

Spiritual
Ecology:
Pedagogy &
Practice

by Dr. Michael Lees

Spiritual Ecoliteracy: Pedagogy and Practice

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Basic Outline:

What is spiritual?

- spiritual is purpose, meaning making, and motivation
- spiritual can be thought of as being secular or non-secular in practice

What is ecoliteracy?

- ecoliteracy means learning how to read the world with the head (cognitive), heart (intelligence), hands (experience), and spirit (language) (Lees, 2017, 2021)

What is spiritual ecoliteracy?

- spiritual ecoliteracy is ecoliteracy infused with meaning making, purpose, and motivation (Lees, 2021)
- spiritual ecoliteracy is individually and collectively developed ecoliteracy that understands the underlying motivations that drive human purpose and meaning making
- spiritual ecoliteracy is your/our story of self, other, us, Earth and non-human inhabitants, and cosmos

Understanding spiritual ecoliteracy through three lenses:

- personal lens
- social lens
- ecological lens

The practice of spiritual ecoliteracy:

- knowledge building
- connections/systems
- interdependence
- acquired knowledge manifesting as wisdom (hopefully!)

Introduction: I introduced **spiritual ecoliteracy** in my 2021 publication of *Religions of the World: Spirituality & Practice*. The construction of the book serves as an example of using spiritual ecoliteracy as pedagogy and practice for developing learner and reader awareness. Particularly as it relates to understanding various religious traditions from around the world while simultaneously raising individual awareness using a personal, social, and ecological lenses in practice. Spiritual ecoliteracy can find application in any of the various schools of human belief, thought, and learning including, but not limited to, the arts and humanities, sciences, mathematics, business, medicine, and economics using the same method shown throughout the book. The following headings represent the history and definition for spiritual ecoliteracy, application of the three lenses providing a pedagogical structure for ecoliteracy, the application of spiritual ecoliteracy through practice, and what the use of spiritual ecoliteracy seeks to achieve in terms of learning outcomes:

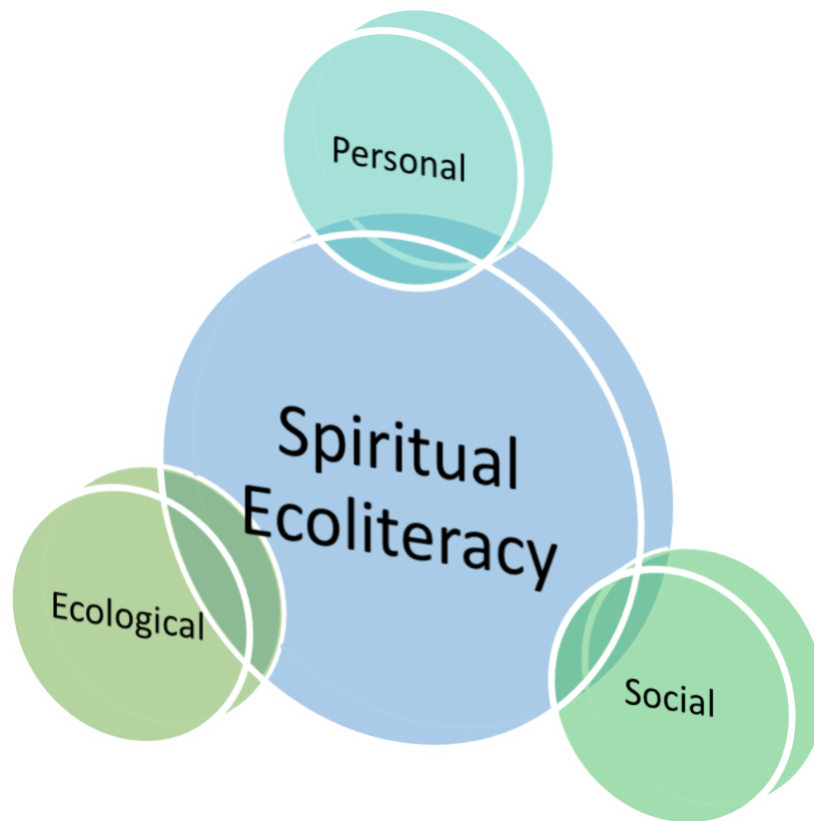
Spiritual: The uniquely creative expression of humans taking a particular teaching(s), any teaching(s), and bringing them to life in an engaged effort involving commitment, purpose, and dedication. Such efforts support the establishment of meaning making, connection, and motivation (Lees, 2021).

Ecoliteracy: Fritjof Capra introduced the term **ecoliteracy** (Lees, 2017). Ecoliteracy is defined as learning how to read the world with the head (cognitive), heart (intelligence), hands (experience), and spirit (language as method towards meaning making) (Lees, 2017). Capra's theoretical foundation for ecoliteracy is called *The Web of Life*. The Web of life consists of four main constructs that include: pattern (form), structure (matter), process (autopoiesis), and meaning (construction of language) (Lees, 2017). Ecoliteracy then is an ecologically systems-based organic and **objective** approach towards recognizing that all sentient life participates in interdependent activities and relationships. These relationships are considered as being a part of, yet greater than the sum of its parts, and within all of the Earth's and cosmos's living systems.

Spiritual Ecoliteracy: Spiritual ecoliteracy builds and stands on the shoulders of Fritjof Capra's definition for ecoliteracy (Lees, 2021). **Spiritual ecoliteracy** is defined as the **objective** and **subjective** spiritual development of ecoliteracy through acts of learning and doing using our head, heart, hands, and spirit. Ecoliteracy, and particularly spirit, is not only grounded in language construction, but now also includes meaning making that is driven with purpose, motivation, commitment, and dedication towards the evolution of meta-spiritual intelligence (Lees, 2021). Meta-spiritual intelligence is defined as, "individual capacity to see a whole-system with an objective point of view in an effort to determine adequate affective responses" (Lees, 2021, p. 19). The development of meta-spiritual intelligence supports a deeper understanding for our interdependent relationship with life by building a bridge between our **objective** and **subjective** responses towards digesting how we learn **about** (objective), and in turn **do** (subjective), living. Spiritual ecoliteracy is the fostering of objective "big-picture" think relative to subjective motivation, purpose, and meaning making. Spiritual ecoliteracy consists of three lenses that support the development and practice of this worldview.

The Three Lenses of Spiritual Ecoliteracy: The three lenses for developing a pedagogy for study, practice, and doing in spiritual ecoliteracy include the personal, social, and ecological. Each lens involves a way of looking, seeing, studying, learning, processing, engaging, and embodying that which is the focus of attention. Each lens provides means and methods towards understanding our objective (empirical and as unbiased as is possible) and subjective (phenomenological, emotive, and felt) responses to our personal, social, and ecological interrelationships. All of which are nested within the experiences of our immediate personal, local, global, and cosmological environment. These three lenses provide the foundation for the development of pedagogical approaches to learning within and across subject disciplines (the sciences and humanities) in the classroom as well as the school of life.

Figure 1: Spiritual Ecoliteracy and the Three Lenses

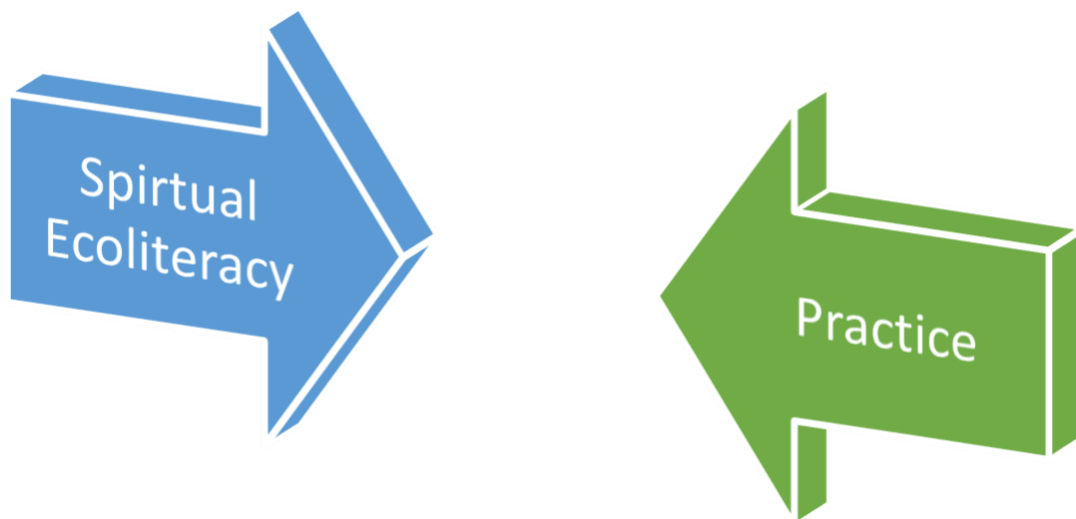


Personal Lens: Self-actualization concerns the intrinsic growth and development of a human being in relationship to a process of unfolding, or discovering, who and what being human means relative to what we learn. Peak experiences, self-actualization, and or, the altruistic disposition of transcendence concerning self, other, and world.

Social Lens: Understanding what (*Insert Subject Matter*) teaches as it concerns individual connections and conduct towards the immediate, local, and global community. Especially that which individuals come into most contact with daily. Fostering trust in the processes taking place between self, other, and social relationships. Provide the view, tools, and know-how involving the engagement of self in relationship to direct contact within individual's immediate surroundings.

Ecological Lens: Understanding how our minds, hearts, and bodies work with contact as it relates to self, other, culture, and the ecosystems that constitute the world at large. Namely, planet Earth. Knowing the mind in terms of cultural and global consciousness; the heart in the development of social, emotional, ecological, and spiritual intelligence through experience; and body as it relates to the environment and contact with life in the form of developed **Spiritual Ecoliteracy**.

Figure 2: Spiritual Ecoliteracy Meets Practice



Practice, Actions, and Outcomes: Practice involves action toward improvement. Any action for improvement requires commitment and dedication. Something that you, as the individual, do repeatedly, for a long, long time. Practice means doing. Practice is understanding (objectivity) in action and spirituality (subjectivity) through direct experience. Practice is where we foster meaning making and development of purpose. Practice involves knowledge-building concerning interdependence within living systems and our phenomenological responses to biology and physics. Most importantly practice hopefully leads to the manifestation of knowledge and the transformation of said knowledge into wisdom. A gained sense of wisdom that balances human approaches to **life living us** on personal, local, and global levels. Practice means live, study, learn, do. Life takes work and life takes play. Practice shows openings and limitations. Practice is never easy. But, without practice when would we know to laugh or cry, know peace instead of war, and appreciate the AH-HA moments of our lives lived in what is only a temporary and impermanent situation? Through practice, personal, social, and global awareness is now supported with a deeper understanding concerning individual relationships with history, space, place, culture, belief, philosophy, and scientific constructs. An individual's social, emotional, and spiritual intelligence garners the potentiality to develop and question, with critical thinking, logic, reason, and creativity, the problems everyone faces daily. Spiritual ecoliteracy provides an expanded world view that includes objective and subjective understanding while supporting the solving of personal, local, and global problems with authentic aspirations, ideas, meaning making, and purpose.

Figure 3: Paradigmatic Scope of Spiritual Ecoliteracy, Learner, and World in Practice



Conclusion: My ideas concerning spiritual ecoliteracy embody 25 years of teaching experience, 30 years of academic research, and a life-time of experience in my related disciplinary fields. My background includes philosophy (Eastern and Western), contemplative religions, religions of the world, moral philosophy, ecology, environmental studies, and creativity. I am very passionate about working with students and learners inside and outside the classroom. That learners, or readers of my work, find connection to themselves and within local, global, and cosmological contexts drives my motivation and purpose. Spiritual ecoliteracy yokes knowledge acquisition with experiential learning. Thus creating the potential for transformation to occur in terms of individual responses to not only learning inside the classroom, or at home, but outside in life as well. My work is meant to include the curious that may be seeking academic learning in structured environments and those who have chosen to learn about life on their own. My only wish is that anyone may find benefit from this work in their lives and hope the Earth and all living beings are that much happier for it!

Sources:

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Contact Information and Additional Work by Dr. Michael Lees:

Dr. Michael Lees' Website:

Ecotone & Pedagogy

<https://ecotoneandpedagogy.weebly.com>

Email: ecotoneandpedagogy4@gmail.com

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