning from them. A network of centres is being formed.

There is another circle also. It joins young people and old, men and women, people from different cultures and nations. It joins Eastern and Western philosophies. It unites people and spirituality and the natural environment. It is like a mandala, a symbol of each person's search for completeness or unity with the world and the universe. It is the connection with the natural world that makes a person complete, because the natural environment provides nourishment for physical survival. It provides the resources for our material well-being. And it nurtures the richness of the human spirit.

As more people become part of the circle, as they share their experiences and wisdom, the circle will only become stronger. A great deal of spiritual guidance today is directed at the

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individual and the inner self. That is important, but it can lead to self-absorption. We are trying to find ways to bring individuals together in a greater unity. People with people, and people with the natural world. Building and maintaining a small sanctuary is a meaningful, satisfying, and purposeful activity for a small group of people, one that keeps them in touch with the natural world in a very deep way, and at the same time, it invigorates their commitment to other actions in protecting and preserving the natural environment.

There are hundreds, thousands, of small, separate groups of people concerned with environmental and social justice issues, all working in their different ways to make a better world better for everyone. Perhaps the concept of sanctuary, already used in many familiar ways, could become a unifying force for people in those groups. A force for the idea that the planet Earth is a sanctuary for human life and that we should protect and preserve it. There may be life out there, among the billions of suns and stars. Who can tell? In the meantime, we have to focus on Earth.

## **Perspective**

### **Ned Kinloch:**

Since we created the Sanctuary and fought to save it, so much has happened. We've talked about connections to the natural environment and they're more important than ever. There's more environmental awareness now than ever. Still not much action, but more awareness of the larger issues of global warming and climate change, as well as a growing consciousness of social justice issues around the world.

Obviously, the connection between the Sanctuary and those issues is a tenuous one. But we think there is one. The creation of the Sanctuary was an environmental protest. It was a small action taken to help protect Skyline Park. But essentially, it was also a protest against excess. Against excessive consumption and continuing destruction of the natural environment for the sake of immediate comfort and pleasure.

That's what threatens all of us today. We talk about global warming and climate change and how they'll affect our lives. How they might affect food production and water supplies. How they'll likely facilitate the spread of disease and pests. But it's very hard to engage policy makers in a dialogue about human actions and activities that threaten the natural environment as we know it today. I think it's generally agreed that global warming and climate change are likely to have their biggest impact on the developing countries and on the poorest regions of the world. But those areas and nations are already hugely impacted by the actions of the developed countries, by corporations and governments dedicated to ever-increasing growth. That's where environmental concerns and social justice issues come together. As the impact of global warming becomes even clearer, environmental issues will be social justice issues and vice versa.

The frustrating thing is that we can live the good life and still live lightly on the earth. A life of comfort; a full and rich life without the wasteful excess of the traditional way of doing

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things. The world doesn't need more junk food, more huge homes, more SUVs, and more than enough bombs and weapons to destroy every living creature on the planet five times over. To provide all those, the destruction of the natural environment and people's livelihoods and lives goes on.

So what are we up against?

Well, in very simple terms, the usual way of doing things. The global economic system based on continuous growth. More is better than less. Faster is better than slower. There are the corporations and governments that work together to promote growth. The lawyers and lobbyists and politicians who write the laws and regulations that subsidize growth, not to mention corporate profits. Obviously, there are the machines and industrial processes that pollute the land, air, and water. And don't forget the advertisers and marketers of envy and greed and excess—that's what they're really selling, not products.

The defenders of the system point to the material comfort of millions of people in the developed countries. But basically, the global economic system benefits the richest handful of people at the very top of the economic pyramid, and they reward themselves so lavishly that their greed outweighs all the benefits that go to everyone else.

And what has this system, this globalization really produced? Fabulous wealth for a few, but not fabulous happiness for anyone. According to some surveys, people, rich or moderately well off, are no happier now than when they had less money and material comfort ten years ago. More is never enough. More and more and more of everything, and each increase is more and more trivial. Except for the people, the billions of people, for whom life is still a struggle for survival. The innocents who die, who are uprooted, who are forced to flee from armed conflict, from drought, from the impact of the global corporate economy.

When you travel to the poorer parts of the world, and some of them are right here in the richest countries, you very quickly realize the face of the global system isn't that of a benign industrialist or a political leader offering a better life for everyone. It's an impersonal—inhuman—wall of police and army advancing behind their helmets and masks and shields towards people who are simply defending their land and their livelihoods. Their goal is not luxury—it's survival.

From time to time, the economic and government leaders look indecisive or uncertain, but whether they're efficient or inefficient, they're basically single-minded pursuers of political and economic power. And at their worst, they're essentially a coalition of the criminal and the corrupt.

It's not a pretty picture.

Sorry. I have a hard time not going into a rant on that subject. That's what happens when you experience the poorer parts of the world, when you get to know the people, and get to understand—or get a glimmer of understanding of their situation.

Now, since the system began to collapse under the weight of its own arrogance and greed, it's obviously the biggest issue facing the world today. A few people recognized that some

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time back, but even now, with all the problems it's brought about, I don't see a lot of enthusiasm for changing it significantly. Certainly not among politicians and the business leaders that brought about this mess.

Admittedly, there is no tested and proven alternative to it. Earlier attempts at socialism have failed hopelessly, and all forms of communism were absolute disasters. Maybe some of the Scandinavian countries are on the right track, even though their economies are going through ups and downs like everywhere else. The challenge is to make large changes quickly and smoothly enough to avoid a total collapse that will hurt everyone and many people severely—or to make small changes, and keep making them until the system is completely different. Not an easy task.

### **Takao Matsushima:**

Year by year, the global evidence keeps accumulating. With six billion people and the material lifestyle of the top quarter—or tenth—of them, we've already exceeded the carrying capacity of the planet three or four times over. Something has to change. And the first steps have to be taken by the most affluent of the world's population. By the people and governments of the developed nations. Not the poorer countries or even the rapidly developing countries—although they should be taking a hard look at the natural environment and their own resource and environmental policies. A global economy based on endless growth almost certainly means disaster, not for the world, but for humanity.

We all know change is hard. And large changes are very hard to take. Even in the current financial crisis, the corporations that are asking for help still resist government regulations. For years, the auto industry has resisted calls for greater fuel efficiency and lower pollution levels. Farmers in North America and Europe fight every attempt to end subsidies and tariffs that interfere with free and fair trade in agricultural commodities—something that would benefit farmers in the poorest parts of the world. In a real disaster, in a catastrophe, you have no choice. When it's essentially a matter of life and death, you have to think differently.

And from all the experiences we and many others have had at the Sanctuary, we're coming to believe that the key to change lies in thinking differently. We all have to think differently about the natural environment and how it relates to everything we do. Everything. How we organize the global economy, how we use and distribute, or allocate resources. How we live our everyday lives and how we interact with everyone else in the world.

There are financial issues, and energy issues, and social issues. Health and education and human rights issues. There are wars and conflicts. There's global warming and climate change—coming soon or coming later. There's no easy solution to any of them.

So what do we do now?

We still have to study and learn through science. We have always known that air, water, and food are vital to our individual and collective survival, but in recent years, thanks to scientific research, we've become more aware of how carelessly we've treated them. How we've polluted them and exploited them wastefully. Through science, we're seeing how our health,

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our safety, and our future are linked to the health of the natural environment. With science and technology, we have to develop new ways of producing goods and materials. We have to develop new forms of energy. We have to take direct, practical action to reduce pollution, reduce waste, conserve energy, and protect the natural environment.

None of that is new. Every environmentalist from David Suzuki to Al Gore and just about every climate scientist has made that point. Over and over again. Even business leaders and entrepreneurs are beginning to agree. But after all the campaigns, after the recent boom in awareness, in the current fashion for “going green,” nothing much is changing. The environmental situation is deteriorating. The economic crisis may slow growth and thus reduce the rate of environmental damage, but it’s not a positive change. It’s taking attention away from environmental issues to straight economic ones—jobs, debt, and survival.

What I think is missing is the realization that whether the threat of global warming is overstated or not, it benefits everyone if we protect the natural environment—the land that feeds us, the water we drink, and the air we breathe. Science and technology can help, but we need a catalyst for change. A negative event—like an outbreak of disease, a massive crop failure, or drought or flood or hurricane—that might do the trick. But there might be a positive one. One that we’re all familiar with, that has been a major force in human society from the very beginning.

## **A New Spirituality**

### **Alicia Tyndall:**

I have been interested in the concept of spirituality, as distinct from religion, for a long time, and I did more thinking about it after Ned brought up the idea of a place to sit in the mountains. In recent years, I can hardly keep up with all the articles and books about spirituality and nature.

I think nature provides a spiritual framework for the modern age as much as it has done in the past. It is ever-changing and unchanging. It is a source of wonder and awe and mystery. We all know how good we feel in places like the mountains, at the lake or at the beach. We love flowers and wildlife, and spectacular sunsets. When we stop to pay attention to them, we feel our spirits rise. Choose your own words and try to describe that feeling. It is not easy to find the words, to communicate what a view or a sunset means. It does not matter. What matters is that we feel something! Only a soul that is shuttered, enclosed, withdrawn, constricted feels nothing. Whatever we feel comes from deep inside us. It is not a need. It is not a desire. It is a fact of life. Of being human.

Once we are awakened to that deep bond we have with nature, we can more easily see how environmental concerns are not secondary to economic or social issues. They are absolutely central to our quality of life and to our very existence. When we accept that, we can bring that acceptance into all aspects of our lives.

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When we first created the Sanctuary, we were thinking locally, not globally. But for a long time now, Ned and Tak and I, and many others, have been discussing new and different ways of protecting the natural environment. We can see the reasons for the traditional approaches from street protests to courtroom battles, and while we win some battles, the losses are mounting, and the global picture is not encouraging. That was one reason for creating the Sanctuary the way we did, secretly, illegally, and a little differently from the usual strategy. That was a relatively small issue, and a very small part of the overall struggle. But looking for new ideas and approaches has become larger in our thinking since then.

The more we consider the situation of the world today—the natural environment, the lives of the vast majority of the global population—the more clearly we see that an important force for change, possibly the most important one of all, is not an economic or political or social one. It is the universal spirituality that unites humans and the natural environment. With the source of life itself.

It represents a very old way of thinking about the world we live in, a way we've abandoned with the rise of science and technology. I think we need to have a spiritual attitude towards the natural world once again. I am not sure how best to apply this new-old way of thinking, but more and more I believe that through spiritual exploration that we may begin to find a more practical, compassionate, and satisfying way of living on our crowded planet.

### **Ned Kinloch:**

Again, these ideas aren't new. Forty or fifty years ago, Aldo Leopold described a "land ethic." He saw the value of the natural environment, not just in economic terms, but in philosophical terms. That's something we need today. A Buddhist priest, Thich Nhat Hanh, has said we are about to enter an age of Interbeing, when people will come to see that life on Earth is part of one great life of the planet. That's not far from the ideas of James Lovelock and the Gaia theory that Earth, the entire planet, is a living organism. And the Dalai Lama has referred to the importance of the shared responsibility between nations, between humans, and between humans and all living organisms.

With all our reading and talking and endless discussions, we're coming to see how the future of human life will be determined by the way we live with the natural world. How we use it. How we protect it. And that will influence how we live together, as nations, as societies, and as individuals.

### **Takao Matsushima:**

Neither traditional religion nor modern science can define or explain the full reality of our lives today. Religions have blind faith; science has uncertainty and chaos. Science and psychology have replaced many myths and superstitions, but they still can't answer all our questions about who we are and our place in the world. Neither can atheism. That's why we need to explore spirituality.

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There's no doubt that established religions provide something very useful and comforting to millions of people. They provide social cohesion. You have weekly gatherings of like-minded individuals, with familiar rituals and enjoyable activities with music and singing. They offer social services ranging from assistance to seniors and the distribution of gifts and clothing to education in Sunday School and denominational schools and colleges. They do important charity and aid work in many parts of the world. What's more important is that religions offer relief from heavy moral burdens through prayers for forgiveness and rituals for the absolution of guilt. They provide certainty: there is someone looking out for believers, and one all-embracing answer for the most difficult questions and problems. Everything that happens is part of a Supreme Being's plan for you and the world.

The core values of the major established religions are wonderful. They all include love and compassion. Unfortunately, there are terrible side effects to religion as it is practiced today. In almost all the established religions, and especially the major ones like Christianity, Islam, Judaism, the truth is frozen at a point in the distant past. They have one holy text, written hundreds of years ago in the case of the Bible and the Koran, more recently in the case of the Sikhs and the Mormons. That's where the truth lies. And in many churches, believers are warned against learning about other viewpoints, discouraged, and in some cases forbidden to read or hear about any other interpretations of the truth as stated by their leaders.

There's so much concern with who will be "saved" and who won't be. So much attention to why one set of believers is superior to all the others. So much importance given to why non-believers must be converted or destroyed. What a cramped, narrow, mean existence that implies! Is that the way to progress? To evolve in a way that allows people to learn and grow and develop and benefit from experience and the wonders of creation? No. The result is ignorance and fear that lead to arguments and conflict and suffering spread throughout the world.

One of the common arguments for religion is that without it there'd be nothing but murderous anarchy in the world. Well, we've got religion, and we've got murderous anarchy in many parts of the world. What we don't have is peace and love. What we don't have is tolerance. We don't have a world full of compassion and generosity.

I don't think we have to do away with religion entirely, but we have to turn it inside out. We have to move away from the structures that divide us and find the universal elements of being human. That's what we're trying to do now: find a combination of actions and beliefs that could bring us into greater harmony with the natural world and bring peace and comfort into all our lives at the same time.

### **Ned Kinloch:**

I guess it's my contrarian nature, but if a supernatural, divine personage exists, I can only imagine him or her looking down on Earth these days and saying:

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“Well, that experiment’s not working out too well. I knew I shouldn’t have given them so much free will. And I should have cut down on the greed. Now they’ve gone and made a total mess of the place I gave them. Luckily it’s just one small planet.

I mean, I gave them so many warnings. I sent them earthquakes. I sent them tsunamis. I sent them Katrina. I even sent them Al Gore! But they were too busy fighting about who loves me most. About the right way to love me. And when things got bad, about who was going to be in the lifeboats. So many of them “knew” that they were right and everyone else was wrong. And that meant killing each other. If they’d only stopped fighting, they would have seen that they’d all be saved if they looked out for each other, and for their home – the planet.

Oh well, let’s see where I can start again. Luckily I’ve still got several trillion planets to choose from. I’ll just Google some places that aren’t too far away, and see what modifications I’ll have to make for a new living organism to put there. I’ll call it Life 2.0.”

### **Alicia Tyndall:**

Basically, the challenge is to find a set of spiritual beliefs that lead us towards a better world, with no place for domination by one group over another, by one nation over another, by men over women, by humans over nature. It is a world far in the future, but I think now is a good time to be thinking about it.

I believe there are three questions that we have to answer.

Can we find a way to a realistic view of humanity which recognizes that we are part of nature, not above or separate from other forms of life?

Can we develop a spiritual attitude towards the very things that give us life: the land, water, air, and all other organisms and creatures that represent global biodiversity?

And can we accept a guiding principle for all our actions and policies based on the common good of everyone, not the benefit of the few?

Those are the questions I think about. The answer to the first question is recognition of a simple fact. It does not represent a large step for humankind. Global warming and climate change show that we cannot control everything. Every day, we destroy more of the natural world around us, and almost every day we find new evidence of how much human life and health depends on what we have destroyed, or what is threatened by us.

The second question does not present as large a challenge as it might seem. It does not mean leaving all of nature untouched. It means the sources of life—the fertile land that feeds us, the water we drink, and the air we breathe—are sacred, but not sacrosanct. It guides us in setting aside the land and water resources we need for survival, and protecting the air we breathe from pollution. It means using land and water wisely and conservatively. It means adjusting our use to long-term availability, not immediate need or gratification. It means accepting that they belong to everyone, not to the one person or corporation or nation that

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claims them first. It means they are a necessary basis for survival, not a source of personal or corporate profit.

It requires sacrifices. Protecting land and water and biodiversity will almost certainly place limits on where we can build homes and roads and factories. Protecting the air we breathe may place limits on the way we travel from one place to another, on the industrial processes we use. It means living lightly on the land. Taking steps to reduce the impact of human progress on those resources. All that can mean living simpler, but living well.

The third question, about the common good of humanity—that is definitely a difficult one! It is very hard, almost impossible, to believe that we will ever be able to find a balance between private gain for individuals, for corporations, for cities, provinces and states, and for nations and the good of everyone everywhere.

I believe that human spirituality could be a very large part of the solution. If we can think—outside the box, as they say—of religion, we might reduce the divisions that make unity so difficult to achieve. I do not think we will ever achieve perfect peace, but we cannot survive in a world of continual global conflict. What will remain if we destroy *our* world? Earth will still be here. Mountains and rivers, a few living organisms perhaps, the wind and the empty sky.

### **Ned Kinloch:**

If we tap into the universal spirituality that seems to exist in humans—if we take a more “ecological” approach, if we have to give it a name—then we can begin to see values that everyone can live by. Values that protect the resources we need to survive. Values based on sharing, not accumulating. Values that promote peace and harmony. The important thing is, we can see, even now, how satisfying the world could be if we spread compassion and generosity and tolerance. And we can also see now, how ultimately pointless our lives will be if we continue fighting, with tanks and planes and bombs, for every last bit of energy, every last drop of water, every last bit of arable land.

The most common views of the future of humanity, from the Bible to modern literature and recent movies, tend to be apocalyptic. A world shattered by warfare and famine in which isolated survivors struggle to stay alive, reduced to living no better than our Stone Age ancestors. Not a pretty picture. It’s hard to say who gets the best of it—the ones who die early and go to “heaven” or those who survive to the bitter end, either to rebuild the human race or to fade into extinction.

Well hopelessness and despair aren’t viable options for a better future. “Live now for tomorrow we die!” might have a romantic ring to it when you’re young. When you’re not concerned about anyone else but yourself. But it’s not an optimistic view of anything. It’s the last cry of the pessimist. The nihilist.

Well, I’m an optimist. We, the people of the Sanctuary, are optimists. We accept that the world will change in ways that nobody can predict. But we’re strong in our belief that along with things like anger and selfishness, there’s goodness in people. That people are

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compassionate and generous. That a better world is possible for everyone—or nearly everyone. Not a perfect world. We're not dreaming of Utopia. Fate, karma—whatever you want to call it—works in ways we may never understand. Perhaps humans are destined to go the way of the dinosaurs. But even if they are, we can make the world a better place for all of us in a multitude of ways, big and small. We can change ourselves, one by one, and then we can change the world. In that better world—imperfect, with inevitable resentments and injustices and shortages and emergencies—we'll simply be more comfortable in ourselves, in our natural surroundings, and in human society as a whole. We'll be better equipped to deal with the issues and problems that arise.

It's possible, and it's worth doing.

So, what does a small pavilion in a Sanctuary in the mountains have to do with all that? What's the link between a sitting platform and global climate change? Between a small group of ordinary individuals and the suffering mass of humanity?

It's ridiculous!

Yes. But you have to start somewhere.

We started with a “What if ... ?” question. A small one. A trivial one. We thought we'd answered it, but it led to more questions. And when Alicia thought about our Earth Day activity, in which, for the sake of simplicity, we focussed on food, water, air, and energy, she saw something none of us had seen. And that led to another “What if ... ?” question. What if land, water, and air were recognized in a spiritual sense for what they are: the sources of life? If anything on Earth should be sacred, it should be food, water, and air. That's where our survival lies. They will be our salvation.

And that brought us to a last question we're considering now. It's a very simple one: Why not?

We're ordinary people. With Alicia, we've got a dash of grandmother wisdom, and that's a pretty good thing to have. We're not looking back to the distant past. We've looked around us, and we're looking ahead. On a practical level, we're getting involved in a range of small-scale activities that stem from our Earth Day celebrations. We're moving the focus from the personal to the collective. We're trying to become “engaged” citizens, making our voices heard by community and national leaders. In a way—and it's ironic after what we've said about established religions—we are turning religion inside out by placing all the emphasis on tolerance, compassion, and generosity, not on what any of us believe about the past. It's our attitude towards the future that's important now. It's how we act now towards others that's important.

A further irony is the recognition that religion is the only other aspect of life that operates on the same global scale as the modern economy. But it needn't be religion. We think it's universal human spirituality that's been expressed for centuries in religious terms. The biggest change of all is expressing that spirituality in terms of the source of life—not a supernatural divinity, but the land, water, and air we need to survive. Can you imagine how the world might change if every minister, priest, rabbi and imam made tolerance,

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compassion and generosity the theme of their sermons? If they preached conservation and moderation? If congregations applied their energy to those values instead of trying to impose a narrow restrictive set of social values on everyone else? As Karen Armstrong has said, it's how you live, not what you think, that's important.

On a spiritual level, we think the sanctuary concept could provide a focus for spiritual exploration and practice. People talk of Nature's cathedrals. They're all around us. As cities get larger, it's harder to get to the cathedrals. That's where small natural sanctuaries could be churches and chapels. Sanctuaries don't have to be in Natural Parks, although I think that's a logical place for many of them. But more than that, we have to bring nature into our lives, into the cities where we live. Not special bits of nature, representative elements. They could be in a city park, beside a lake or a river. In a backyard or in a balcony garden. Simple places where we can find peace and calm for a few minutes. Places where we can connect with the natural world.

### **Takao Matsushima:**

Living lightly on the earth will not destroy the standard of living that people in the developed world have today, and to which the poor of the world aspire. It may diminish the incredible material abundance of the privileged few, but they, and the less affluent, can still have rich and varied lives, and the lives of the poorest sectors of global society can be immeasurably improved. We have boundless inventive and entrepreneurial skills to make useful technological breakthroughs. We have structures for monitoring, regulating, and mediating almost all aspects of global society. Let's put those skills and structures together to share, rather than appropriate, the natural wealth of the world.

It's a goal that requires action on many fronts, political, economic, social—and spiritual. We're beginning to feel that is the most important of all. For years, environmentalists have been calling for change. Economists resist. Politicians resist. We all resist—because change is uncertain and hard. But if each and every one of us can make a personal, spiritual connection to the land and water and air; if each of us can experience the peace, the richness and joy of nature, then we may begin to find spiritual connections to people of other nations and cultures. If we all regard nature as sacred, as more important to human life than material abundance, then we will find it easier to make the changes in our everyday life, in our consumption habits, in our reduction of wastefulness, in the spread of conservation practices. Our lives will be simpler, but equally rich and fulfilling.

### **Roger Maltenby:**

We've talked a lot about spirituality, and now we pretty much agree that it could be the key to thinking differently about the world. That's essentially our first level of action. It's where we start as individuals in transforming ourselves by making a personal connection to nature. By bringing stillness and silence into our lives. By bringing nature into our lives. With more sanctuaries in natural settings, open to everyone, with more sanctuaries in cities and urban

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areas, people will be able to make a spiritual connection with the natural world that can be the motivation for further action.

With the MindBody Space, we get our minds and bodies into gear. There's nothing competitive. There's no pampering. We bring personal focus and simple goals to those activities that calm us and energize us.

And with the Sanctuary in the mountains, we combine the stillness of sitting, the focus of mind and body, and the soul-restoring enjoyment of physical exercise in the natural environment. That's what we take back to the city or the town and our regular lives.

The link to our regular lives is important because that takes us to the next level of action. Paradoxically, we think we can change the world by sitting on our butts. But that's just the start. Since last year's Earth Day activity at the Base, we're encouraging people to take action in two ways. One is to join and support existing groups dealing with environmental and social justice issues. There's a wide range of groups and of course, there's a ton of issues. But those issues don't affect everyone directly, or I should say, the effect is not perceived that way. Even though the world seems smaller than ever and we're more closely connected to every other part of the world than ever before with our cellphones and email and airplanes, saving whales and grizzlies and the tropical rain forest is not a central part of life in Canada. Poverty in Africa or even Afghanistan seems far away for most Canadians. That's why we think the next level of action should be based on local regions.

The second way to take action is to join or form a group of people to get to know the region where they live. In particular, to be aware of the natural resources that affect every person every single day: the land that produces food, the water for drinking, agriculture, and industry, and the air that everyone breathes. And then, when one learns where their food, water, and air come, they soon realize how much each region depends on resources far beyond its borders. We're all connected in vital ways to other parts of the world. To the natural environment hundreds or thousands of kilometres away. And to people that live in those other regions. That's what joins us. Not our culture or colour or religion. Our mutual dependence on the natural sources of human life. Those resources are threatened today, and the only way to save them is to work together. In an emergency, like a house on fire, people don't argue about who the architect was, and his or her intentions in building the house, and they don't stop to discuss who will benefit from fire. They get together and fight the fire. That's what we have to do today.

That brings us to the third level of action, and that's finding ways to influence national and international policies so that those resources are used and protected for the benefit of everyone, not just one group of people, one corporation, or one nation. At all levels of government, ordinary people have to make their views known to the politicians and policy makers. Somehow, we have to find ways to counter the influence of lobbyists and defenders of those who benefit at the expense of everyone else. That means making sure politicians at all levels of government know they have support for legislation to protect key environments, conserve those resources, regulate the use of them, and manage the economy within a framework of long-term environmental sustainability.

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We can only see so far into the future, and we know we'll have natural changes, inevitable or otherwise. We can only act on the basis of what we know, what we're aware of. And right now, I'd say that ignorance rules. It's time for us all to be aware of what we've got and what we need, and start to work together to protect those resources. Not just for us—we who live in this particular region—but for everyone in the world.

That's where the Sanctuary comes in. If we create more sanctuaries, people will have more opportunities to make a spiritual connection to nature. Sanctuaries won't do much for the impoverished populations of the world, those already close to nature in Africa, Asia, and Latin America especially. I think it's our responsibility to change, here in the developed nations. If we don't change, I think the apocalyptic scenarios that Ned mentioned will be hard to avoid.

So that's our approach to the future. That's what we see as a practical, useful role for the Morning Light Co-op. There are many people working on environmental and social justice issues with more expertise and experience than we have. We think this might be the best way for us to support them by getting people involved on a regional basis, getting them to act locally, and have their voices heard on a national and international level.

## **Reflections**

### **Alicia Tyndall:**

I like the fact that the Sanctuary began with an act of civil disobedience. It seems fitting. I think there is a tradition there, somewhere. That is how significant change often begins, with a spark of defiance, a burst of imagination, a touch of creativity, and one small act.

The time is right for a spiritual renovation. More and more people are dissatisfied with religion and are interested in discovering a new spirituality for themselves. In our affluent society, many people, especially older ones, are in a position to “give something back” to society, to the world. They are finding more time to spend on their physical and mental well-being. They are taking up yoga, for example, and starting to explore spirituality in a variety of ways. Many young people are interested in the natural environment. They are learning about it in school and they are ready to turn that knowledge into action. Young and old, these are the volunteers, the activists, the people doing something to make the world a better place.

Some people are willing to put their bodies on the line. Often that is all they have – the poor, the dispossessed, the powerless. I would like to see more people, like most of us associated with the Sanctuary, take a stand. We have our education and a certain level of comfort. We have a reasonable understanding of how the economic system works. We can easily consume less without undue hardship. We can make choices based on principles of social justice, of fair trade, of non-exploitation, not only on cost nor on the momentary dictates of fashion. We are the ones who have to lead the process of change. Not poor people struggling to make ends meet.

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I would like to see more people joining political parties to make their voices and views heard, even if it means compromise and discomfort. To call for and support policies based on environmental concern and social justice.

In the big scheme of things, those are all very small actions. Like the Sanctuary of the Morning Light. Whatever we do today or tomorrow, the world will continue to change. We are not trying to stop it in its tracks. But if we are less acquisitive, less envious, less wasteful, we may find ourselves more comfortable in the world. Less alienated, and healthier and happier.

We are not sages or philosophers. The Sanctuary is not the answer to all the spiritual concerns of our age. It is, essentially, an experiment. But with more sanctuaries, close to cities, in cities, people will be able bring nature back into their lives. They will make their own connections to the natural environment; they will have their own insights and make their own discoveries. Perhaps hours or days of silent contemplation will enable someone, somewhere, to find a path to a better way of living for everyone. For the common good, and not for personal gain.

Perhaps, in fifty or a hundred years, this idea—a sanctuary against the destruction of the natural environment—will make a difference.

### **Rebecca Watson:**

One day, I remember, Alicia called Ned a "crazy Zen priest." She meant someone who breaks all the rules, but does it in a way that makes sense. She said there have been guys like that in the history of Zen Buddhism. The more I've thought about it since then, I think she was right. But I think Ned and Alicia and Tak are all mad monks—or nuns in Alicia's case.

Ned has always said there's no one right way of thinking about the Sanctuary. He didn't expect everyone to have exactly the same vision as he had. The important thing was to believe that it was worth doing, and do it as well as we possibly could. That seemed to me like a good way to go.

Now, the world needs more explorers—people asking questions, trying new approaches, looking for a future in which being is more important than having, and giving is more important than getting.

It needs defenders of the natural environment against careless, wasteful, exploitation and destruction.

It needs warriors for equality and justice, willing to fight those who oppose new approaches. To convince those who are fearful of change. To fight what Ned called the deadly inertia of "that's how we've always done it."

Explorers, defenders, and warriors—that's what Ned, Alicia, and Tak are. I like to think the rest of us are as well.

**Ned Kinloch:**

For all of us, it's been a journey. We set off into the unknown and found allies and supporters in surprising places. We've learned a lot already, and we still have an awful lot more to learn. Perhaps we have something to offer the world: the concept of a new relationship with the natural environment that sustains us. A relationship based on equality and sharing, not dominion and destruction. On compromise. On accepting limitations in our lives. On preserving some of the less visible, less conscious, elements of nature that are really more important in our lives than most of us realize. And finding challenges and satisfaction and pleasure in living in the world. It's not all gloom and doom. Happiness is all around us. Not in the accumulation of more and more possessions, but in what the world provides, in our families and friends, in our adventures, in our imaginations and our dreams.

Our journey started with from a simple idea and the path has led us to a vast panorama of possibilities. On this latest stage of our journey, we're still not far from the starting point.

In silence and stillness, we find ourselves. We find our place in an immense, wondrous, exhilarating and exalting natural world.

When we find that place, we feel energized. Mentally. Physically. Spiritually. We find a divinity within us as it is in everything. Where it comes from? That's still a mystery. But it's not important. The fullness and richness of nature embraces us. It will continue to do so if we treat it with respect. If we regard it as sacred.

There's no covenant. In a few billion years, scientists say the world will be either cold and deserted or vaporized in a fiery blast. I can't remember which. But now, it's up to us to save ourselves. To survive and thrive. We can do it.

One of the things I learned along the way was an old Zen story.

A Zen master gave this advice to his disciples as they went out into the world: "Just sit. Meditate. Perhaps someone will sit with you."

Well, that's what we're doing. We're sitting. Others have already joined us. Sitting in the morning light, we've got a whole new day ahead of us. Let's see what we can make of it.

