

Healing our Planet and Society - History, Theories, Challenges, and Prospects

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The notion that nature is important to healing goes back at least to when temples for Asclepius, Greek god of healing, were built high on hilltops overlooking the sea.

Aristotle believed walks in the open air clarified the mind. Darwin and Einstein walked in the gardens and grooves to help them think.

We live in a world of duality but opposites.

“To develop a complete mind: study the art of science; Study the science of art... realize that everything is connected to everything else.” -Leonardo DaVinci. This speaks of taking two opposites and entangling them together in order to create a complete vision of the whole. (Davchevski, 2014)

“Nature is the source of all true knowledge.” -Leonardo DaVinci (BrainyQuote).

The wisdom of ancient cultures is now being acknowledged and proved through scientific research, reinforcing the idea that connections with the natural world are fundamental to human happiness, health, well-being, spirit and our very survival.

In A Sand County Almanac, Aldo Leopold set forth his most enduring idea, the “land ethic,” a moral responsibility of humans to the natural world. At its core, the idea of a land ethic is simply caring: about people, about land, and about strengthening the relationships between them.

E.O Wilson’s biophilia hypothesis suggests that humans possess an innate tendency and genetic disposition to seek connections with nature. The pervasiveness of spiritual reverence for animals and nature in cultures worldwide is evidence of biophilia.

Environmental psychologist Dr. Roger Ulrich was the first to use medical research to demonstrate that gazing at a garden can speed healing from surgery, infections, and other ailments.

The industrialization and urbanization of our civilization since the 1950s has resulted in a disconnect of our lives and way of living from the land and nature, a root cause of rapid deterioration of both natural systems and human health. At the global scale, the complex and seemingly insurmountable environmental, social, economic and political dimensions surrounding these trends are daunting.

What are our prospects in our cataclysmic age of mass extinctions, colony collapses, and climate instability, exacerbated by short-sighted politics and policies hellbent on destroying our precious and precarious landscapes and wilderness that are inextricably intertwined with our own health and well-being? At a moment when it all seems so hopeless, we must recommit and reimagine how we understand, perceive and reconnect with nature. The inspiring history and

theories need to be translated into practical applications, putting forward methodologies and models towards implementation. Landscape architects, educated in integrating sciences with art and aesthetics are well positioned to engender a culture of land stewardship.

What can we do, collectively and individually, to turn back the clock on losing biodiversity and associated wildlife at alarming rates? Zooming in to smaller and more manageable scales, we can make a discernable and measurable difference to the struggling natural world in our race to save ourselves.

The presentation will include examples of modest steps we can take, in academia and practice, towards the larger goal of respecting and reconnecting with nature that is fundamental to our happiness, health, well-being, spirit and our very survival, even engendering prosocial behaviors and a stronger sense of community.

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Author Biography

Baldev Lamba, RLA, ASLA is an associate professor in the Landscape Architecture Program at Temple University, Philadelphia where he teaches capstone, public lands studio, professional practice, and landscape engineering. His research explores the intersection of ecology and aesthetics as a motivator for a comprehensive approach of serving mankind and

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nature. He is the co-author of the award-winning book, *Green Green, A Community Gardening Story for children*, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Lamba has more than three decades of experience working as an architect and landscape architect in India, the Middle East and the United States. His award-winning projects include the First Ladies Water Garden on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.; the Campus Design Competition in India; Hansell Park in Buckingham, PA; and the Philadelphia Horticultural Society's Pop-Up Garden in Philadelphia, PA. Lamba's notable accomplishments also include the Excellence in Research and Creative Work Award from the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture and his acclaimed series of award winning Pop Up Parks in Philadelphia and Doylestown.