

**UNDERSTANDING OUR PLACE IN THE COMPLEX WEB OF LIFE AND  
SEEKING TO STAY IN BALANCE WITH IT, IS A KEY TO HAPPINESS.**



Just like any other **ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM** in the universe, our state of being feeds, and feeds off, the other systems around us. Nirmala Nair explores this **PARADIGM** known as 'the ecology of wellbeing'. **WORDS** NIRMALA NAIR

# the ecology of wellbeing



## WE LIVE

disconnected from the web of life in our ever-accelerating pursuit of individual happiness

and personal gratification. A pursuit that is often in conflict with the interests of the natural environment and the community at large, and at odds with any chances of wellbeing.

This relentless pursuit of happiness is driven by the myth that the more we have the happier we will be. Bombarded by endless commercials telling us how to make life better or happier, it's hard to avoid what is known as 'mall syndrome' – that of rushing to the shops to buy more and more things we don't need. But many are beginning to realise that this materialistic life-style is not making people happy. It's too

narrowly focused, leaving little time or energy to lead balanced lives in harmony with nature and society. The growth of movements, such as Gaia, which aim to reconnect people with nature and build communities that tread lightly on the land, indicates that there is an overwhelming desire to explore a more balanced state of being – a state of wellbeing that reflects the wellness of the group as well as individual happiness.

A by-product of globalisation is that cultures have been conditioned to think the same way, want the same things and accept the same solutions. Mass communication has pruned, shaped, and conditioned cultures to accept monocultures for the mind and banal formulas for happiness. As with milk, this homogenisation of almost everything has processed the goodness out of life and left people

feeling dissatisfied. Whether or not they can articulate it, they feel at odds with the natural order of life where diversity is an essential component. This manifests itself in emotions of alienation and disconnection, and left untended, spirals downwards into ever descending levels of energy. The deeper the disconnect, the more empty life becomes, creating ever increasing feelings of sadness and frustration. The very essence of life is violated, and violent outbursts of all kinds regularly ensue.

Having lived for generations in an increasingly disconnected and dispirited manner, we cannot change this negative pattern overnight. But we can actively become aware of it. We can envision a life where we desire to live in greater wholeness and connectedness with nature and each other. The good news is that

we do not have to pay or buy market shares for this to happen. It simply takes having clear intentions of how we want to live, actively and regularly fuelling this intent, and living in an increasingly connected way with other life-forms and each other – a lifestyle that is the very antithesis of materialism.

Rupert Sheldrake, a contemporary 'field theory' scientist studying the interrelationships and 'resonance fields' of living organisms, notes that like any other organism, social groups are organized by fields, as in schools of fish and flocks of birds. Human societies, he says, have memories that are transmit-



ted through the culture of the group, and are most explicitly communicated through the ritual re-enactment of a founding story or myth, as in the Jewish Passover celebration, the Christian Holy Communion and the American thanksgiving dinner, wherein the past becomes present through a resonance with those who have performed the same rituals before. ([www.sheldrake.com](http://www.sheldrake.com))

Like any smaller social group, our homogenised global culture has created a force field of its own – a resonance passed on through generations of pursuing happiness in a disconnected fashion. And, like any other energy field, given a sufficient ‘pull-factor’, this field can be harnessed and redirected to emit a new and different resonance.

Becoming aware of the disconnection between production and consumption is an important step in creating a new resonance of wellbeing. Most consumers, although striving for happiness, do not pause to reflect on where their purchases come from or what they went through to land on the shop floor. Helping people to think about the disconnect between the origins of the product and their own domestic lives, and to help them make simple

“Wellbeing is the web of life in balance – vibrant, healthy and simply magical in beauty.”

**Nirmala Nair**

“Happiness is increasingly understood as the individual pursuit of personal gratification – often in conflict with the larger community – whereas wellbeing is more inclusive, reflecting the wellness of a group or a community.”

**Dr Linn, a Chinese master living in SA for the past 14 years.**

choices to buy more ‘connected’ local goods, is one way in which to start rebuilding communities and make urban living more wholesome.

A groundswell of many people deciding to move out of the current ecology of a not-so-happy lifestyle could set in motion the necessary energy for a new way of life that reflects individual happiness embedded in the wellbeing of the community. Choice is the inevitable factor enabling or militating against this happening. But the potential benefits are enormous, such as improvement in communication among neighbours; increase in ability to make a meaningful contribution to society; elevated feelings of self worth; a better functioning community; and a decrease in crime.

Before machines and industrialisation began bombarding our senses, the First People treaded lightly on the land, with reverence and simplicity and in harmony with nature. We can learn from them and how a few remaining indigenous societies have managed not to succumb to the power of money and machines: the San in Southern Africa, the Dogon in Mali, and the Kogi Indians of the Santa Marta region of Andean Colombia, among a few others scattered across the planet. We need to embrace their connection with the land and pay attention to the choices they have made in keeping to their purpose of co-evolution.

Spirals hold a clue for we modern people floundering in the deep recesses of linear thought patterns, unable to make sense of happiness. Nature is awash with them – an unfolding fern, a nautilus shell, a tornado, a vortex, a whirlpool – and many of the rituals and traditions of First People involve spirals in some way. Now scientists are discovering that there is more to the pumping of our hearts or the flexing of our

muscles than previously met the eye. The movement is brought about through the life-force of the upward spiralling of the cells they comprise.

By observing how spirals work, we can understand both our own energy and that of Nature as a whole. They move either outwards and upward, or inwards and downward. Balance requires a multitude of diverse forces to move in both directions in an infinite continuum of creation and destruction, birth and death, order and entropy. Spiral dances of life unravel simple secrets to living lightly, living in resonance, living in connectedness and constantly paying attention to imbalances so as to adapt to systemic changes and be able to bring back balance through our simple actions.

Life on Earth is like a labyrinth, or hologram, a system intimately interconnected and ever unfolding in new spirals of energy. Life also gets stuck in the mayhem of the maze. The trick is to become aware when we are stuck and seeking happiness at the expense of others, and to appreciate that life operates as a whole. Our task is to develop a wholesome rapport with nature, with nature as an extension of our life and we a part of nature. If we operate our lives thus, we will experience an indwelling of containment leading to contentment. It is this sense of contentment that in turn spirals outward into a sense of wellbeing to be enjoyed by the community, and eventually manifests as precious moments of happiness. ▮

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**MONICA GRAAFF** SUMMARIZED THE THOUGHTS OF THE AUTHOR.