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The economy and global competitiveness are the bottom line for society and governments, or so says conventional wisdom. But what are the real needs that must be satisfied to live rich, fulfilling lives? This is the question David Suzuki explores in this wide-ranging study. Suzuki begins by presenting the concept of people as creatures of the Earth who depend on its gifts of air, water, soil, and sun energy. He shows how people are genetically programmed for the company of other species, and suffer enormously when we fail to live in harmony with them. And he analyzes those deep spiritual needs, rooted in nature, that are also a crucial component of a loving world. Drawing on his own experiences and those of others who have put their beliefs into action, *The Sacred Balance* is a powerful, passionate book with concrete suggestions for creating an ecologically sustainable, satisfying, and fair future by rediscovering and addressing humanity's basic needs.

The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature Details

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Gavin Esdale says

David Suzuki and Amanda McConnell weave an impressive tapestry with this one.

It's exactly what it says in the subtitle: Rediscovering our place in nature, and it does a good job overall.

The book uses the four Aristotlean elements (Earth, Air, Water, Fire) as a structural device to illustrate the myriad of ways in which human beings are part of and wholly dependent upon the interplay of these Earthly elements, and it's fairly effective. Weaving together science, anecdotes, liberal use of quoted prose and poetic material, and a palpable sense of wonder and optimism, the book gives a very interesting paradigm of what it means to be a human being in the environment of planet Earth, not merely as a human being apart from the environment of planet Earth.

I liked it because it does not shy away from the difficulties that humans face in relating ourselves to nature, and it is enjoyable because the book's core message is not misanthropic (which to me is just a lazy cop-out anyway in environmental polemics). Rather, Suzuki and McConnell argue for a shared stewardship and re-framing of how we see ourselves in regards to the Earth, it's creatures, and our fellow human beings.

Now, as a science student, I always do have to exercise a little bit of skepticism at certain claims that lean a little hard on spirituality and the importance of nature to experiences of this nature, but thankfully the book doesn't tip into nature-worship as such, and while it comes right up to the edge of it, the book's core messages and otherwise-sound scientific assertions aren't compromised.

I recommend it, especially if you're feeling a little lost about humanity's unique place in our environment. It is a good reminder that human beings are not necessarily destructive by nature and that we do have remarkable capacities for good, both for each other and for our Earth (and, as this book helpfully reminds us, the two go so very often hand-in-hand). It's a vital message, especially today.

Travis Hosgood says

A very detailed perception of mans connections to earth, wind, fire, and water. Not only to the elements, but down to the smallest micro organisms. Suzuki explains detailed relationships of the collective noosphere. Speaks of some dogmas of science and technology and some possible solutions for future generations. Let us understand this message, tell a friend and work to copy nature instead of bludgeoning it into submission.

Andrew Lee says

The content of The Sacred Balance is crucial for humans to understand and appreciate, and is told in a storytelling narrative emphasizing that everything is interconnected, humans are whole with our surroundings and our environment, and what we do to it, we do to ourselves.

However, I found his storytelling to be overly wordy, as if he was trying too hard to sound dramatic, his flow

often erratic, and his content to be annoyingly repetitive. I guess that's unavoidable when you are talking about the interconnectedness of everything - the same topics and points tend to come up over and over again. I also found half of his referenced quotes to be useless and outdated, further bogging down the flow.

While I would rate his writing style at 2 stars, the content is 5 stars, must-know material. For someone just getting into environmentalism, Suzuki is a wonderful entry point because of his celebrity activist fame. I personally understood most of the heavy content already, which is why it felt annoyingly repetitive for me. If you are already well aware of environmental and economic issues, are deeply connected with nature and are quite spiritual, I would skip this reading, and suggest more stimulating books such as *Active Hope* by Joanna Macy.

As a side note, I have heard about controversy surrounding David Suzuki's integrity and character, and decided to do some internet research on this. My conclusion is that the varied attacks on his character were of suspicious origin and involve twisted facts, a fate that has befallen many celebrity activists. To me, David Suzuki always was and is still a character of integrity I admire who has fought passionately as an activist and environmentalist all his life using his celebrity status for good. Forgive him for having a few nice homes and being excessively outspoken at times.

Nutkin says

While I enjoyed reading *The Sacred Balance*, it didn't really grab me because it was like having someone preach to the choir. I already identify with a lot of the ideas in this book about needing to refocus as a society on what is really important, how to reinvigorate communities and how to recognize that we are as much a part of the environment as is a tree. I was a little put off during the chapter "The Sacred Matter" because I felt that some parts were almost too spiritual & that there was a sense that atheism and/or scepticism is negative. As an atheist myself, I think that one can experience significant awe and wonder in the natural world to hold the same kind of reverence that someone spiritual might hold. Instead of revering a tree because I think it has a soul, I revere it because of the sheer awesomeness of its design, of how it fulfills its needs, of how it is an integral part of the system.

I really like that he ends the book on a positive note with inspiring stories of some environmentalists from around the world. Sometimes when reading environmental books or calls to arms, it's easy to get depressed and lose hope, but his choice of ending helps to demonstrate that we have a choice as individuals. Suzuki also makes great use of quotes to emphasize some of his ideas.

I would recommend this particularly to people who perhaps like nature, but don't consider themselves environmentalists. I think it would be also a potentially useful read for people who see themselves as disconnected from the environment.

Elsie says

"Our stories tell us where we come from and why we are here. In the beginning, these stories say, there was water, and then there was sky and fire, there was Earth, and there was life. We humans crawled out of the womb of the planet, or we were shaped out of clay and water, carved from twigs, compounded of seeds and ashes, or hatched from the cosmic egg. One way or another, we were from the sacred elements that together compose the Earth. We are made from the Earth, we breathe it in with every breath we take, we drink it and eat it, and we share the same spark that animates the whole planet. Our stories tell us this, and so does our

science..." pg 264-265.

Our stories tell us this, and so does our science...and that's what makes this book such a humbling journey for me...I only wish that more people get to read this wonderful book. It would be great to have it introduced as a school text, so that younger people can be aware and have a clear understanding of how everything in nature is interconnected, every single thing or element has it's purpose and are all equal. Therefore all should be respected and loved before it's too late.

Wendy Jensen says

I love how Mr. Suzuki links spirituality with proper healthy respect and care of our environment, our Mother Earth. Too often we see recommendations that fall far short of behavior that would truly represent reverence for the place that birthed us and gives us sustenance. Just like ocean travelers who throw their garbage overboard, there are those who profess their enjoyment of nature while thoughtlessly contributing to its decline, all in the same breath.

Where I wanted Mr. Suzuki to go further was in his "Restoring the Balance" section at the end of the book. Instead of recommending eating meat-free meals one day a week, why not become vegan? In addition to supporting alternatives to the car, why not seriously explore the reasons behind our government's lack of support for renewable clean energy? Why aren't our scientists attacking these issues and bringing industry solar homes and geothermally-heated office buildings?

Criticism aside, this book refreshed my connection to my church...the outdoors. Thank you David.

Kurt says

A very well-thought-out book explaining man's place in nature. Modern humans have been around for only the very briefest of moments in the geologic or biologic history of the earth. Yet in that short time we have caused huge stresses to the natural world upon which we are all (all 7+ billion of us) completely and 100% dependent. We treat our air and our water as dumping grounds. We poison our soils in order to produce unsustainable amounts of food and minerals. And we are reducing the earth's biodiversity at unprecedented rates (even on the geologic scale). Collectively, we humans do all this all while remaining apathetic or ignorant to the potential or likely consequences. Many people even have the arrogant attitude that whatever humans collectively do to their world must be good or what we are supposed to do, because, after all, *we are part of nature*.

The book is far from all gloom and doom though. The author presents many ideas and describes many on-going efforts to mitigate or even turn around the harm we are doing to our own home.

Gail says

The Sacred Balance is a stunning exploration of how our physical bodies are comprised of the four sacred elements -- Air, Fire, Water, and Earth. The author, David Suzuki, does draws from the many indigenous traditions around the world that have preserved the knowledge of the central role of these elements in maintaining the balance of life on this earth. Suzuki positions himself as a storyteller adding something to

that world view. As a biogenetist, his contribution is to tell the story of the four sacred elements through explaining the science of how we are each composed of the four elements.

Core chapters are: "Homo Sapiens: Born of the Earth", "The Breath of All Green Things," "The Oceans Flowing through our Veins", "Made from the Soil", "The Divine Fire", "Protected by our Kin", "The Law of Love", "Sacred Matter", "Restoring the Balance."

At the beginning of the book, he quotes from Thomas Berry about the need for human kind to create a new story about how our species has survived and how it will survive. Suzuki believes that an important need for our species to survive is to reinvigorate our stories with a knowledge about how bodies -- and our kinship patterns -- incorporate the four elements. This knowledge then becomes the root not only for understanding how ecologies work, but also for understanding how vital the human element of love is for ensuring the preservation of life, families, and the larger ecological systems.

PBS had a companion video series -- in which Suzuki takes his grandson around the world to expose the young boy to different traditions related to each of the four elements.

Rolf Von says

I read it 20 years ago when it first came out and found it helpful at the time. A good starter for people who haven't considered such things deeply. Simple yet important messages. Were many more people to have a deep sense of its messages, we'd currently be on a very different path.

Meagan says

A perspective-shifting take on our environment.

Also, I read it as if David Suzuki was narrating The Nature Of Things. Strange, but soothing.

Etienne says

Livre intéressant qui nous force à réfléchir sur la nature, les liens qui y existent, notre rôle, nos actes et leurs conséquences. J'ai trouvé particulièrement incroyable de voir à quel point l'auteur est un visionnaire, beaucoup de choses qui y sont écrites sont plus naturelles aujourd'hui, bien qu'il reste énormément de travail, mais de penser que quelqu'un pensait ainsi en 1997 (date de la première édition) c'est assez stupéfiant. Points négatifs, j'ai trouvé que l'auteur s'y égare un peu parfois, parlant de tout et de rien, d'un sujet à l'autre, passant de l'écologie à la biologie ne passant par la géologie. Je me serais peut-être attendu à apprendre un peu plus, étant déjà assez conscientisé par le sujet, cela explique peut-être le fait que j'ai moins appris. Sinon, très bon livre que je conseillerais à ceux qui n'ont pas de conscience environnementale encore en 2016 (ouvrez-vous les yeux! il n'y a pas que l'économie!) ou pour ceux qui commencent à lire et à s'informer sur le sujet. Peut aussi très bien servir à se rafraîchir la mémoire et à se rappeler des concepts de bases, mais que le monde dans lequel on vit nous force parfois à oublier!

Janet Aird says

I loved this book. Suzuki shows how everything in our universe is connected, from the microscopic to the universal to the undefinable soul.

He incorporates quotes from the Koran, the Bible, Leonardo da Vinci, scientists, philosophers and poets, and covers everything from the origin of air to how a breath of air travels through our bodies, from the structure of a water molecule to the hydrologic cycle, from the way soil was formed to soil as a source of life, and more.

It's very dense. I had to leave it for awhile and go back to it a few times.

Joseph Mckenna says

I will preface this statement by stating that I would want David Suzuki as a neighbor, and that his hopes and dreams are very similar to my own in many respects. However, I am left with an overall feeling of disappointment in his canonical work. There is no paradigm shift, no revolution in thought, only his lingering feeling of nostalgia for paradise lost and token suggestions to slightly modify our own behavior.

The Sacred Balance of the earth will not be achieved with individual's considering public transport options, participating in meatless Mondays, and finding the spiritual balance of our distant ancestors. Someone will need to find out how to stop humankind's quest for endless growth that is coupled with finite resources and space; revolutionize transport needs, and create an economic revolution that manages to provides for our needs and wants without destroying everything in our path.

No such solutions exist in this book, nor are any real ideas explored. Instead we have wonderful, simplified science explaining how our natural world works. Here Suzuki excels in reminding us the miracle of life, the subtleties of digestion, rainfall patterns, etc. Beyond that we only have a meandering collection of spiritual thoughts, an incredible reliance on Edward O. Wilson quotes, and the recycled suggestions that recycling your aluminum cans is going to save the world.

Susan says

Well written; scientific information presented in a mystical/poetic style. In "The Sacred Balance," Suzuki invokes the classical elements of life: air, water, earth and fire, to explain Earth's ecological balance. He discusses the ways in which humankind, like all the inhabitants of our planet, is dependent on the building blocks of life and the environment around us. And, he asks each of us to remember how sacred our relationship with all life is. Can our "modern," consumer economies be sustained? The answer, clearly, is "no." Do we need to destroy our communities and our natural world to discover that truth? It's up to us to choose.

Dave Angelini says

This is a well-spoken call to environmental thinking. I argue with environmental causes, but I usually skip

books that scare people into the need for action, or preach to the choir. But I couldn't put this book down. It reiterated old truths in new ways and made fascinating arguments I had never heard. Suzuki has a poetic and impassioned voice, but stays plain-spoken. He even raises the issues of overpopulation, often ignored in discussions of global warming and other environmental problems. Importantly he directly addresses what governments and average people can and should do to help the global environmental problem. Reduce. Stay local. Avoid chemicals. Pressure governments to meet human concerns over those of business. One thing Suzuki does well (albeit slowly) is that he points to the knowledge of traditional cultures without romanticizing them. He does not reject modernism or science entirely for a sappy sort of anti-modern parochialism, but he is willing to point out the limitations of modernism, corporate capitalism, and reductionism.
