



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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## Time to Choose

by Satish Kumar

Sustainable living stands on four pillars: science, spirituality, technology and art... but what kinds of science, spirituality, technology and art? These are contentious questions.

There is mechanistic science which does not recognize anything other than what can be measured, quantified and analyzed. Such science looks at the Earth and the natural world and sees it as a machine. But there is another kind of science: the science of wholeness and the implicate order; the science of Gaia, the living Earth; the science that accepts the principles of uncertainty, mystery and surprise. Which science do we choose?

Spirituality also has two aspects. There is a 'flaky' spirituality which limits itself to personal growth. But there is also a spirituality which is engaged with the world: the spirituality of everyday life; the spirituality of compassion, imagination, beauty and generosity of the spirit. Which spirituality should we choose?

Then there are two kinds of technology: one is developed for war and for commercial profit. Nuclear, nano and biotechnology fall into this category because they disregard natural rhythms and human aspirations. Strong, powerful and privileged governments and corporations use and misuse these technologies for their own narrow ends. But there is another kind of technology that is appropriate, benign and renewable and makes a small footprint on the Earth. Such technologies work in harmony with nature, rather than attempting to dominate or conquer her. Which technology should we choose?

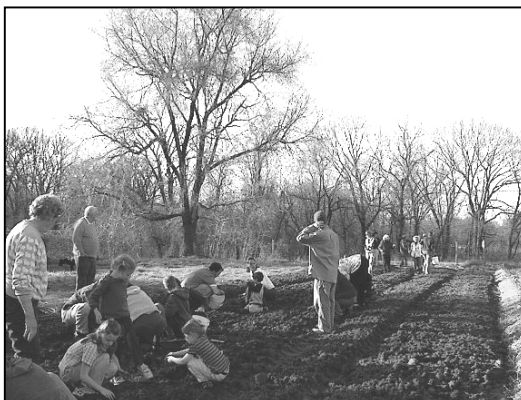
Art also takes two forms. The first is celebrity and commercial art, which is disengaged from the concerns of the world. This isolationistic and egotistic art has little to do with the ecological, spiritual or social challenges of our time. As long as the artist is made into a celebrity, as long as art creates controversy, then the aims of art are considered to be met. But there is another kind of art: art with integrity;

art that inspires, uplifts and serves the greater purpose of life. Which art should we choose?

These are clear choices: between skeptical science and holistic science, between selfish spirituality and inclusive spirituality, between triumphant technology and tender technology, between egotistic art and art with integrity.

We have already made some fatal choices: we have ruined Hiroshima and Chernobyl, we have devastated landscapes and created dust bowls, we are destroying the forests and causing the icecaps to melt, and we are perpetuating unjust and fragmented societies and fueling religious conflicts around the world. It is time to change our direction. It is time to choose. The

choice is ours and the choice is crucial. ☉



*Satish Kumar has been called the sage of the deep ecology movement. He received the 2001 International Award for Promoting Gandhian Values for walking 8000 miles around the world for peace. Currently, he is Program Director at Schumacher College in England and Editor of Resurgence Magazine, an international magazine promoting peace, sustainability and holistic philosophy. See page two for information on Satish's visit in April.*

## Letter from the Director

Spring! What does that word, this Season connote for you? What emerges within your memory of Springs past? What has Earth taught you by its seasonal renewal? As I write in late February I look forward to our annual potato-planting to ring in Spring with the Equinox celebration. I can envision our woods coming alive again with daffodils and bluebells. Then the blossoming dogwoods and red bud trees of April burst forth. And whoever originally scheduled the first Earth Day back in 1970 to be on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April was *really* thinking... what a lovely time of year to celebrate Earth!

This year the two components of the **Oblate Ecological Initiative** are also blossoming. The **Community Supported Garden at La Vista** begins its 4<sup>th</sup> season and a new chapter with our new farmer Kristopher Larson. Kris moved to Levis Lane in December with his wife Stacy and infant son Jacob. Another part of the newness of the Garden this season is a 6 week Spring share of lettuces, spinaches, and the like grown in the ground in our greenhouse. Of course Kris has also been busy getting the fields ready for the regular 6 month share of vegetables that begins in mid-May.

The **La Vista Ecological Learning Center** continues to

## Spring Equinox, 2006

grow with the expansion of hours of Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND. Maxine is now both program and administrative assistant and has been invaluable in helping prepare for a great Spring!

In this issue we feature articles by two leaders and visionaries in the field of Ecology and Spirituality. Oh, and the Learning Center is assisting to bring both of these folks to speak in the St. Louis area this Spring. (We hope YOU can attend... see ads in this issue.) Satish Kumar and Sr. Miram MacGillis, OP are passionate and wise and Earthy... may their words call forth newness from you this season.

The work of the Oblate Ecological Initiative grapples with the issues set forth in these two articles. In assisting folks to recognize the signs of these times and thus the need to choose sustainability... we promote sacred living.

You might also notice the insert of this edition. Our annual Earth Literacy program is held each August and has been full (20 participants) the last two years. We invite you to consider attending this August or being part of any other program or retreat we offer. (See the schedule on page 6). ☯

- Maurice Lange, OMI

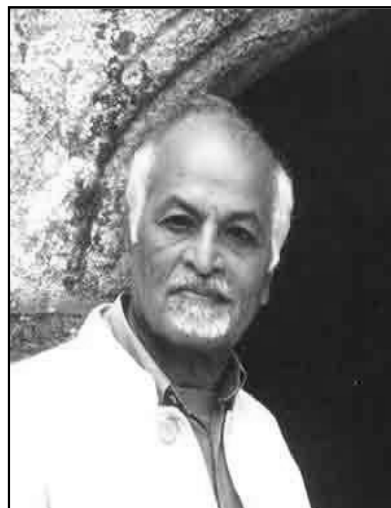
### Satish Kumar Presents Two Evening Lectures

Tuesday, April 18<sup>th</sup>  
**“Reverential Ecology:  
 Soil, Soul, Society”**

7:00 PM

ATC Room, Trimpe Building  
 Lewis and Clark Community College  
 5800 Godfrey Road  
 Godfrey, Illinois 62035

In this evening lecture, *Soil, Soul, and Society* asks for truly inter-connected thinking. Kumar's trinity is a symbol to arouse and focus our vision and help us work towards a more peaceful and holistic world-view.



Wednesday, April 19<sup>th</sup>  
**“Eco-Intelligence:  
 Reclaiming Innate Wisdom”**

7:00 PM

Winifred Moore Auditorium  
 Webster University  
 470 East Lockwood Road  
 St. Louis, Missouri 63119

Tonight, Kumar will inspire us to wake up to the intelligence of Earth - of which we are a part - so we may come home to our true selves and deal more effectively with today's problems.

### Registration Information

Admission for either event is \$5 in advance or \$10 at the door. To reserve your place please send your name, address, and \$5 cash or check made payable to “OEI” *Oblate Ecological Initiative* Attn: Satish Kumar Event 4300 Levis Lane Godfrey, IL 62035 618-466-5004

The Oblate Ecological Initiative is pleased to join with Sustainable St. Louis, the Piasa Palisades Group of the Sierra Club, and the Environmental Studies Program of Webster University to sponsor this special event.

# Food as Sacrament

By Miriam Therese MacGillis

*To live we must daily break the body and shed the blood of creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness and others to want. - Wendell Berry*

In 1980 I came to live and work at Genesis Farm, a 140-acre farm bequeathed to my Dominican congregation in 1978. It was founded on a vision of creating a space where people of good will could come to ask the critical questions around our contemporary crises. It was to be a reflection center where we would also grapple with the challenges of our Western life-style, our alienation from the natural world, and the issues of land, agriculture, and food.

Genesis Farm is a "learning center for re-inhabiting the Earth," a descriptive phrase taken from the writings of Thomas Berry. The two primary dimensions of our work are in the areas of learning and agriculture.

The learnings lead us to alter radically our perceptions of the origin and nature of the Universe as a bio-spiritual reality. We work to heal the separation of matter and spirit, as that single human perception that has so intrinsically affected the beliefs upon which the whole of Western culture is founded. Our programs and workshops are designed to help us experience ourselves as a dimension of the Earth, and to expand our concept of self to include our Earth self, our Universe self, as one single reality. This is no small undertaking. Redefining ourselves in a bioregional context has become a primary source of personal transformation. This, too, is profoundly challenging. Each of our programs takes these learnings as its starting point.



The second major thrust of Genesis Farm is in the area of what we now call "sacred agriculture." In the words of Vincent McNabb, O.P.: "If there is one truth more than any other, which life and thought have made us admit, against our prejudices, and even against our will, it is that there is little hope of saving civilization or religion except by the return of contemplatives to the land."

Laying a contemplative foundation for our work in sacred agriculture rests on two central bodies of thought that we try to integrate.

The first is the exploration of the Earth as a self-nourishing organism. This concept displaces the prevalent cultural assumption about the role of farmers as the "growers" of food. When we begin to grapple with the differences in these perceptions, it becomes obvious how enormous is the shift of consciousness demanded to transform agriculture as practiced in the industrialized world. There are scientific, educational, and economic institutions that would virtually collapse if this understanding became evident and operable in our human communities.

If we understood the Earth as a living being whose activities are to nourish, govern, learn, heal, regenerate, and transform itself, then the mystery at the heart of human existence would open up and draw us into the sacramental aspect of our lives through the most ordinary and familiar ways.

The second major influence in our farming comes from the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, a practice known as biodynamic agriculture. Steiner lived in Austria at the turn of the century. While he did not have available the insight drawn from quantum physics, or Gaia theory, or the observations of our space explorers, his knowledge of the spiritual world pervading the world of matter resulted in an approach to farming and to the nourishing function of food that is extraordinary. Since 1987 the fields and gardens of genesis Farms have



*Garden Distribution Room at Genesis Farm.*

been cultivated with this biodynamic approach. The food from this garden is literally a manifestation of Spirit.

It has become clear to me that the concept of food itself is key to the transformation of our ecological crisis. Unless our human species can open itself to the contemplation of food as a holy mystery through which we eat ourselves into existence, then the meaning of existence will continue to elude us. Our present cultural experience of food has degenerated into food as fuel, for supplying the energy for our insatiable search for that which will fill the hungers of our soul. When we understand that food is not a metaphor for spiritual nourishment, but is itself spiritual, then we eat food with a spiritual attitude and taste and are nourished by the Divine directly.

From early times Western culture has carried the burden of guilt for the existence of chaos in the Universe. Only now are we realizing that the Universe was divinely organized from the beginning with chaos as an integral dimension. Our earlier perceptions have cast a shadow over the attitude with which Western peoples have "discovered" and evolved "agriculture." Feeling doomed to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow explains part of the deep, hidden rage against the natural world described by Thomas Berry. Our propensity toward favoritism has closed us off to the full diversity of nourishment offered by the Earth. It has constrained us by the narrow choices we elected in our methodology of monoculture.

This clearly has shaped our present agricultural crisis.

The determination to redeem the Earth and transcend its natural limitations has played itself out in the industrialization and total mechanization of farming. The soils have been exhausted and drugged, their inner life forces depleted and poisoned, not because we are necessarily an evil species so much as that we are driven by our abstract ideas about a perfect world. We have been enculturated toward an inability to experience the Universe as it actually is. We end up tearing apart the "garden planet" in our effort to redesign it.

If we were to accept the Earth on the terms and under the exquisite conditions in which it continues to evolve, the role of the farmer would be raised to a most honorable and sacred human profession. Relieved of the illusions that they are manufacturing food, or that they are worthy of success to the degree that they are also economists, cosmeticists, and managers, farmers might understand themselves as acting in something akin to a prophetic and priestly role. We need to see farmers as entering the sanctuary of the soil and engaging the mysterious forces of creation in order to bless and



*Farmer Smadar English at Genesis Farm.*

nourish the inner and outer life of the community they serve.

Villages, towns, and cities surrounded by farms practicing sacred agriculture would begin to regain the elemental prosperity of pure air, water, and diversity, and the possibility for health and vitality. The attention farmers would pay to the rhythms of the celestial world could re-inspire the artists and poets. The music and texture of "place" would be grounded in the great seasonal cycles by which the human has been fashioned in our longing for communion with the Mystery at the heart of the world.

As our culture shrinks in its inner life and rages in violence between individuals and groups, and against the whole of nature, we might do well to reflect on the meaning of food. I do not believe that we are doomed to the inevitability of "engineering" food into a state of eternal shelf life, or that we must use our most deadly nuclear inventions to irradiate our food for its immortality. These compulsive tendencies can be changed.

We live in a Universe with an inner spiritual reality. There is nothing that does not participate in this deep sacramental presence. The soils, the microbes, the animals are all holy, are all revelatory. Understanding the Universe in this way has the capacity to transform our obsession with control and power.

It is my hope that the concept of sacred agriculture will find expression and authenticity on our land at Genesis Farm. By opening afresh the sacramental dimension of food, I hope to open the meaning of Eucharist and Gospel, so that we learn again to treat creation "knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently"...as a sacrament.

Let contemplatives return to the land. 

*This essay is excerpted from "Food As Sacrament" by Miriam Therese MacGillis from Earth and Spirit, edited by Fritz Hull, 1993 by the Continuum Publishing Company. Reprinted with permission of Fritz Hull.*



**Sister Miriam MacGillis**, a member of the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, New Jersey, lives and works at Genesis Farm which she co-founded in 1980. She is one of the foremost interpreters of cultural historian Thomas Berry's work regarding the evolution of the Universe and the development of the human within that story. Through her workshops and lectures all over the world she helps people to grasp and embody a new understanding of what it means to be human.

Join us for a workshop presented  
by Miriam MacGillis, OP

***Not By Bread Alone...  
the True Cost  
of Our Daily Bread***

Saturday, May 6, 2006  
8:30 am - 3:30 pm

May Center  
12303 DePaul Drive  
Bridgeton, MO 63044  
(near St. Louis)

Program fee includes organic lunch:  
\$15 in advance and \$20 at the door

Call 618-466-5004 for a detailed brochure.

*Sponsored by the Intercommunity Ecological Council*



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*Eating is a sacrament.  
The grace we say cleans our hearts and guides the children  
and welcomes the guest, all at the same time. --Gary Snyder*

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## *Meditation Before Eating*

***This food is the gift of the whole Universe –  
the Earth, the sky, and much hard work.  
May we eat in mindfulness  
so as to be worthy to receive it.  
May we transform our unskillful states of mind  
and learn to eat with moderation.  
May we take only foods that nourish us  
and prevent illness.  
We accept this food to realize  
the path of understanding and love.***

From Plum Village Chanting and Recitation Book, compiled by  
Thich Nhat Hanh and the monks and nuns of Plum Village, 2000.

The Oblate Ecological Initiative  
is a ministry of the  
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

## **OEI CALENDAR 2006**

April 18 Tuesday	<i>"Reverential Ecology"</i> , 7 PM Satish Kumar lecture in Godfrey
April 19 Wednesday	<i>"Eco-Intelligence"</i> , 7 PM Satish Kumar lecture in St. Louis
April 22 - 23 Sat. - Sun	<i>"Silent Spring: Earth Day Revisited"</i> Weekend Retreat
May 6 Saturday	<i>"Not by Bread Alone..."</i> Miriam MacGillis workshop in St. Louis
May 8 - 12 Weekdays	<i>"Kids Explore God's Creation"</i> Students immersed in natural world
June 21 Wednesday	<i>Summer Solstice</i> , 7 PM Celebrate as Summer begins
July 21 - 23 Fri - Sun	<i>"Earth Literacy Revisited"</i> 2005 participants return to La Vista
August 3 - 10 Thurs - Thurs	<i>"Exploring the Sacred Universe"</i> Earth Literacy Program