

### Sean and Jacob's Podcast

**Sean:** Hello this is Sean,

**Jacob:** and Jacob,

**Sean:** And you're listening to the religious segment of Ten Ways to Know Nature.

**Jacob:** Today will be focusing on finding divinity behind nature. Nature is pure. When it is untouched and unmodified by human hands we as humans, perceive it as a representation of unadulterated beauty. It is because of nature's purity and beauty that people of all religions are able to find something divine within it.

**Sean:** We had a chance to speak with religious leader, Chaplain Hendrickson.

**Jacob:** We asked her her thoughts on divinity behind nature.

**Chaplain Hendrickson:** I don't think that you would look at nature, look at the beauty and decide there must be a god because the world is so beautiful. But I think that if you do have a faith, if you do believe in a higher power, in a deity of some kind then its very easy to make the jump to, there must be a god, so, you know, I don't know, that's my own, that's really coming at it from my own experience.

**Sean:** As chaplain Hendrickson said, you can find divinity behind nature through your own experience.

**Jacob:** Which leads us to think that regardless of religion, you can always find divinity within nature. However, if you do associate with a religion though, that could influence how you perceive it.

In her Ecology of the Jewish Spirit, Ellen Bernstein raises the issue that Jews often believe that Israel is the only land that is holy. She says that this belief can, "translate into indifference toward their own environments."

Personally, I do not have this issue. As a Jew, I do have an inherent connection to the land of Israel and many sites in it such as the Cotel and Masada. These places represent important events in the history of my people and carry with them stories of struggle and perseverance. They connect me with my past as well as my spirituality, but there are places other than Israel that I feel connected to. Having spent my entire life less than half a block away from Prospect Park, I have gradually come to feel very close to it, and it's safe to say that the connection I have with it is one of my strongest. Contrary to what Bernstein says, I find it easier to be close with a place that is readily available to me. I am in a sense geographically inclined to have a connection with the park.

**Sean:** There's belief that Christianity has done nothing for the conservation of nature. This view suggests Christians believe they are above nature, as if they control it rather than nurture it. Wendell Berry, a famous environmental activist

mentioned earlier by Luis and Julia, believes this ignorance is absurd. He states, "If we read the Bible, we will discover that we humans do not own the world or any part of it. The earth is the lord's in the fullness thereof." Personally I'm a Christian and I do agree with Wendell Berry. I do not own nature or any part of it. It's more equitable and connectable than that. But how do I as a Christian connect with nature? I do believe there is god behind everything, but I'd rather look at it with a more simplistic view. I can see divinity behind nature whenever I feel at peace with my surroundings as if everything in that moment was in harmony. Then it's easier to see something greater in the background. For instance, a simple hike to clear my mind can evoke a feeling of peace and make me feel spiritually connected.

**Jacob:** Following up with the idea of spirituality in nature, we went around asking people where they have a connection to nature.

**Ian:** Coming from LA, it's like very hard like to feel connected to nature, like, you don't see the stars out at night. There's this one time, I went to Yosemite as a kid, it was probably in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade or something like that, and it made me realize the contrast between the city and like, going out there, like it made me realize I have to go out there more often, that's where I find my connection to nature.

**Martin:** Well I grew up in the hills of Kingston, Jamaica, and I'd usually run each day, run up into the hills, for my exercise, and its really beautiful, like the trees, like the sound of birds and whatnot. Really makes me feel, made me feel calm and connected like I was connected with it.

**Dan:** The river, when I row crew, the reflection of the natural light on the water really helps remind me of any philosophical questions on spirituality I have.

**Connor:** This summer I went to the Grand Canyon and standing on the edge, just looking out, how vast it was, it made you feel like there was something behind it.

**Jacob:** We just heard from Ian Vero-Cruz, Martin Gentiles, Dan Crowley, and Connor Staggerwald.

**Sean:** Most humans can find this connection to nature, but it goes deeper than just the individual connection, it's how everything is connected, like an interconnected web. This web, or ordering, sometimes referred to as natural order, is more complex and nonlinear than it seems.

**Jacob:** Addressing this subject of natural order, Chaplain Hendrickson offered her point of view of this inter-connected web and where humans fit in it.

**Chaplain Hendrickson:** Well I mean, I definitely believe that humans have a role as stewards of creation, but I don't think that it can be as hierarchical in the sense that like, humans are the highest created order and I think that it is more inter-connected than that because that hierarchy doesn't really work because obviously

when we thought we were in charge of creation, we've screwed it up, so I think we obviously need to think of that and we need to tip that on its side in some way and imagine its not just what can we get from the world, what can we get from animals and nature but, what is our role to play?

**Jacob:** Again Chaplain Hendrickson raises an interesting point. What is our role? This question has been asked since the beginning of humanity and different people have come up with a variety of answers. Religious doctrines were written around this question and because of it religions answer it differently. As it turns out, there are some striking similarities between the main global religions as well as between the less prominent religions of the world.

**Sean:** Despite their perceived differences, Islam Christianity and Judaism share very similar belief regarding nature. Their understanding of nature is that it is a gift of God. Because it is a gift, it is the humans' role to protect it. However, this role of protector comes with it some level of superiority. You protect that which is inferior to you. It is even written in the first book of the Old Testament, "God blessed them and said to them 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

**Jacob:** Some less prominent religions such as the African Traditional Religions and varying Native American religions held beliefs far from those of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Instead of ranking humans above their environment, these religions simply thought of humans as an active part of nature. They were no greater than it but no lesser at the same time. Nature acted as a teacher, provided them with sustenance, and gave them their spirituality. All of this along with the equality they afforded nature allowed the Native Americans and the Africans a very intimate connection with nature- one they cherished.

**Sean:** While characteristic of these religions, this appreciation of nature is universal. As expressed by us and those we interviewed, anyone can have a spiritual connection to their environment. We encourage you listeners to go and seek your own connection to nature. Who knows, perhaps you might find some divinity behind it. Thanks for tuning in on Sean and Jacob's podcast, now were sending it back to John.