

An  
Introduction  
to

# Earth Recovery Groups



**Aaron Hoopes  
Gregory & Helen Wilson**



## Dedication

*“To all the children*

*To the children who swim beneath*

*The waves of the sea, to those who live in*

*The soils of the Earth, to the children of the flowers*

*In the meadows and the trees in the forest, to*

*All those children who roam over the land*

*And the winged ones who fly with the winds.*

*To the human children too, that all the children may go into the future  
in the full diversity of their regional communities.”*

Thomas Berry

in the dedication of his book *The Great Work*

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## *What is Earth Recovery?*

Earth Recovery is a program for groups or individuals who:

- **See the damage** we are doing to the earth
- **Realize the consequences** for ourselves, society, and the planet
- Want to gather with others to **share feelings** and **knowledge**
- Want to **change the addictive behaviors** we use to numb our feelings
- Are motivated to help **heal both individuals and the planet**
- Seek a sense of **belonging** to the whole earth community. Belonging is primal, fundamental to our sense of happiness and well-being

**Earth Recovery** is a not-for-profit organization, based in Vermont and Florida.

**Earth Recovery Groups** were originally conceived and introduced by Rev. Dr. Gregory Wilson at the *Healing Our World and Ourselves* Conferences and the *Our Children, Climate, Faith* Symposiums, in 2013 and 2014.

Volunteers including Gregory, Aaron Hoopes, and Helen Wilson are creating educational materials that will be available on the website, **[www.EarthRecoveryGroups.org](http://www.EarthRecoveryGroups.org)**.

We will be conducting retreats where you will **learn** more about Earth Recovery, **experience** healing exercises, and get **tools** to start an Earth Recovery Group in your community.

For information, call Gregory Wilson at 772-486-4029 or visit our website at **[www.EarthRecoveryGroups.org](http://www.EarthRecoveryGroups.org)**

## *What are Earth Recovery Groups?*

Earth Recovery Groups create a space where we can connect our emotional life, our thinking self, and the external world, which can break us out of the addictive cycle to reinvigorate the human spirit so that we can reclaim the sense that we are part of the spirituality of this planet. By recovering the feeling of our connection to being a participant of this great and wonderful being we call Earth, we will garner the strength to intervene and turn ourselves toward a path that is life-sustaining.

In the Earth Recovery process, we will recover our vision and our ability to be in the reality of being participants in and on this wonderful planet. We need to begin to see that we are part of the whole that makes up the Earth. Our health as humans is directly related to the health of this planet.

It is time to realize the Earth is a one-time project. There is no second chance. When we understand that the land's primordial powers have been debilitated we can begin to recognize that we must be involved in bringing health back to this planet in some comprehensive manner.

...In this recovery process we need to change deep within our souls so that we once again develop the capacity to have communion with this living being Earth

\* \* \* \* \*

*“Our separation from the earth, from nature, is like when a plant is pulled up by the roots. Separated from the earth, it dies. We have been pulled by our spiritual and psychological roots from the earth.”*

Gregory Wilson

## *What Happens at Earth Recovery Groups Meetings*

An Earth Recovery Group might meet once a week, or once a month. We would begin with a short (1-2 minutes) check-in, with introductions and a sentence or two about why you are there.

Then, we would use one of these sets of questions to structure the discussion:

- 1) What is the need for Earth Recovery? What is happening in the world that you find distressing? What brought you here tonight?
- 2) What are the benefits of Earth Recovery? For you personally, why this group at this time? How can this group be helpful?
- 3) How can we relate to those around us who are in denial about the state of the Earth? How can we share the New Story without antagonizing those we care about?
- 4) Celebrating Earth and Nature. Building new rituals and exploring resources for an earth-centered life.

Before the discussion time, there would be a short meditation time, for breathing and centering. Also either before or after the discussion, a guided meditation, or an exercise of encountering nature would be lead by the group facilitator, based on ideas and exercises in our books and group materials.

## *Why join an Earth Recovery Group?*

*Q: Do I need to join a group? Can't I do this on my own?*

A: When you picked up this booklet, and began reading these questions, you were acting on a desire to do something different. Most of us begin this journey alone, growing up in a world where there are more roads than deer paths, more cars than bicycles, more shopping malls than parks or forests, where the sound of birdsongs is drowned out by the roar of traffic, and the starry skies are obliterated by light pollution. We feel disconnected from nature, and from one another. There are people around you who are aware of the same things, many who feel the same way you do, and are ready to get together and do something about it. In a group, you will learn from others, and draw strength from being together. In an Earth Recovery Group, you will be with people who want to heal the Earth, and reconnect with Her as part of their own healing and growth.

*Q: When we practice Earth Recovery, who benefits?*

A: First, Earth herself, and all who live on/in/around her. As we grow in awareness and compassion, and the way we live becomes life-enhancing rather than life-damaging, the environment will be better for all.

Second, anyone working for environmental health, as activists can draw strength directly from our increasing connectedness with one another, and with Earth and all her beauty.

And finally anyone struggling with the addictions we use to numb the pain of seeing the destruction all around us, addictions that are sweeping the globe as our families and communities are torn apart by an unfeeling economic system that puts profit above the well-being of people and forests, and mountains, and rivers, and oceans, and all human and non-human life. We begin to create healthy alternatives to the addictions.

*Q: How can I get out of the depression and hopelessness I feel when I learn about all the horrible things being done by people with way more power than I have?*

A: Joining with others in an Earth Recovery Group will help in 3 ways: what we **feel, know, and do**:

- 1) Being with others who feel the same way lets you know you are not alone, and you can begin to feel the power of a larger group to make the changes that we need. It will begin to heal your Heart.
- 2) Learning about the things others are already doing helps bring balance to the knowledge we have about the problems; we expand the Knowledge we hold in our Minds.
- 3) Joining with others, we Act and being active is the best medicine for depression. Being part of a group means we always have people to share the tasks, and to provide support, even when we are acting alone. Hannah Morgan was alone in the tree (blocking the route of the KXL pipeline) but she knew and felt the love and support of church members who prayed with her before she climbed up. Whether it's by protesting or praying, letter-writing, or a holding bake sale for legal fees, we can all Do Something for the cause of a healthier planet. Our Bodies and Souls will flourish and heal, along with everything we are connected to.

In Earth Recovery Groups we are joining one another to put language to our inner deep feelings. We are hoping the people who are attending Earth Recovery Groups are in a community so that when they begin to claim their selves and to heal and begin to have a voice, that there is a community that they are already in where that voice can be heard.

*Q: How can I get started? Can I start an Earth Recovery Group?*

A: Absolutely! There are materials available for independent groups. We recommend that the first step for a group facilitator is attending a weekend retreat, *“Emerging, Re-wilding, and Ensoulment,”* where you will have an opportunity for direct experience of Nature, with counselors that provide a framework for discovery where you are now in your own recovery. If you are unable to attend a retreat, contact for a consultation about the process of becoming a facilitator.

*We are between stories...*

*"We are in trouble just because we do not have a good story. We are between stories. The old story, the account of how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned 'the new story'. We are talking only to ourselves. We are not talking to the rivers, we are not listening to the wind and stars. We have broken the great conversation. By breaking that conversation we have shattered the universe. All the disasters that are happening now are a consequence of that spiritual 'autism'."*

Thomas Berry

*"I believe, with Thomas Berry, that the degradation of the Earth cannot be stopped until the great mass of people feel in the core of their beings that, whereas the Earth is ours to revere and cherish, it is sacred, and thus not ours to ruin and destroy. Saving the earth – from ourselves! – is, thus, a project of spiritual transformation."*

Bruce Alexander

*Earth Recovery is a process of waking up to what is happening to the planet.*

Upon waking up, one can have several responses. Often the first response is anxiety. and then a withdrawal from that awareness (denial). Earth Recovery provides a place for people to own the feelings they are having about what's happening to the planet, their families, their streams, their forests, and have a place to be able to articulate, putting words to their emotions, and do that with other people who are of like mind to find support as we move through this process of recovering ourselves first, and then moving to action which addresses the problems.

A disconnection has come about through a centuries-long, gradual process. Because we have been disconnected, dislocated, the normal human response is some form of addiction.

Earth Recovery is for people that are gathering themselves to confront the dislocation and the disconnectedness, reconnecting ourselves to this earth, regaining our sense of belonging, our sense of harmony and our sense of well-being. Earth Recovery provides a framework for changing our way of relating to the natural world, encouraging us to reconnect with the whole and live in a way that heals.

In Earth Recovery Groups we are joining with others to create a New Story. We seek guidance from the wisdom and knowledge of those who lived in this world long ago. We pay attention to our intrinsic common sense of what is right and wrong. We recognize that we are a part of the planet as a whole.

Today many people are beginning to rediscover the joy and happiness that comes from being connected to the natural world. A simple, yet profound change happens within the individual and has the potential to affect the whole world. The change can happen within you. Earth Recovery is like an open door waiting for you to step through.

Together with others who are experiencing the same sense of anxiety, and of needing to do something different for the good of the Earth and their own well-being, you can become aware of the guiding principles that govern existence and choose to live in harmony with them. You will find yourself waking up to the natural world and experiencing the life-force energy that flows through all things, becoming part of something greater than yourself.

This is not some mystical power, nor is it a magic wand to solve all of your problems. It is a way, instead of attending to the world around you and realizing your connection to it.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Blessed be the Earth**

*Blessed be the Earth that forms at last  
The remnants of super novas brilliant show in deep space,  
Over the eons swirling helium, hydrogen,  
giving birth to stars and planets.  
Our home our mother earth pulling herself together, tighter and tighter  
fire and water, rock and sea, land and air, storm and calm,  
plant and animal, tree and human.  
From the soil and water we emerged  
from the air we breath and in the air we walk.  
We are in this Earth  
We are on this Earth  
We are sustained by this Earth  
We are fed by this earth  
We are of this earth  
Blessings upon this living being of which we are a part.*

~ Gregory Wilson

## *Changing Our Story*

Who would have written the story we live in? Nobody. Yet here we are, with over 400 Dead Zones in our oceans; climate disrupted; oil spills, some catastrophic; war; poverty; pollution; anxiety and depression – all normalized and increasing. And the practices that produced these patterns, practices that govern our lives, are normalized.

Many believe the way society is structured will change, or will not do irrevocable harm. But many of us do not believe these patterns will change. Political and economic systems continue policies that for over 400 years have moved us toward normalizing patterns of destruction while promising change. The pattern of "do the same thing expecting a different outcome" is not new to humans. In the world of addiction and addiction recovery, this is called insanity and it never leads to a good end.

How is it that we find ourselves in this downward spiral and still support the policies that brought us here, continuing to support them as we head for the waterfall? Can't we hear the roar of the water as it plunges over the edge? Many of us can. This work of Earth Recovery is an attempt to join together and go toward the shore, and reassess rather than find ourselves pulled in the torrent of rushing water toward the falls, where no amount of effort could change the fact that we are going over.

Earth Recovery is also about preparing aid centers and shelters at the bottom of the falls. The primary questions and responses that we will deal with are what is happening to the individual, families, local communities and the environment in which we live? And how can individuals, families, and local communities cope and recover from the spiritually deadening patterns that normalize anxiety and depression and lead to an anti-democratic way of life ?

## *The New Story*

We need to re-write the myths that guide our lives. We need to live in a New Story. One place to begin is with the work of Thomas Berry, a cultural historian and eco-theologian of the late 20th and early 21st century. His work can reintroduce us to our rightful place, as aware participants with the unfolding nature of the universe.

Berry makes the observation that whatever the human needs to emerge and flourish has been supplied by the unfolding universe, "Whatever it is and was supplied by the surrounding world, whatever inspiration for their imagination, whatever awakening of intelligence, whatever personal fulfillment. This joyful fulfillment found expression in poetry and music and song and dance, a fulfillment that continues to find expression in our children running through the meadows, wading in the creeks, playing with animals, or simply sitting with utmost satisfaction in a backyard puddle experiencing the cooling delight of such an environment on a summers day."

He describes the universe process itself as having a tendency toward greater Differentiation, a deepening Subjectivity, and a more intimate self-bonding (Communion) of its component parts.

- differentiation is the capacity of each species to become distinct from other species, while fostering the diversity of species.
- subjectivity is the sacred depth of each individual, its own inner articulation, its unique spontaneities
- communion is a bonding together and expression of a deeply felt relationality

To create a new story, we begin by changing our understanding of time from human-centered time to cosmological time. It has taken 13.7 billion and 60 years for me to come into existence on this day. Without the “flaring forth of the primordial energies” and the transformations that occurred subsequently, the forming of the first galaxies and then the red giants moving toward the super nova collapse and the next generation of stars forming within themselves the elements that would lead to life on earth, I would not exist.

In a sense I must learn to retell my birth story given all the knowledge I have now about the formation of the universe. If I do not, I cannot truly know myself nor my truest nature. When I know my story within the nature of the unfolding universe, I will be able to understand the three intentions of differentiation, subjectivity and communion manifested in the movement of the universe, and how they can guide the development of human culture and our relation to the earth.

An Earth Recovery Group is one place we can begin telling our stories as parts of the New Story. As we discover and articulate our particular roles in that story, we will find strength to carry on the work of bringing healing to our planet, and our own internal worlds. As we do this, we will, as Peter Burdon writes in his book, *Exploring Wild Law*, move “beyond our small human-centered preoccupations into the sublime wonder of the vision of the whole.”

*“First, I need to work to discover my own addictions, and be in some form of recovery. Then I need to work with others to find a new vision for the future of myself, our family, our community and our culture. That vision must provide space for psychological integration, spiritual nurturing, reclaiming my place as a member of the earth community, a community that is sustainable and enjoyable, and provides a good clean earth for future generations.”*

Chellis Glendinning

## *Earth Recovery Practice*

On the following pages we offer some examples of the exercises that are available in the book, *Earth Recovery Handbook*. You can use them in groups, and in your individual practice.

### *Rebalancing*

Bringing balance to our lives means many things. It means paying attention to our inner worlds (how we are breathing, whether calm or in turmoil, feelings of contentment or anxiety, undercurrents of security or fearfulness) and in our outer worlds (family, neighborhood, society, work-world, nature). When we are in balance, things move smoothly. It is as if we are aligned with the world and everything is as it should be. When we achieve balance we know who we are as an individual, and how we connect with the larger world. This balance gives us a sense of freedom, security, safety, belonging. It is not always easy, however, to remain in balance when it feels like the whole world around us is careening out of control. When undertaking a rebalancing it is important to start with things that will support and guide us as we move further into the process of Earth Recovery.

#### *Rebalancing the Body*

When beginning any life-changing practice it is important to start with something that will both jump-start the process as well as assist with the more difficult aspects of the endeavor. The body is our physical presence in the world. It is the vessel with which we navigate the outside world. It is also the part of us that we have the most personal control over.

#### *Breathwork*

The first, and most important practice of rebalancing the body is the practice of deep breathing, often called breathwork. Breathing is one of the basic aspects of our physical selves. It is something we are doing all day, everyday, in a continuous rhythm throughout our lives.

Breathing is fundamental to human existence. Learning to breathe correctly is the first step in rebalancing ourselves and maintaining the health of the body. Even with just a basic understanding of the circulatory system it makes perfect sense. We take in oxygen from the air we breathe. The oxygen enters our bloodstream and creates the oxygen-rich blood that flows through our veins. The blood liberates the energy in the food we ingest. At the same time it collects the toxins and poisons generated through our everyday living and expels them as CO<sub>2</sub>.

By learning breathing exercises and practicing them whenever we get an opportunity, our body becomes infused with more oxygen and vital energy. It begins to feel better. As we feel better we start to breathe easier and fuller, which in turn brings in even more oxygen and energy.

The simple action of noticing the breath brings our awareness to it and increases its quality. As we become more adept at being conscious of our breathing during our daily lives we create opportunities to notice the magic of the world around us. Breathing in this manner slows us down and roots us in the present moment.

### *Exercise: The Complete Breath*

.....The Complete Breath is a dynamic breathing exercise that is both simple and complex. Regular practice cleans and invigorates the lungs and expands lung capacity, which, in turn, slows down unconscious breathing and makes it smoother and more regular. In addition, The Complete Breath maximizes oxygen intake and causes oxygen-rich blood to flow more readily to the extremities. In the beginning, it is best if The Complete Breath is practiced from a lying-down posture so maximum concentration can be placed on the exercise itself, which consists of four separate steps: inhalation, retention, exhalation, suspension.

## **Inhalation**

Inhale through the nose. Expand the lower abdomen, pushing out and down, as if you were breathing with your belly. Once your abdomen is full, continue inhaling and expand the chest, filling your upper lungs. Raise the collarbone and shoulders as you continue inhaling. Fill your throat and finally your nose. Stop.

## **Retention**

Hold your breath in. Bring your attention to the fullness of your body. Feel the circulation of the oxygen-rich blood throughout your body. Continue to hold the breath in for a count of ten.

## **Exhalation**

Exhale through your nose. Contract your lower abdomen by compressing it in and up. Continue to exhale by squeezing the air from your lungs and chest. Lower your collarbones and shoulders. Blow the air from your throat and nose. Empty it all out. Stop.

## **Suspension**

.....Hold the breath out. Bring your attention to the emptiness of your body. Feel your body like an empty balloon waiting to be filled. Continue to suspend breathing for a count of ten.

## **Repeat**

On the next inhalation don't gasp for air. Calmly and smoothly inhale just as before. Feel the air reaching far beyond your abdomen, filling every corner of your body like an expanding balloon. Notice the sensation of your body as the new oxygen is brought in.

## ***Unplug***

*Remember Now  
The Time has Come  
To do Important Things  
Go Outside  
Touch the Earth  
Breathe, and Cry and Sing  
I Know It's Hard  
Impossible?  
A Very Tough Decision  
Make it Now  
Turn it Off  
Unplug your Television*

*~ Aaron Hoopes*

*Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet.*

*~Thich Nhat Hanh*

## *Exercise: Cultivating Quietism*

Finding or creating internal silence can be challenging. The mind is simply not used to being peaceful. When things do calm down, we often look immediately for some new distraction. Cultivating Quietism is a method for occupying the mind while, at the same time, allowing it to settle down of its own accord. See if you can find one of the environments of Quietism described below. Seat yourself comfortably and begin your observation. Observe the setting as a whole as well as running your eyes over each part of it. Listen to it as well – and smell it, touch it, and taste it if you can.

Once you have immersed yourself in the environment...go to your breathing.

Don't forget: breathing is fundamental. Use the breath to connect with the environment. Use the breath to connect you with your self.

Try to identify the essence or essential nature of the environment *and absorb it into your own sense of being*. Most important, enjoy the feeling of peaceful relaxation you are cultivating.

Just relax...and breathe.

### *Environments For Observation*

#### **Day Sky**

The day sky is deep and clear. The clouds bring movement and change. Time slows down as the clouds drift slowly by. Become aware of their subtle movement and change in form as they drift above you. If you imagine each cloud as an occasional intruding thought, let it pass by and move on. Release the mind and let it be free within the vast confines of the sky and all that is there.

## **Night Sky**

The night sky presents the quality of silent eternity. The stars and constellations hint at the vastness of the cosmos. Different stars and constellations appear with the changing seasons. Calmly observe the stars and the moon as they wander across the night sky. The moon embodies a magical strength and mystery. Let the mind expand to fill the heavens, and all other thoughts are quickly and easily let go.

## **Trees**

The life cycle of a tree reflects the cycle of all life. From seed to sapling to mature tree to dead wood, the tree passes through the cycle as we all do. Each tree is unique and embodies the essence of life. Roots sink deep into the earth. Imagine the wind as a wave of discursive thought. The tree does not fight against the wind, instead it moves with the wind, swaying back and forth allowing the wind to pass through. Bring that feeling within yourself.

## **Anywhere and Everywhere**

People who live in big cities may often feel that access to natural settings is rare or spoiled. But Quietism settings can be found anywhere. Parks, gardens, and rooftops all offer opportunities to cultivate peace within.

Take the time to breathe and relax whenever possible. Nature exists all around us; we just rarely experience it. Stop. Breathe. Relax and enjoy it. This practice allows your mind to free itself of its habitual thought patterns and opens up infinite possibilities.

## *Exercise: Go Outside*

Really.

I mean it.

Go outside and stay there for a while.

There is absolutely no possible way you can connect yourself to the spirit within you if you are not in touch with the natural world around you. It is the other beings of this planet that make your spirit whole. Beginning to cultivate a relationship with the various plants, animals, birds and insects allows you access to that part of you which is connected to everything. Go outside and take some time to observe the dance of life around you. Open yourself to the possibility that everything around you is flowing to the rhythm of life. Let the wind blow through your hair. Take off your shoes and walk barefoot in the grass. Climb a tree. Ask yourself if there may be more to the world than the confines of your own personal thoughts and experiences.

*“Only if the human imagination is activated by the sight of the great soaring birds in the heavens, by the blossoming flowers of Earth, by the sight of the sea, by the lightning and thunder of the great storms that break through the heat of summer, only then will the deep inner experiences be evoked within the human soul.”*

Thomas Berry

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*The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction. ... Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature -- the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.*

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*