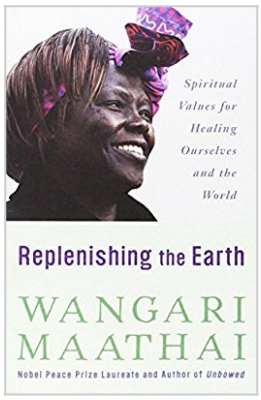

Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World

By Wangari Maathai

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An impassioned call to heal the wounds of our planet and ourselves through the tenets of our spiritual traditions, from a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize

It is so easy, in our modern world, to feel disconnected from the physical earth. Despite dire warnings and escalating concern over the state of our planet, many people feel out of touch with the natural world. Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai has spent decades working with the Green Belt Movement to help women in rural Kenya plant—and sustain—millions of trees. With their hands in the dirt, these women often find themselves empowered and “at home” in a way they never did before. Maathai wants to impart that feeling to everyone, and believes that the key lies in traditional spiritual values: love for the environment, self-betterment, gratitude and respect, and a commitment to service. While educated in the Christian tradition, Maathai draws inspiration from many faiths, celebrating the Jewish mandate *tikkun olam* (“repair the world”) and renewing the Japanese term *mottainai* (“don’t waste”). Through rededication to these values, she believes, we might finally bring about healing for ourselves and the earth.

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Editorial Review

From Booklist
Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maathai, founder of the green-belt movement in Kenya, brings a firm grasp of the science of environmental destruction and climate change, and of the dire physical and political consequences for humankind, to this bracing and breathtaking investigation of the spiritual dimension of this growing crisis. Lucid and inspiring, as in Unbowed (2006), Maathai explicates our bred-in-the-bone reliance on the great web of life; the ancient, now largely lost perception of nature as divine, yet not limitless or invulnerable; and the bedrock truth that when the environment is degraded, so, too, are we. Maathai looks to her Kikuyu upbringing as an example of a sustainable way of living, and draws on her Catholic education in fresh and striking readings of the Bible. She also studies the living gospel of the planet, tallying the far-reaching harm done by our “craving for more.” As Maathai presents a clarion set of “core values” based on “gratitude and respect for the Earth’s resources” and a commitment to conservation, she gracefully entwines environmentalism and justice, the practical and the sacred. --Donna Seaman

About the Author
WANGARI MAATHAI is the founder of the Green Belt Movement, which has planted over 45 million trees across Kenya since 1977. In 2002, she was elected to Kenya’s Parliament, and in 2003, she was appointed Deputy Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources, posts she held until 2007. Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. In 2009, she was appointed a United Nations Messenger of Peace by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

CHAPTER ONE

Beginnings

Within a few years of its inception in 1977, the Green Belt Movement (GBM) expanded from a small, tree-planting project at the National Council of Women of Kenya to a full-time engagement. Simultaneously, a small number of community groups grew to a network of thousands of such groups. As this occurred, it became clear that both the groups and the individuals were not upholding standards of behavior that they expected of others, especially those in government, which was already much criticized. These standards included honesty, hard work, and a commitment to transparency and accountability. It gradually became clear that the Green Belt Movement's work with communities to repair the degraded environment could not be done effectively without participants embracing a set of core spiritual values.

Therefore, it became necessary to raise awareness of issues of governance and the management of resources. Consequently, these values- love for the environment, gratitude and respect for the earth's resources, self-empowerment and self-betterment, and the spirit of service and volunteerism-emerged as a central feature of what we came to call "civic and environmental education." These comprised a set of seminars that we held for those wanting to participate in the work of the movement so they could know the procedures and values that should guide them. The seminars were designed to deepen individuals' understanding of the root causes of ecological destruction and the role political management of resources can play in the breakdown of the environment. Participants were encouraged to delve into why their environment was degraded, and the role that they and other members of their communities and society at large play in this.

At each seminar, each group enumerates its problems. It is then challenged to explore where those problems came from and how to develop a set of actions it can take to solve them both immediately and in the long term-at individual, household, and community levels, and on a small or larger scale. While many people may see a reason to plant trees to meet their own basic needs, the idea of creating a clean and healthy environment that may benefit everyone rather than only individuals is new. During the seminars, women and men who have been passive about environmental issues around them, become self- empowered and energized to take action. They embrace the idea of being willing to work for something larger than themselves. When they return to their homes, they become eager to report how many tree seedlings they have nurtured in tree nurseries, how many trees they've planted, and how many people they've talked to in their local assemblies, including churches, about their newfound interest. For many GBM members, their satisfaction in their own efforts means that even the small financial compensation they receive for each tree seedling that survives becomes the token it is intended to be, rather than a formal payment for the work done. Their circle of concern expands beyond themselves and encompasses the common good.

Those who embrace the values at the heart of the seminars-love for the environment, gratitude and respect for the earth's resources, self- empowerment and self-betterment, the spirit of service and volunteerism-remain involved in tending tree nurseries, transplanting seedlings, and restoring landscapes and indigenous forests. They also engage in other GBM activities such as collecting rainwater, terracing their fields to stem soil erosion, and planting food crops in their gardens to improve food security for their households. They also are involved in building and maintaining low-tech sand dams to ensure water supplies in the dry season. And, moreover, they stand up and advocate for their rights to a clean and healthy environment.

In the beginning of the work with the Green Belt Movement, it surprised me that many individuals and groups did not practice these spiritual values as part of their faith. By then, almost everybody was a Christian and these values are deeply entrenched in Christian teachings. I'd had them transmitted to me first by parents, then by teachers, friends, members of my community, and associates. My mother was always working hard, and I helped her in ways that now I can hardly believe. Even though I was very young, I cultivated food crops in the field, gathered firewood, fetched water from a nearby stream, went to the market, and ran many errands for her. I took care of my young siblings, and on one memorable occasion carried home a huge harvest of red kidney beans that was too heavy even for our family's donkey. My father, too, worked hard as a mechanic on a British settler's farm and supported a large family.

As I was growing up, I also learned that my grandparents' generation had maintained a proud heritage that had a strong commitment to justice, sense of right and wrong, and a belief in honesty. They didn't have to learn these values; they were simply passed along as an inheritance, very early in life. When children are exposed to values, and they see them embraced by those around them in their actions, the values become part of their personalities and hard to unlearn.

At school, I was encouraged to be honest, too, and I was lucky to possess a mental attitude that was not constrained by judgment or religious dogmas. Catholic nuns-first the Consolata sisters from Italy, then the Irish Loreto nuns, and finally the Benedictine sisters of Mount St. Scholastica College in the United States-taught me from the age of twelve. They encouraged my curiosity, an embrace of the scientific method, and the use of critical thinking. Such exposure made it easy for me to listen and assess without prejudgments, and this has assisted me greatly in my life journey.

Today, people often ask me how I determined all those decades ago that the environment was so important. To a certain extent it was not my discovery. I was led by events that were happening around me at the time. For example, in 1972, the United Nations held its first global conference on the environment in Stockholm, Sweden. In 1973, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) was established in Nairobi, with Maurice Strong

as its first executive director. I was invited to join a group that established the Environmental Liaison Center International, a nongovernmental (nonprofit) environmental organization founded to work closely with UNEP and monitor its activities.

As I gained knowledge from others who knew much more than I did then, I became interested. This enabled me to respond when, in the lead-up to the first UN women's conference in Mexico City in 1975, I listened to rural women in Kenya listing their problems. I could see that all the challenges they had were rooted in a degraded rural environment. Planting trees came to me as a concrete, doable response.

I came to identify trees as the answer to the environmental problems the Kenyan women faced, partly because I grew up in the countryside surrounded by trees and green vegetation. But I was also fortunate at the time to be involved with organizations that were becoming aware of this issue. I can also point to the Source as the wellspring for all of the ideas that came.

Sometimes the inspiration to act arrives as a spark; sometimes it takes the form of a process. Whether one is drawn into an action through a sudden rush of inspiration, or through the slow dawning of a realization that something needs to change, I would argue that it all comes from the Source. But it's nonetheless essential to cultivate an attitude that allows you to take advantage of that awakening. This entails keeping your mind, eyes, and ears open, so that when an idea arrives you'll be ready for it. To be able to capitalize on our inspiration it is also important to be predisposed to welcome new sets of knowledge and retain an open mind. We need to appreciate as much as possible that a further horizon always lies beyond the one we see in front of us; there are always opportunities to learn and to examine one's own perception in light of recent information or revelations.

Ideas, it would seem, are like fruits hanging from trees: when they're ripe, you have to be ready to catch them before they fall. Like the five wise virgins of Jesus' parable (see Matt. 25:1-13), we must seize the opportunities presented to us, by making sure that we're fully prepared with the appropriate mental, physical, and spiritual capacity to take on the challenge. The environment must be ripe.

Sometimes such an awakening comes in the process of work or engagement in a cause or a joint effort. You realize how important something is- as I did with the environment-and you begin moving from working by yourself to communicating its importance to others. Before long, almost before you realize it, you have many people working with you.

When I told the rural women about the benefits of trees-that they'd help stem soil erosion and improve the health of the soil, making it possible to grow healthy foods; that they'd provide firewood, fodder for livestock, and shade; that they'd help regulate rainfall and provide a habitat for small animals and birds-I discovered that I'd opened a Pandora's box. In trying to solve one environmental problem, I found there were many other problems that the women and their communities needed to solve.

When I began the civic and environmental seminars, I didn't imagine that the core values at the center of the Green Belt Movement's work would be in such short supply! Without the value of volunteerism, the organization's work would not be sustainable, because we have never been flush with funds. It's impossible to compensate people for every bit of work they do; a price tag cannot and should not be placed on everything we do for the environment. And that is the way it was traditionally, before the cash economy arrived in Kenya: individuals had a profound sense that they must give back to their communities by providing voluntary service for the common good. The farther people moved away from traditional life and became "modern," the less willing they were to serve. Everything had to be paid for, and those who couldn't pay were pushed out.

This modern deficit in values existed in every aspect of society: within the government, from which we received not only indifference but often outright hostility; among the public, who couldn't believe that anybody, including members of the Green Belt Movement, would be working so hard solely for the common good. Each assumed that we must have an ulterior motive, such as money, or power, or political advantage-not least because there seemed to be no good reason why we would not be practicing the vices that brought money, power, or political advantage and patronage. No one seemed to realize that such vices-which included selfishness, greed, and the exploitation of the available resources-would cause harm that would eventually affect everyone. This deep disconnection from others and the environment would come back to haunt the same society.

When the women came to the GBM and complained that they didn't have enough firewood to cook healthy food for their children, naysayers couldn't argue that trees were not a practical response. What they wondered was why I made it my business to work with them and find a solution. When I explained how important it was not to deforest Kenya's main water catchment areas and not to plant the wrong type of tree along the riverbanks, in forests, or in wetlands, it was self- evident that a severe problem-water and soil erosion-was being addressed. What detractors questioned was why I should be concerned about it.

"Don't you have anything better to do with your education?" some people asked. After all, as I was part of a small, educated elite within Kenyan society, someone who'd been a professor at the University of Nairobi, it was expected that I should be in the classroom dealing with academic matters rather than in the fields persuading rural women to plant trees. But I wasn't alone digging holes! Many other women were planting trees with me and were also expending considerable effort for something more than material compensation and personal gain. They, too, must have been motivated by a set of values and not just responding to their basic needs and individual gratification.

Since its beginning, the Green Belt Movement has moved from the simple act of tree-planting to meet immediate needs to attempting to mitigate the effects of climate change and heal the earth's wounds. When it started undertaking advocacy on matters of governance and rights, challenging those in power who were destroying the environment and putting citizens in danger in the process, some people may have thought it was silly, or foolhardy. Sometimes I wasn't sure myself why I continued. I knew, though, that the work wasn't being done for any ulterior motive, and that the GBM was addressing serious issues. I became even more certain that what we were doing was right, because we were dealing with basic and viable solutions to real and chronic problems. Experiences fed on themselves, and propelled participants and the work to the next level. Serving for the common good might be taxing or even dangerous at times, but the Source and the values are strong forces that kept us moving forward.

In time, individuals from outside of Kenya (principally Europe and the United States) reached out and wanted to support the GBM's work financially. They did this not because they wanted participants to gain personally, but because they wanted to do something good for the environment and the people living in the region. They recognized that we needed to protect our environment, but poverty was widespread. When I found myself in trouble with the Kenyan government, a number of people put their lives on the line to help me. Why did they bother, even though they were not next of kin, members of the same ethnic group, or my countrymen? It was because, like many others in the world, they were not driven by selfishness, the need to control others, or the desire to accumulate more. They were motivated by compassion, empathy, and recognition that the environment needs to be protected everywhere and that this is a matter of global concern to all.

Through this combination of questions about motivations, the development of the civic and environmental seminars, and my work in the field with Green Belt Movement groups, I've been encouraged to search more

deeply into the issue of spiritual values. I've sought to understand whether those driven by such values are being stupid or naïve, or both, for wanting to work for the common good and expecting others to do the same. I've been challenged to ask myself why this set of values should be important for society, how these values might make a difference in our lives, and whether those of us who embody them are the fools or the wise ones.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Stover:

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Yes, you can choose the suitable activity with regard to spend your time. Any person spent their own spare time to take a walk, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open or maybe read a book eligible Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with the opinion or you have other opinion?

Margherita Pettit:

The book Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World will bring one to the new experience of reading a new book. The author style to describe the idea is very unique. When you try to find new book to see, this book very suited to you. The book Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World is much recommended to you to study. You can also get the e-book in the official web site, so you can more easily to read the book.

Thanh Johnson:

Spent a free a chance to be fun activity to accomplish! A lot of people spent their sparetime with their family, or their particular friends. Usually they doing activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic within the park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your free time/ holiday? Could possibly be reading a book may be option to fill your totally free time/ holiday. The first thing you will ask may be what kinds of book that you should read. If you want to consider look for book, may be the book untitled Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World can be great book to read. May be it could be best activity to you.

Christina Harper:

People live in this new moment of lifestyle always make an effort to and must have the time or they will get wide range of stress from both way of life and work. So , whenever we ask do people have free time, we will say absolutely yes. People is human not a robot. Then we inquire again, what kind of activity are you experiencing when the spare time coming to a person of course your answer can unlimited right. Then do you ever try this one, reading textbooks. It can be your alternative throughout spending your spare time, the book you have read is actually Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the

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