

The Soul of Brazil and Her Future:
Meditations in the Heart of the Rainforest

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Prologue

In August of this year (2009), during my fourth visit to Brazil, my friend Walter Behr invited me to spend a few days with him and his family in the Atlantic Rainforest in the Bocaina region.

Walter is a dedicated environmentalist, the co-author of acclaimed National Parks of Latin America, and Director of the Itatiaia National Park, where he lives with his wife Luciana and their daughter Helena. We were joined by two of our friends, Alan Dubner and Rudolf Peter Schwark, both learned environmentalists and lovers of nature.

After an introductory tour of the Itatiaia National Park, we drove, through the colonial town of Bananal, to the “Sertão da Bocaina”, close to the Bocaina National Park, where Walter keeps his family cottage or the “refuge.”

What follows are some of my personal ruminations that have arisen from my initiatory and novice three days experience of the Rainforest and from the conversations I had with my learned Brazilian environmentalist friends. As I deepen my experience with the rainforests as well as with Brazil and Brazilian people in the coming years, my views will also deepen and will be continually modified and expanded.

The Soul of Nature

The Atlantic Rainforest contains a tremendously rich biodiversity. There are many places in the Rainforest with more than 200 different tree species existing in a single hectare (10,000 m² or 2.47 acres). In the South of Bahia, there is a place where 454 tree species live in one hectare (a world record). There are more than 1367 species of mammals, reptiles and frogs, and more than 1,600,000 insect species are estimated to exist.

Trekking around the Rainforest, my pulse resonating with the pulsation of nature, I felt that not only the trees, plants, flowers, birds, and animals but the water, ground, rock, wind, and sky are also alive. The Rainforest taught me that nature is the plenteous bounty of creation, celebrating its boundless creativity and limitless creation.

The soul of nature is this celebratory abundance of creativity and diversity, expressed through the innumerable variety of terrestrial creatures ornamenting the beauty of the earth, and the infinite number of celestial creations adorning the splendor of the universe.

To know the soul of nature is to tap-in to the illimitable source of creativity and to tune-in to the perennial celebration of plenitude. To know the soul of nature is to overcome and transcend any notion of scarcity. Yet, the notion of scarcity is a fundamental assumption that imprisons the mind and controls the action of humanity.

In reality, nature as a whole is abundant and knows no scarcity. Humanity, because of its highly evolved adaptive capability, explored and lived in every conceivable environment and location, overcoming any regional or seasonal scarcity with its creativity and ingenuity. Even if the outer natural resources may be locally limited or scarce, the inner human resourcefulness is non-locally unlimited and plenteous. The abundance of nature thus becomes transformed to the amplexity of the human resourcefulness—i.e., intelligence, creativity, imagination, and ingenuity.

Ralph Waldo Emerson states in his essay Nature:

“To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least, they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food (my emphasis).”

The soul of nature permeates the whole of nature of which humanity is an integral part. Thus, the soul of nature and the soul of humanity are profoundly connected. By tuning-in to the soul of nature, the soul of humanity becomes awakened. By tuning-in to the soul of humanity, we become awakened to the soul of nature. Then, our “inward and outward senses [will be] truly adjusted to each other.” We will be “lovers of nature”—again.

The love of nature and the love of humanity are two manifest expressions of one same love. By being lovers of nature we become lovers of humanity; by being lovers of humanity, we become lovers of nature. The soul of humanity will be reunited with the soul of nature, healed from its estrangement.

Nature, Humanity, and Ecology

The rainforests occupy a central place in the global debate on ecology. For example, whereas once the primeval Atlantic Rainforest covered 1,300,000 km²—some 15% of Brazil, today only 95,000 km² is left—only 7.3% of the original area. What are the nature and the magnitude of the long-term impact of such deforestation on the ecology of the earth? This is a very important question.

Because of its essentially planetary nature, the environmental issue presents humanity with a great opportunity for global human unity in our common quest for the sustainable earth. At the heart of the science of ecology is humanity’s relationship to the earth and nature as a whole. The most important environmental issue, in my view, is not the (anthropogenic) global warming or

climate change but how we can transform ourselves to be lovers of nature “whose inward and outward senses are truly adjusted to each other” so that we will have the requisite wisdom as well as the scientific and technological knowledge to develop truly sound ecological solutions.

The earth’s climate being a complex system, the science of complexity teaches us that we cannot reduce the cause of the earth’s temperature fluctuations to a single factor such as the increase or decrease of CO₂ emission. The cause is reticular, with multitudinous contributing factors. According to Dr. Robert Carter, Professor at the Marine Geophysical Laboratory, James Cook University, Australia, an authentic scientific study of planetary climate change requires an interdisciplinary research of at least 22 scientific disciplines.

This means that the search for a sustainable planet not only presents an opportunity for global unity but also can foster interdisciplinary, world-wide collaborations of great many scientists from diverse academic disciplines. Yet, all of this search and research will be conducted in vain if humanity at large fails to be lovers of nature and the humans—our self and fellow humans.

What is required of us is to attune to the soul of nature and to regain our own soul, our own wholeness, which we have lost through the increasing secularization of our modern and post-modern western culture. The issue is as much the ecology of the planet as the ecology of the mind—as much the issue of physio-biosphere as that of the psycho-ideosphere.

As there is a tremendous biodiversity existing in nature, there exist enormously rich cultural diversity, ethnic diversity, philosophic diversity (‘ideodiversity’), and psychological diversity (‘psychodiversity’) in the world. While the wholeness, harmony, or balance of the rainforests is normally enhanced by their biodiversity, the anthropodiversity of race, culture, philosophy, or psychology often causes division and conflict. Why? Upon this question we have a lot to learn from nature.

The Soul of Brazil

Meditating upon the soul of nature made me also think about the soul of a nation, Brazil in particular. As an individual human being has a soul, a nation has a soul. It is in the conscious identification of her soul that a nation defines and develops a distinct soul, a singular identity, and becomes a united people with a shared destiny.

For example, the soul of Japan is (or was) “harmony.” In the seventh century the Prince Shotoku (574-622 AD) declared “harmony (wa)” to be the highest moral, ethical, and political principle in the first Japanese Constitution he established in 604 AD. (The original name of Japan, yamato, meant “great harmony.”) The soul of the United States of America is (or was) “liberty” and all that this concept entails—such as freedom, independence, individuality, responsibility, rights, and property.

The soul of Brazil, I sense, is the spirit of celebration, celebrating her abundant wealth of creativity and diversity. The soul of Brazil is very close to the soul of nature—the celebratory abandon of the plenteous wealth of creativity and diversity. The soul of Brazil mirrors and captures the soul of nature and its wholeness which dynamically and harmoniously embraces an enormously rich diversity.

Brazil is a nation of immense natural and human resources. Brazil represents the evolving unity of unfolding diversity—biodiversity of nature and anthropodiversity of ethnicity, race, culture, history, philosophy, and psychology.

The future of Brazil depends on how and how much she can express and evolve her distinct soul in harnessing her wealth of natural and human resources. Brazil, in her development, must stop imitating the western way which is inconsistent with her soul. She must create a new way, which incorporates the western way but is uniquely Brazilian and therefore in integrity with her soul.

That new Brazilian way, I suggest, is the development of a new ecological consciousness that holistically unites humanity and nature, technology and ecology, and science and spirituality. This new ecological consciousness will be naturally more celebratory than cerebral.

Today humanity lacks the kinship with nature and the soul-to-soul connection with nature. Also humanity lacks the spirit of celebration, suppressed under the weight of over-cerebration. Brazil can powerfully contribute to the world by infusing humanity with her celebratory soul with all its virtues. The international sports events, as the Soccer World Cup 2014 and the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics signal excellent opportunities in this regard as well.

Brazil as the Leader of Ecological Consciousness

Brazil is emerging as one of the leading nations of the 21st century. Today Brazil's original basic scientific research, including mathematics, is really world-class. The level of original research in basic science such as mathematics and theoretical physics is one of the unmistakable indicators of the future potential of a nation. Brazil has already gone beyond the stage of absorbing the results of original scientific research from the western nations; with formidable fecundity she now produces original scientific studies of high quality.

Combining her immense natural and human resources with her advanced scientific resources (knowledge) and resourcefulness (acumen), Brazil is well-positioned to become a leading nation of the world. When the Brazilian people creatively harness all the resources and resourcefulness in the expression of her unique soul and ecological consciousness, Brazil will become a true world leader.

A nation does not become a world leader by virtue of her military or economic might alone. A nation becomes a world leader by virtue of her moral character. A nation becomes a leader of the world by presenting a new kind of consciousness, presenting a new vision for humanity.

When the United States was established in the late 18th century, she presented such a new vision, a new consciousness, of individual and national freedom and independence. Brazil is positioned to accomplish in the 21st century what the United States accomplished—with a unique new vision by evolving a new holistic ecological consciousness and developing a new celebratory ecological society as the creative expression of her national soul.

In ancient Japan, politics (*matsuri-goto*) was inseparable from celebration (*matsuri*). In Brazil I see the possibility of a revival of politics as celebration, leaving behind the politics of conflict which has ravaged the whole world for centuries. Also, I see that Brazil can become a leader in the science of ecology by instituting the kind of international and interdisciplinary scientific research and collaboration which Professor Carter describes. I can see a great future for Brazil and Brazilian people, which future will benefit the rest of the world.

Epilogue: Nature as Free and Beautiful

To those who do not know mathematics it is difficult to get across a real feeling as to the beauty, the deepest beauty of nature. . . . If you want to learn about nature, to appreciate nature, it is necessary to understand the language in which she speaks.

—Richard Feynman, *The Character of Physical Law*

After the unforgettable introduction to the Rainforest, in São Paulo I delivered the third session of my year-long spiritual-intellectual developmental course, “Authentic Thinking for Creative Evolution.” Walter, Rudolf, and Alan are also among the 16 participants taking the course. The theme of the third session was “freedom.” I asked the class: “Is nature free?” Walter answered: “Nature is free if I am free.”

Yes, nature is free if we are free. As nature includes us, so we include and hold nature within our very consciousness. There is nothing in our experience that is outside of our consciousness. Therefore, when our consciousness is free, when we are free, everything that we hold, behold, and uphold within us expresses living freedom.

As the above quote by the physicist Richard Feynman implies, our appreciation of nature and its beauty increases when we understand the language of nature (mathematics) which is utterly invisible to our senses. To commune with nature does not mean to return to a primitive form of living. On the contrary, it means to continually deepen our appreciation of the soulful beauty of nature, which requires and leads to the evolution of our consciousness and the development of our knowledge of the hidden harmony of nature.

“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” because without the eye, the inner vision, that can behold beauty, there would be no experience of beauty. Therefore, the more we open our inner vision for beauty, the more beauty we can behold in our eye. As we evolve in our consciousness, and as we develop our vision for beauty, the more beauty of nature we can behold in and with our spiritual eye.

Freedom is a measure, as well as a result, of the evolution of consciousness, and thus the more evolved we are, the more freedom we can experience. Therefore, the spiritual eye that beholds greater or subtler beauty is also freer. As we evolve in our consciousness, we will behold more beauty and experience more freedom.

With the vision that beholds ever greater beauty and with the consciousness that experiences ever greater freedom, we will join and participate increasingly more in the celebration of nature in a manner uniquely human—that is, through being the co-creators of the evolving earth that is beautiful and free.