

OH MOTHER EARTH

by *Kofi Appiah-Kubi*

Oh Mother Earth,
We are fully dependent on you.
It is you who received us
With your open arms at birth
When we were yet naked.

You supply our daily wants
With your rich resources.
Indeed you nurture us
Throughout our earthly life.

And when the wicked death
Finally snatches us away,
You will still be there
To open up your womb
And receive us all back.

Yet see what we have done
To your loving-kindness in return.
We have in many ways
Raped, polluted, exploited
And wasted your rich gifts.

We have indeed treated you
With greed and disrespect.
We have monopolized all your gifts
At the expense of millions
Of our brothers and sisters.

We have grasped
The mystery of the Atom Bomb
And ignored the Sermon on the
Mount
And the Golden Rule.

We have indeed become
Nuclear Giants

And Ethical Infants.
We reach out to the moon
While ignoring our Earthly duties.

We have constantly broken
Our covenant with you
To live with the ethics
Of learning to live with Nature
Rather than conquering Nature.

Thus our rivers smell,
Our environments stink,
Our fish and animals die.
We are plagued with diseases;
The whole creation groans.

Mountains erupt
And swallow our homes and farms
Like a roaring lion!
We are drowned
By flooding rivers and oceans.

Your judgments elude our scientific
knowledge.
We stand mouth-opened
And repeatedly ask:
How long, How long,
How long, Oh Mother Earth?

We least realize
That the use of your gifts
Reflects our spiritual
And social well-being,
Including our economic prosperity.

Our spiritual health
Is closely linked

Kofi Appiah-Kubi is a research associate at the Olive Garvey Center for the Improvement of Human Functioning, 428 North Oliver Street, Wichita, Kansas 67208.

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To your health, Mother Earth,
And to that of the community too,
When we use your gifts justly.

Unjust use of these gifts
Brings about doom
Which is often accompanied
By spiritual and social decay.

How do we expect
To do violence to ourselves

And to you, Oh Mother Earth,
Without precipitating
Social, spiritual, and economic chaos?

Our constant plea therefore is:
Mother Earth
Forgive, Forgive, Forgive.
For the legs of the hen
Do not kill the chicks.
Shalom, Shalom, Shalom.

The above prayer sums up the philosophy of the Akan people of southern Ghana regarding our relation to nature, hopefully in a way that Jews and Christians will appreciate.

In Akan tradition there exists a relationship between the individual and nature which is expressed in terms of kinship, identity, and mutual respect. As human beings, Akans consider themselves part of creation and intimately bound to nature. The Mother Earth received us when we were born, she sustains us throughout life, and she will receive us back into her womb when we are dead and buried.

The individual is bound with nature so much so that humanity's view of time is based on nature; there is a cyclicism in the rhythms of nature of which humanity is not only a part but the center. The life cycle of the individual is patterned to that of nature. The individual is born, grows, marries, bears children, becomes old, and dies. He returns to the spirit world of the ancestors, but is then reborn or reincarnated to begin another cycle in the world of the living. In like manner the trees blossom and flower; the fruits appear, ripen, and dry; and sometimes they fall on the ground and germinate again to produce trees, which will in turn produce more seeds.

Although nature is for humanity's benefit and use, we do not exploit it as a thing without life, for it is nature which gives full meaning to individual life. Custom teaches that the way God's gift of land is utilized reflects the spiritual and social fabric of society. Proper land use, therefore, is evidence of faithfulness to God and Mother Earth, and is reflected in the health of the soil and nature, and the economic health or prosperity of the society. Unjust land use, on the other hand, spells social, economic, and spiritual disaster, crop failure and epidemics. Illness is often attributed to the unfaithfulness of the people. The simple logic here is that we cannot expect to do harm and violence to nature and Mother Earth, who are the bearers of our life and existence, without precipitating crises in our economic, social, spiritual, animal, plant, and human life. Just as the Akan is taught to hold himself in esteem, so he must regard nature.

Nature is a living thing; a river is not just a river; it is the repository of the divine spirit. Therefore, we must learn to live with the ethics of learning to live with nature rather than the ethics of conquering nature.