

I've Even Seen Happy Clams...

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Translated by Jo Campbell

Towards the Ecozoic era: compassion, deep ecology and good eco-pacifist food.

Introducing Utopia

How shall we picture the Ecozoic era? A world based on non-violence, peace, compassion, equality, sharing and love; respect for nature, life, the sacred earth, the story of the universe...A geo-cultural organisation founded on respect and understanding of natural cycles and wilderness, where independent bio-regions have their own network, populated by organic farms, eco-villages and sustainable towns.

The vision of this approaching era has already been created by Thomas Berry, along with other great thinkers from different ages, mystics, poets, philosophers, writers, artists, non-aligned scientists, teachers, or just normal people—simple but profound—such as farmers, craftsmen, mothers, the elderly, men and women who throughout the centuries have never stopped dreaming of a better world...And children too, from all over the world, perhaps the only ones, apart from the mystics and poets, to have had a clear and true vision of the world inspired by nature and wilderness.¹

But when will we reach this Ecozoic era? Maybe it's not important to know now, but what is important, in our daily life, in our own bioregion, is to do something practical and ecologically sound for us, for others (all the others—plants, animals, mountains, rivers, valleys, seas...) and the planet. We can try and live the Ecozoic era from this moment onwards, as a practical dream, with our eyes wide open, starting to create it for the future. Everyone can at least make

1. A similar world was discovered by the Lithuanian mytho-archeologist Marija Gimbutas (her research began to be known outside scientific spheres at the end of the 1980s) in Neolithic Europe. This was an agricultural, peaceful, egalitarian and matrilineal society that she called the Civilization of Old Europe or the Great Goddess (6500-3500 BC), probably referenced in the "Earthly Paradise" of the Hebrew Scriptures and the "Golden Age" of Greek philosophers as a time before the coming of the patriarchal society that continues today.

his or her own contribution, however inconsistent, and hope that one day, perhaps in 300 years time (in the Ecozoic!), someone will fondly remember us...and Thomas Berry.

In our own small way, my partner Mariagrazia and I have started putting the “Ecozoic” into practice, using a new language where possible, doing things ecologically; she writes poetry, I compose eco-pacifist songs. Now I’d like to tell you about something concrete we do every day—three times a day, in fact—in the kitchen! Cruelty-free vegan cooking...So here, with a few thoughts of my own, I’d like to introduce you to a traditional Mediterranean dish and lots of tiny animals that live under the sand in the sea—clams.

A Story

One morning at the seaside I’m walking along the beach warmed by the late September sun with the waves crashing on the shore and no one in sight. The air is fresh and full of salt carried by the wind from the sea. The only signs of human presence are my footprints in the sand. At a certain point, I start hearing tiny voices like a choir coming from beneath the sea-washed sand; “Thank you, thank you, thank you!” I can’t believe my ears, but then realize that these thanks are meant for me, and I feel really happy...

Last summer, when camping with Mariagrazia, I asked her to teach me her most original vegan dish, “Happy Clam Spaghetti,” where the clams of this famous Mediterranean recipe are replaced by pistachio nuts. It’s really tasty, and just as good as the original dish. The pistachio nuts are fun to open.

And the clams? They’re still living happily under the sand, in spite of the fishing boats with their “suction dredgers” that devastate the sea bed near the coast, sucking up everything they find, keeping only the clams, destroying all forms of marine life, and leaving only an underwater desert. This is happening at the moment in Italy, mainly in the Adriatic Sea.

Compassion

The word comes from the Latin *patire* “to suffer”, but also from the Greek *sympatheia*, “community of suffering”, and defines an emotion that makes us feel sorry for the pain of others, almost as if we were the

ones suffering. In the holistic Buddhist vision compassion is also seen as the desire for the well being of all other forms of life with the idea that everything is interlinked. So we can say that there is no wisdom without compassion and no real compassion without wisdom.

Deep Ecology

Compassion is a fundamental part of Buddhism and is linked to wisdom, but what sort of wisdom? The history of our planet, the various civilizations that have followed each other from the Upper Palaeolithic until present day (first matriarchal, then patriarchal), and the relationship (recently decidedly negative) that the human race has had with Earth, has taught us that real wisdom is to be found in ecology.

In an interesting article that appeared in the magazine *Lato Selvatico* (an important publication of the Italian Bioregional Network), the American poet Gary Snyder explains that you can't save an animal or a species if you don't work towards saving the bioregion where you live. This is what deep ecology teaches us. So if we don't solve the problem of over-fishing in the Adriatic Sea, there won't be any clams left! Already lots are imported from Spain.

The "desire" to eat too many clams (and fish), but especially too much meat (the "Cattle Culture," as Jeremy Rifkin calls it in his book *Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture*) is causing probably irreversible damage to the planet (desertification of the seas and whole regions, causing misery for the local population), together with great suffering for animals (factory farming) and also for humans themselves (huge increase in cardiovascular disease and tumours).

Gary Snyder also reminds us of the first precept of Buddhism, "Never cause unnecessary suffering." So it would be really admirable if the Western world, with all its wealth and resources, should try to feed itself more on vegetables and grain, and show more respect for animals (living beings that are weaker and defenceless). Otherwise, continues Gary Snyder, we're heading towards "an immoral form of waste" that we, as a people and a planet (Gaia, the living planet, as the biochemist James Lovelock explained so well) just can't allow any longer.

Clearly, that which is true for the Western world cannot be applied to the third world and tribal populations whose economy is still high-

ly dependent on hunting and fishing. This first precept of Buddhism is also not a “commandment” (luckily there are still those who raise animals with care and love), but is simply an invitation to consider that ecological sense can lead us towards eating less meat, or even giving it up completely.

Good Eco-Pacifist Cuisine

Each day when we sit down to eat we can do something to ease the suffering of the many animals who are treated so badly purely to satisfy the needs imposed by the “Cattle Culture.” Vegetarian and vegan cooking offer an infinite choice of cruelty free dishes that are really tasty (a wise choice which can be fun to make, like the “Happy Clam Spaghetti”).

Compassion when eating! We can honour life and Earth when we eat, I feel that this is an easy but effective daily routine that anyone can do to be part of the “Great Work”—the wonderful vision offered by the late eco-theologian and bioregionalist Father Thomas Berry, where every one of us should make an effort to do something each day to reach a new era of ecological wisdom that he called the “Ecozoic era”, based simply on the sacred earth, the philosophy of deep ecology and the practice of bioregionalism.

Nature in the wild shows us that species do not hurt others just for pleasure, or just because they can. Only humans do this by choice. The idea that the human species has a cultural evolution that we consider to be progress is now contradicted by what we’re doing to animals, the planet and in the end to ourselves. Just looking at Europe, in the Neolithic Civilization of Old Europe, based on agriculture, peace, equality and matriarchy, there was much more awareness of ecology than today.

In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, the Czech writer Milan Kundera perhaps reminds us how to measure real “goodness” in human beings – by how they treat all those who are at their mercy, including animals. I would also add trees, and those who are weaker, and cannot defend themselves, for example children, women, old people, gypsies and those with disabilities.

Here’s a game to end with—a wonderful, meaningful game, explained by Mark Rowlands in his recent book *The Philosopher and the*

Wolf, a variation of the original by John Rawls (both philosophers). It can be played alone or in company.

Try to imagine how you would like the world to be, perhaps a fair society based on the values of peace, solidarity, compassion and equality, without wars and the exploitation of nature, and so forth. Wonderful, isn't it? Who wouldn't want to live in it? Seems just like the dream of the Ecozoic Era. But there's a rule to the game that makes it really interesting, and here it is: only right at the end of the game do you find out what sort of life you would lead in this society. You discover if you're a man or woman, black or white, rich or poor, intelligent or stupid, a believer or atheist, selfish or selfless, and so on. Also, watch out: you may be elderly or a child, healthy or ill, or even an animal or a tree.

And what if you happened to be a cow, a pig, or...a clam?

Recipe for Spaghetti with Happy Clams

(Chef: Mariagrazia Pelaia)

Ingredients for Two people:

200g spaghetti
200g pistachio nuts (with shells)
1 piece of kombu algae and a handful of nori algae (crumbled)
1 or 2 cloves garlic
Chilli (as desired)
4 plum tomatoes
Bunch of parsley
Olive oil
Extra-virgin olive oil
1 spoonful wholemeal flour
1 bay leaf

Instructions:

Two hours before cooking, put the two types of algae to soak (other kinds of algae can be used).

Use a large frying pan to make the sauce—a generous dose of olive oil, whole garlic cloves, (I'm always desperately looking for them, stealing them from my partner), half a dried chilli in pieces, and a bay leaf.

Add the pistachio “clams” with the chopped algae and a couple of spoonfuls of the soak water and cover. After a few minutes, add the chopped tomatoes. Shell about half the pistachios, or more, depending how much you want to use your hands later. Meanwhile, put the spaghetti into boiling water.

Drain the spaghetti when it's only half-cooked and let it finish cooking in the sauce, to which you have added the rest of the soak water. When it's nearly done, add the flour. Take off the heat and add a couple of handfuls of chopped parsley and a dash of olive oil, *et voilà!*

Notes:

The recipe for “Spaghetti alle vongole felici,” or “Happy Clam Spaghetti” including photos, and other eco-pacifist recipes can be found at www.cucinaecozaica.com. Your comments are welcome!

More information at www.orecchioverde.ilcannocchiale.it, my blog, which deals with bioregionalism, deep ecology, poetry dedicated to Gianni Rodari (1930-1980), Italian writer and pacifist.

My eco-pacifist songs are at <http://insalatasbagliata.webnode.it>.

The title of the article comes from the song by the Italian singer Claudio Lolli “Ho visto anche delle zingari felici” (“I’ve even seen happy gypsies”), which was a symbol of the student protest movement in 1977.