



## International Journal of Society, Culture & Language IJSCL

Journal homepage: [www.ijsc.net](http://www.ijsc.net)  
ISSN 2323-2210 (online)

# Indigenous Accounts of Environmental Stewardship in Light of the Theory and Language of Maharishi Vedic Science

Lee Fergusson<sup>1a</sup>, David Kettle<sup>2b</sup>, Geoffrey Wells<sup>3a</sup>

### ARTICLE HISTORY:

Received December 2016  
Received in revised form February 2017  
Accepted February 2017  
Available online March 2017

### KEYWORDS:

Indigenous sustainability  
Environmental stewardship  
Tradition  
Maharishi Vedic Science  
Sanskrit language

### Abstract

The principles and practice of sustainability have gained momentum in the last 15 years and now form a central part of conversations around social praxis and the future. It has been proposed that the theories driving sustainability science are embedded in Indigenous history, and it has been shown that many ancient traditions always concerned themselves with sustainable and ethical living. Among the traditions identified with environmental stewardship are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia and Māori of New Zealand. Of interest in this context is the Vedic tradition, a tradition of sustainability and ecological awareness which identifies the source of sustainability in Natural Law, the universal source of tradition, language, and knowledge. In this paper we survey two Indigenous traditions as they relate to environmental stewardship, and explore their relation to the Vedic tradition.

© 2017 IJSCL. All rights reserved.

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Email: [lee@pranaworldgroup.com](mailto:lee@pranaworldgroup.com) (Corresponding Author)  
Tel: +61-407-600949

<sup>2</sup> Senior Research Fellow, Email: [dbkettlelimited@slingshot.co.nz](mailto:dbkettlelimited@slingshot.co.nz)

<sup>3</sup> Professor, Email: [geoffrey@maharishivedicresearch.org](mailto:geoffrey@maharishivedicresearch.org)

<sup>a</sup> Maharishi Vedic Research Institute, Australia

<sup>b</sup> Maharishi Vedic Research Institute, New Zealand

## 1. Introduction

Although the concept of ‘sustainability’ has been a key plank in the language of environmentalists and ecologists since the 1960s, the term has only gained political, industrial, and social traction in the last 15 years, with concepts of sustainability now forming a core to the language of many government representatives, business leaders, academics, and ‘change managers’ (Lozano, Ceulemans, & Seatter, 2015). Statements such as these have their roots embedded deeply in history (Grove, 2006), and some theorists maintain the relationship between ‘human-in-environment systems’ and the history of human settlement may serve as a platform from which to predict future sustainability outcomes (Costanza, Graumlich, & Steffen, 2007). Costanza et al. (2007) have therefore suggested:

If we continue to operate in ignorance or denial of [an] integrated historical understanding, we run the very real risk of mirroring the paths of the Easter Islanders, the Classic Maya, or the Roman Empire. But if we can adequately learn from our integrated history, we can create a sustainable and desirable future for our species. (p. 522)

The identification of sustainability in Indigenous cultures and how they might inform contemporary praxis appears to be a compelling one because it is evident that many traditional cultures did think about and act in a certain way toward their environments. While these approaches may not technically be called ‘sustainable’ in the modern sense of the word (Nelson, 2012), they constitute what Cort (2006) refers to as a ‘lived ethic’.

From this we conclude that some traditional cultures developed a sophisticated understanding of environmental stewardship and, as such, it may be worth reexamining past (and continuing) Indigenous sustainability practices in order to learn and adapt from them. As a general point of orientation, we use the term ‘sustainability’ to mean a process, system, or practice that can be maintained or kept going without depleting itself or damaging its surroundings, however we recognise the term has many meanings and multiple types and levels of usage are possible in different contexts.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Dating back thousands of years, the Vedic tradition of India represents an under-researched domain of knowledge, but its explanation of the ‘home of Natural Law’ (or Dharma), and its relation to traditional practices, is of relevance. Derived from the *Veda* (वेद, meaning complete knowledge) and Vedic Literature, this tradition represents a rich vein of sustainability science. For example, the four Vedas (*Rk Veda*, *Sāma Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*) and their relation to ecology have been investigated in light of contemporary environmental problems (Prime, 2002), and environmental management in *Vedānta*, one of the 36 branches of Vedic Literature, has been examined (Steingard, Fitzgibbons, & Heaton, 2004). One academic has even gone so far as to recently claim that the Vedas are the “origin of environmental science” (Tiwari, 2016, p. 157).

According to Sharma (2015, p. 2), Vedic knowledge “urges people to pursue the path of ethical and sustainable economy, which coincides with the philosophy of ecological economics for sustainable development”. He maintains that the sole purpose of expanding the material wealth of individuals, which lies at the core of the Western exploitation model, can be contrasted to the Vedic approach which promotes the well-being of all life on earth, specifically pointing to the fact that Vedic approaches identify all living beings as ‘children of the earth’, and cites *Yajur Veda* and the *Upanishads* which encourage the maintenance of biodiversity. Sharma (2015, p. 4) also maintains the Vedic practice of “worshipping the field is a sign of gratitude towards the earth” and a marker of environmental stewardship, and Ranugedevi (2012, p. 3), suggests Puranic texts, such as the *Vishnu Purana*, ascribe importance to not killing birds and animals (noting that a “person who does not harm or destroy other creatures or animals” pleases God), and points out the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (5:101) emphasises “certain norms...prescribed for human beings to keep the environment clean”.

Of relevance to this study is the introduction of Maharishi Vedic Science, the systematic investigation of the ancient principles and practices of the Veda and Vedic Literature as brought to light by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

(1969, 1996a), because it too makes a cogent case for sustainability in all areas of life. Maharishi—founder of Maharishi University of Management in the United States and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Vedic Vishwavidyalaya University in India—has re-enlivened the understanding of, and systematic approach to, ancient Vedic knowledge, and his unique insights contain not only the theoretical bases to ‘explain’ and the experiential methods to subjectively and objectively ‘experience’ and thereby ‘know’ the Veda and Vedic Literature, but he has operationalised these concepts into applied social welfare programs to achieve the goals he has identified for Vedic Science (Chandler, 2011).

The language of the Veda and Vedic Literature is Sanskrit, which Maharishi (1995, p. 1) describes as “the language of nature”. Sanskrit, used throughout this paper to identify original terms of the Vedic tradition, is called *Shruti* (श्रुति) or “that which is heard at the basis of creation” (Maharishi, 1994, p. 117). According to the Vedic tradition, Sanskrit is the sound of nature’s own intelligence reverberating within itself, the sound of self-reverberating consciousness which, in the natural momentum of sequential transformation, evolves into the structures and forms of sound—the alphabet, syllables, words, and sentences—expressed as the sequential unfoldment of the verses of the Veda; this process of manifestation of sound, Maharishi maintains (1994, p. 63), “expresses itself as the quantified structures (or qualities) of the flow of speech”. In this sense, Maharishi’s view is different to the standard understanding of Sanskrit derived from comparative philology (e.g., Burrow, 2001), although it is perhaps closer to those expressed by authors who suggest it is a “supreme language” (Aklujkar, 1996); the concept of Sanskrit ‘literacy’, however, as being “located in the social, cultural, and political context in which it takes place” (Street, Pishghadam, & Zeinali, 2014, p. 18), is more generally consistent.

Elsewhere, we have highlighted the principles of Maharishi Vedic Science as they pertain to sustainability science (Fergusson, Wells, & Kettle, 2017), however, any relationship between sustainability in Indigenous cultures and Vedic Science has yet to be explored. For

this reason, the present paper asks two research questions:

- 1) what examples exist of Indigenous views and practices of sustainability?
- 2) how do these views and practices relate to Maharishi Vedic Science?

### 3. Sustainability in Traditional Cultures

To answer research question 1, we present two traditional views of sustainable practice: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions of Australia; and the Māori tradition of New Zealand. It is not within the scope of this paper to do justice to each of these cultural traditions, as their rich legacies of environmental stewardship and living in accord with nature are at once complex and far-reaching, however some general sense of traditional precedents for today’s trend in sustainability may suffice.

#### 3.1. Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditions

A great many groups identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and, as a consequence, a wide variety of viewpoints are possible and equally valid in Australia. For this reason, the following should be read as a synopsis of Indigenous worldviews not as a hegemonic position statement on sustainability as understood by every traditional culture in Australia. We hold that while there may be fundamental ‘truths’ or core values of stewardship applied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions and articulated in different languages, these may not be universally accepted or practiced by all groups, however, the phrase “if you look after the Country, the country will look after you” (Griffiths & Kinnane, 2010, p. 3) may be considered representative.

For at least 50,000 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have lived in what is now called Australia. Tilbury and Cooke (2005) argue that a tenet in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practice of sustainability is the use of “critical and systemic thinking” (p. 3) which recognises the ‘whole is more than the sum of its parts’; the authors maintain that such an approach is a befitting way to understand and manage complexity in nature, culture and society. ‘Country’, for Indigenous

Australians, means the holistic engagement (i.e., the physical, mental, and spiritual emersion) in and identification with a specific physical location (i.e., one's own Country). Such identity is achieved by nurturing, visiting, talking and singing to Country. It is this identification with Country that has led to the Indigenous approach to stewardship and ecology, an identity which locates the individual and group at the centre of any environmental, ecological, and social consideration of present practices and future outcomes.

One such consideration relates to water and its sustainable use. Water, Langton (2006) claims, is viewed as a sacred aspect of life and its historical management can be assessed on three different levels—cognitive, social, and temporal. However, analysis of Indigenous engagement with water has largely escaped what she refers to as the 'scientific gaze'. Indeed, Langton (2006) points out that the standard anthropological view of pre-colonial Aborigines and water considered evidence only in the context of settlement patterns, site usage, and population growth as 'markers' of social development and resource management, but this method does not account for the richness and depth of the Aboriginal understanding of environment, including the sustainable management of resources like water.

For example, Langton (2006) points out that unlike the simplistic western notion of 'wet' and 'dry' seasons in the Laura Basin region of the York Peninsula, local Aborigines (including the Guugu Yimithirr, Lama Lama, and Kuku Thaypan, collectively referred to as 'Pama') identify six different seasons related to rainfall, and have developed sophisticated ways of living sustainably in accordance with them. At the core of each interaction is what Langton (2006, p. 158) calls a "disciplined stewardship of the resources of their estates". The Pama have also developed methods of reading dewfalls and the evaporation of dew, and understand the relationship of dew to hot, wild and controlled fires. This understanding and linguistic articulation extends to the role of rivers and creeks in fire management, including how these features of Country can be used as firebreaks during times of fire, making the knowledge of water particularly important

to sustainable habitation in the region.

Given the fragile nature of Australian ecosystems, sustainable stewardship of water and other resources in desert regions (called 'desert knowledge') is considered especially important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; this led Captain Cook to observe on 'discovering' Australia that Indigenous people "in reality ... are far happier than we Europeans...the earth and the sea, of their own accord, furnishes [sic] them with all things necessary for life" (Sveiby & Skuthorpe, 2006, p. 209). His view ran counter to the narrative which argued that people from non-Western traditions were by definition 'uncivilized'. One reason for such an unenlightened attitude is related to the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders had not 'evolved' building techniques for permanent habitation nor had they constructed complex city states.

However, as Long and Memmott (2007) have rightly shown, the 'mobility' of Aborigines is in no way uncivilized but integral to the way they maintained Country and social identity, and related to countless generations of continuous and sustainable land management and conservation. More recently, Gammage (2011) has shown that Aboriginal land management at the time of colonial invasion 230 years ago was more systematic, extensive, and 'scientific' than previously thought, and French (2013) has documented the role played by women in conserving the integrity of Country.

Perhaps the most fundamental Indigenous sustainability tenet rests on the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people see themselves as part of creation, not separate from it. This view resulted in an approach to living which meant that instead of putting surplus energy into trying to squeeze more food out of the land than was necessary, Indigenous Australians expended their energy on spiritual, intellectual and artistic endeavours. According to Eckersley (2008):

They carried their palaces on their backs, their cathedrals were built in their minds, and they felt no need to glorify human heroes. It is in the mind and the creativity of the spirit...that Aboriginal society stands out. This created a psychology that was

completely disinterested in acquiring and possessing material things, (pp. 1-2)

an exceptional culture which protected Country from exploitation and mistreatment.

### 3.2. Māori Tradition of Aotearoa

The Indigenous people of New Zealand (the Māori of Aotearoa) have a holistic, what could be referred to as a sustainable, worldview; they see all things as connected, including the physical and spiritual realms (Hawke, 2016). The different physical and spiritual areas of life for them are represented by three 'baskets of knowledge', which the forest god Tane brought from heaven (Klein, 2000): (a) knowledge garnered through experience by the senses, (b) knowledge of the world behind human sense perception (i.e., knowledge of the cosmic processes that sustain and replenish the energies of life, knowledge of what science calls 'laws of nature'), and (c) knowledge beyond space and time (i.e., knowledge of an ultimate reality entered by ritual chants). A true analysis of Māori sustainability requires, according to Klein (2000), a comprehensive understanding of these three types of knowledge.

Any understanding of Tangata whenua (or Indigenous) perspectives on sustainability would thus include an appreciation for concepts such as: (a) Mauri or core essence, meaning every aspect of life has its own life-force, (b) Whanaungatanga or participation and membership, in which land is not viewed as something that should be owned or traded (i.e., one does not own land, one belongs to the land), (c) Whakapapa or relationships and lineage, which connects Māori to every element in the universe and to each other, (d) Mātauranga or understanding and clarity, specifically an understanding of the role of history, genealogy, mythology, and cultural traditions which play an important part in shaping Māori attitudes, and (e) Kaitiakitanga or conservation and protection of the environment. A key feature in each area of sustainability is reciprocity; the reciprocal agreement between Kaitiaki (a guardian or caretaker) and natural resources must physically, spiritually, and politically sustain the Kaitiaki, who "in turn must ensure the long-term survival of that resource" (Whakataki, 2016, pp. 3-4).

This traditional Māori system of environmental guardianship reflects the notion that people are the offspring of nature, and hence are responsible to their ancestors and descendants for protecting the environment, which is their kin. In other words, when nature and its resources are viewed as part of us, and with which we have a reciprocal obligation of guardianship, our approach to the use and treatment of the environment and the long-term consequences of our actions mean we must interact with our environment 'sustainably', a concept also applied in healthcare (Ahuriri-Driscoll et al., 2008). For these reasons, Klein (2000) explains the Māori worldview of guardianship is fundamentally different to the Western view of ownership and conservation which has been driven by modern scientific theory. Klein (2000) highlights this difference by pointing out that where human beings are separated from nature according to the dualistic theory of science, in the Māori worldview humans are genealogically linked with every natural asset of the world and therefore they belong to nature and are not separate from it. In the western model, concepts of private property and political liberalism are rooted in the belief that individualism is linked with efficiency, whereas Māori view ownership and private use rights as limited to the common interests of Iwi (tribe) and Hapu (subtribe).

Similarly, Klein (2000) maintains that in the Western model 'happiness' is seen as the result of materialistic 'want fulfilment' and as an essential 'value' of modern society, but in the Māori view individual and collective needs, rather than individual wants, are the decisive factors in an 'economy of balance'. The three main building blocks of Māori culture can therefore be summarized as: (a) the sustainability of communities is dependent on the strength of families, (b) the sustainability of land is dependent on clean soil, water and air and the proper guardianship of them, and (c) the sustainability of people is dependent on relationships, Aroha (love and feeling compassion), and Wairua (the spirit or soul). Thus, according to the Ngati Whatua o Orakei (Hawke, 2016), the Māori worldview can be described as seeing all things as being connected, not in separate boxes.

In summary, we conclude that several sustainability themes common to each tradition

can be identified from these traditional examples, including that humans are interconnected to the laws of nature in fundamentally important ways and that everything in the universe is interdependent, that humans are responsible for conserving the resources of their environment, and that the environment should not be mistreated or polluted.

#### 4. Maharishi Vedic Science and the Vedic Tradition

The relationship of Vedic Science to language (Haney, 1989) and literary theory (Orme-Johnson, 1987) has been considered. Of significance is Setzer and Fairchild's (1997) analysis of Vedic Science, culture and what they call "the decline of literary humanism" (p. 123) because they contrast Vedic Science with structuralist and post-structuralist language theories, suggesting it be called a "metatheory" or theory of "unified consciousness". The nature and scope of his Vedic Science have been provided by Maharishi in several publications (1996a, 1997) and by other researchers (Chandler, 2011). These can be summarised as: (a) pure consciousness is the source of all the laws of nature, the field of Natural Law which gives rise to all the forms and phenomena in creation, (b) pure consciousness is the home of complete knowledge, the Veda, and the source of language and culture, (c) every individual can contact and enliven the full potential of pure consciousness for benefit in all walks of life, (d) individuals can rise to higher states of consciousness, resulting in thought, speech, and action in accord with Natural Law, and (d) groups of meditating individuals can enliven coherence in collective consciousness and thereby change the course of social and environmental life.

##### 4.1. Existence of Pure Consciousness

At the core of Maharishi Vedic Science is the understanding of pure consciousness—an unmanifest, unbounded, eternal field of pure creative intelligence, pure wakefulness, from which all physical creation emerges. Pure consciousness is, according to Maharishi (1996b, pp. 17-19), "the most basic element in life; our body, our behaviour, and our environment are all expressions of

consciousness. Consciousness is fundamental to life. It is the prime mover of life. Every word that we speak and every action that we perform is an impulse of consciousness". In the language of Vedic Science, pure consciousness is *Ātmā* (आत्मा), the "Self" of everyone and everything; according to the Vedic tradition, it is the "Self established in itself" (*Tadā drashtuḥ swarūpe avasthānam, tada drṣṭuḥ: svarūpeḥ avasthānam, Yoga Sūtra*, 1:3). It is transcendental, unseen, hidden, silent, and self-referral, but at the same time the "prime mover of life" because all tendencies or "reverberations of the Self" emerge from "within the self-referral state and yet remain within the state of pure consciousness" (*Vṛitti sārūpyam itaḥ atra, vṛittisā rūpyam itaḥ atra, Yoga Sūtra*, 1:4). Other names give to pure consciousness by Maharishi are Transcendental Consciousness (*Turiya chetana, तुरिय चेतन*), Being, Yoga (*योग*), pure intelligence, and pure existence (*Swayambhu, स्वयम्भु*). As Maharishi (1966) has explained:

Underneath the subtlest layer of all that exists in the relative field is the abstract, absolute field of pure Being [pure consciousness], which is unmanifested and transcendental. It is neither matter nor energy. It is pure Being, the state of pure existence. This state of pure existence underlies all that exists. Everything is the expression of all this pure existence or absolute Being which is the essential constituent of all relative life. The one eternal, unmanifested absolute Being manifests itself in many forms of lives and existences in creation. (p. 27)

Maharishi (1997) describes pure consciousness as the "unified field of all the laws of nature", the field of Natural Law (i.e., *Dharma, धर्म*), which is the source of "the fundamental building blocks of creation". It should be noted that Maharishi maintains pollution is caused by the "violation of Natural Law" and thus "pollution, problems, stress and failures in life" can be prevented by training individuals to not violate or go against the integrity and purpose of Natural Law (Maharishi, 1996b, p. 89).

##### 4.2. Complete Knowledge of Veda

Maharishi Vedic Science is the science of the

Veda and Vedic Literature, the science of complete knowledge and its inherent organising power. Veda is located in the field of pure consciousness (in what Maharishi (1997, pp. 4-5) calls the “common basis of all streams of knowledge”), and results from the coming together of the knower (or Rishi, रishi), the process of knowing (Devatā, देवता), and the object of knowledge (Chhandas, छन्दस्), where consciousness is conscious of its own existence, its own Self. In this way, “knowledge blossoms in the togetherness of knower, knowing, and known” (Maharishi, 1997, p. 176), in the unification of three fundamental aspects of knowledge.

This unified state of knowledge is called Samhita (संहिता) in Vedic Science; such a state of knowledge can be known by direct experience in the unified field of pure consciousness, the unmanifest and unified source of all thoughts, speech and action of the individual and the source of all material forms and phenomena in creation. For this reason, in Maharishi Vedic Science the Veda is referred to as the “root of all laws” (Vedo akhilo dharma-mūlam, वेदो अखिलो धर्ममूलम्, *Manu Smṛiti*, 2.6), the root of all languages and cultures. Hence, the Vedic Literature represents the expressed aspect of the Veda and is an account of the innumerable laws of nature which govern the physical universe, as well as the human body (Maharishi, 1995). Maharishi (1997) explains:

All this knowledge has been kept alive since time immemorial in the oral tradition of the Vedic Pandits of India for the very reason that the unified field and its self-referral dynamics is the basis of the entire diverse creation, and therefore cannot ever be forgotten or lost; being consciousness, fully awake within itself, it cannot ever forget itself, it cannot ever be lost. (p. 7)

### 4.3. Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi Program

The Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program are described as a simple and natural way for each individual to contact pure consciousness, and enliven the values of infinite intelligence, energy, and bliss in every aspect of human life in order to unlock “the

hidden genius” of every human being (Maharishi, 1978a, p. 135). Maharishi (1996b, pp. 252-253) explains that Transcendental Meditation is the program which “takes attention to Transcendental Consciousness and enlivens the total potential of Natural Law in the conscious mind of everyone. The precision and order in the practice of Transcendental Meditation makes the procedure systematic and mathematical”, and thus Transcendental Meditation is a technology of “self-referral consciousness”. In the Vedic Literature, the way to experience pure consciousness is to “transcend” thoughts, speech and action, to go beyond mental activity by being “without the three Guṇas, O Arjuna!” (Nistrai-guṇyo bhava-Arjuna, निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवार्जुन, *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 2.45, or be without the three main forces [gunas] of nature), and once “established in the Self, perform action” (Yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi, योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि, *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 2:48). Maharishi Vedic Science explains that “this balanced state of mind is called Yoga” (Samatvaṃ yoga ucyaṭe, समत्वं योग उच्यते, *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 2:48).

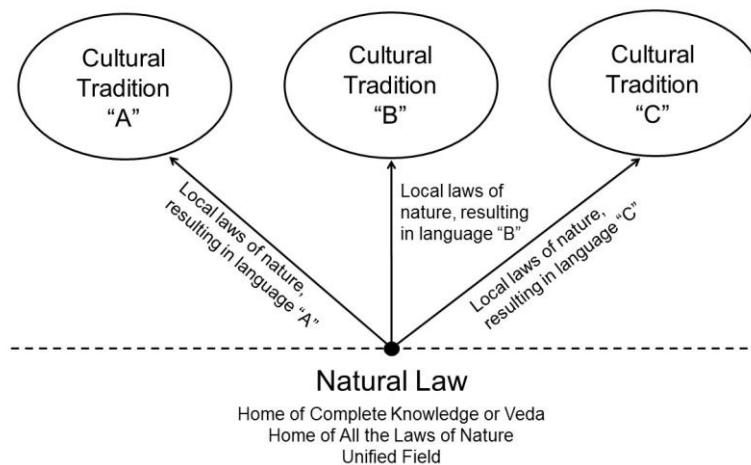
The TM-Sidhi program, an advanced aspect of Transcendental Meditation, goes further and “trains the individual to think and act from the level of Transcendental Consciousness, greatly enhancing the co-ordination between mind and body, and developing the ability to enliven Natural Law to support all avenues to fulfil one’s desires” (Maharishi, 1996b, p. 258), phenomena arising from greater integration of individual brain physiology. One of the hallmarks of this type of unique physiological activity is the property of ‘coherence’ (i.e., significantly great levels of synchronicity across all regions of the brain). Several reviews of research documenting these outcomes are in circulation (Dillbeck, 2011), including one which indicates practice of the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program increases one’s respect for traditional values (Gelderloos & van den Berg, 1989).

### 4.4. Life in Accord with Natural Law

Ṛk Veda states for those established in pure consciousness, Natural Law becomes the “charioteer” of all thought, speech, and action (Yatīnāṃ Brahmā bhavati sārathiḥ, यतीनां ब्रह्मा भवति सारथिः, *Rk Veda*, 1:158:6); that is, according

to Maharishi (1995, p. 275), Natural Law spontaneously and automatically guides life in a progressive and sustainable direction. Elsewhere, this phenomenon has been described as living “higher state of consciousness” (e.g., Alexander, Boyer, & Alexander, 1987). Higher states of consciousness develop as a result of the infinite intelligence and knowledge of Natural Law being enlivened in individual consciousness, resulting in life more in accord with the laws of

nature. Some psychologists therefore characterise higher states of consciousness as levels of development which represent “the natural continuation of human development beyond the stage of adult formal operations ... [which] may reflect a developmental level of subtlety and comprehensiveness that goes beyond the level which can be readily appreciated within the boundaries of ordinary adult thought” (Alexander et al., 1987, p. 91).



**Figure 1**

*Relationship of Natural Law to Different Laws of Nature, Which Gives Rise to Different Languages and Cultural Traditions*

In Maharishi Vedic Science, this level of human development is called Cosmic Consciousness or Turyatit chetana (दुर्यतित् चेतन), to contrast it with the aforementioned Turiya chetana, because the ‘transcendental’ nature of pure consciousness has become a permanently ‘lived’ reality on all levels of thought, speech and behaviour. Maharishi emphasizes that this state of life can only be lived ‘spontaneously’, can only be lived naturally. According to Maharishi (1994, p. 34), as consciousness grows one begins to realise “I know the Veda, this great Totality” (Vedāham etaṁ puruṣaṁ mahāntam, वेदाहमेतं पुरुषं महान्तम्, *Shwetāshwatara Upanishad*, 3:8), and ultimately “I am the Veda” (Vedo‘ham, वेदोऽहम्, *Devī Upanishad*, 1).

In addition to the role of Natural Law in thought, speech, and action, of relevance to this study is Maharishi’s explanation of the relation of Natural Law to different cultural traditions, as shown in Figure 1. According to Maharishi (1978a):

Different cultures arise from different natural factors, such as different climatic and geographic conditions. Somewhere there are mountains, somewhere valleys, somewhere hard rocks, somewhere deserts, somewhere fertile soil, somewhere heat, somewhere snow—all these factors underlie the culture of the people living in those lands. That is why even within small countries, habits and mannerisms change, and even accents of the same language are different from area to area. Just one mile this way and one mile that way, habits, traditions, and accents change. The people justify the differences by saying: ‘This is our ancestral tradition’. (pp. 135-136)

For this reason, Maharishi goes on to explain that as a result of incorporating his Vedic Science into daily life, “people begin to live in accord with Natural Law, that is, in accordance



with the culture of the land. It is Natural Law that maintains life everywhere and gives every nation its cultural traditions” (Maharishi, 1978a, p. 135).

#### 4.5. Coherence in Collective Consciousness

As a consequence of developing higher states of consciousness in individuals, greater coherence is also generated in the ‘collective consciousness’ of society (i.e., in the totality of all the individuals’ consciousness in any given social group). This increased coherence in collective consciousness when as few of one percent of a given population practices Transcendental Meditation or when more than the square root of one percent of a population practices the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program together in a group has been marked by an improved quality of life at both the city and country levels, as measured by decreased crime, suicide, divorce, and traffic accident and fatality rates, and by increased harmony and reduced conflicts at the international level (Dillbeck, 2011). This phenomenon is called the Maharishi Effect.

The Vedic expression: “In the vicinity of coherence (i.e., the coherence of brain physiology created by Transcendental Meditation) hostile tendencies are eliminated” (Tat sannidhau vairātyagah, तत्सन्निधौ वैरत्यागः, *Yoga Sūtra*, 2:35) encapsulates this principle; the Maharishi Effect has been explained in more detail elsewhere (Orme-Johnson & Dillbeck, 1987), and such an initiative on the collective level, according to Maharishi (1978a, pp. 9-10), fulfills “the concern of wise men over ecological pollution and destruction and the wastage of natural resources”.

We note that Maharishi has written extensively on the importance of developing what he calls “cultural integrity” (e.g., 1978a, pp. 133-145), which occurs when people begin to live in accord with Natural Law, in accordance with the culture of their land. Maharishi has also acknowledged the importance of tradition as “those modes of creative intelligence which, embedded in the Nature of life, have withstood the test of time and...serve as a safe ground for currents of creativity to grow and find fulfilment generation after generation” (as cited in Fergusson & Bonshek, 2015, p. 225).

## 5. Indigenous Sustainability and Maharishi Vedic Science

We recognise that there are vastly different Indigenous traditions and languages throughout the world which have operated for thousands of years in distinct and unique ecologies, each having its own set of specialised principles and practices, and each having a valuable view of the environment and how it should be sustainably nurtured to produce the most salutary outcome for its people.

To answer research question 2, we have identified eight major themes of Indigenous sustainability from the scientific literature and presented them on the left-hand side of Table 1, however for brevity we have detailed only four themes. These themes are relatively consistent across the two domains of Indigenous sustainability surveyed above, although perhaps not all groups uniformly identify and acknowledge each theme as their own. Thus, the following is not meant to homogenise or trivialise cultural or linguistic traditions; it is merely an attempt to find common threads of sustainability across Indigenous traditions and, if possible, locate their source in the Vedic tradition of knowledge. Thus, on the right-hand side of Table 1, we have listed themes from Maharishi Vedic Science which support or correspond to the Indigenous sustainability themes.

### 5.1. Theme #2: Everything in the Universe is Interconnected; Our Lives are Interdependent on Each Other and on Nature

The concept that everything in the universe is interconnected and interdependent is common to Indigenous traditions; even Plato said “all nature is akin” (Arnheim, 1969, p. 7). Maharishi (1966), too, maintains that “life is one continuous and homogenous whole” (p. 73) and “the relative fields of life are so closely interconnected” (p. 76). He has identified the source of this reality of life in the unified field of pure consciousness when he says:

Pure consciousness is a field of infinite correlation pervading the whole of nature, so any negative or positive impulse at any single point is instantly transmitted to the entire field and accordingly [that impulse] damages or

enriches all life everywhere....The relationship between man and nature is indivisible. (Maharishi, 1978a, p. 9)

Maharishi has even explained how “pollution” is caused if the integrity of this view of nature is abused, when he points out that “all the laws of nature are so intimately connected that the isolation of any one law will create imbalance in any field of life...if the part is not connected

to the whole, then pollution is inevitable” (Maharishi, 1994, pp. 297-299). Of significance is the finding that individuals who practice the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program develop cognitive flexibility, suggestive of a greater awareness of the interdependence and interconnectedness of nature, and an improved ability to deal simultaneously with both the abstract and the complex (Dillbeck, 2011).

**Table 1**

*Summary of Sustainability Themes in Traditional Indigenous Cultures and in the Vedic Tradition*

Theme of Sustainability in Traditional Cultures	Theme of Sustainability in the Vedic Tradition
1. We have been here since the beginning of time.	1. The Vedic tradition is an ‘eternal’ (Nitya, नित्य, also meaning ‘indigenous’ or “from the beginning”) tradition of knowledge.
2. Everything in the universe is interconnected; our lives are interdependent on each other and on nature.	2. Life is one continuous and homogenous whole, and the relative fields of life are interconnected.
3. We do not “own” the land; we “belong” to the land and are indivisible from it.	3. The relationship between man (Manuṣya, मनुष्य) and nature (Prakṛiti, प्रकृति) is indivisible (Niravayava, निरवयव); this is the natural state of things (Nisargabhāva, निसर्गभाव).
4. We acknowledge and respect that all plants and animals have a “life force”.	4. Every aspect of life, including every plant and animal, has a “life force” (severally called Prakṛiti, प्रकृति, Prāna, प्राण or shakti, शक्ति).
5. Our traditional knowledge of resource use and management is reflected in our intimate relationship with, and knowledge of, the natural world around us.	5. Through Transcendental Meditation the individual maintains the purity of pure consciousness in the nature of his mind and comes into harmony (Samādhi, समाधि) with his surroundings and as a consequence his surroundings come into harmony with him.
6. We are stewards of the environment in which we live, and we know that our health is intricately tied to the health of our environment.	6. To make full use of nature, man must learn to live in harmony with nature.
7. We are responsible for conserving and preserving the resources of our environment, and therefore we should not mistreat or pollute our environment.	7. To misuse or destroy the environment is to deal a fatal blow to ourselves.
8. We have a responsibility to share our resources; traditional economies are “collective needs” based rather than “individual want” based.	8. We should develop enlightened individuals who “lovingly own the whole world” and fulfill the “centuries-old cherished ideal of ‘help thy neighbour’”.

## 5.2. Theme #4: We Acknowledge and Respect That All Plants and Animals Have a ‘Life Force’

The life force spoken about in traditional cultures is conceived differently in different places and in different times (for example, in Māori culture it can be Mana, Tapu, or Mauri, depending on the context). In the Vedic

tradition, pure consciousness—Ātmā—is the life-force of all creation; in the language of the Veda, the energy (or infinite dynamism) of Ātmā is called ‘Prakṛiti’. Maharishi (1995, p. 370) explains that pure consciousness has two names: Purusha (पुरुष) and Prakṛiti (प्रकृति); the silent value of consciousness is Purusha, while the dynamic value is Prakṛiti. “We find Being [pure consciousness—Ātmā]”, Maharishi

(1966) says:

At the basis of all activity, behaviour and the various ways and forms of living. Being is the most glorious, most precious and most laudable basis of all living. Being is the plane of cosmic law, the basis of all the laws of nature, which lies at the root of all creation and evolution. It is possible to glorify all fields of life and living by consciously infusing the nature of Being into all the different fields of activity and behaviour. (pp. 32-33)

### **5.3. Theme #5: Our Traditional Knowledge of Resource Use and Management is Reflected in Our Intimate Relationship With, and Knowledge of, the Natural World around Us**

Indigenous approaches to nature and the long-term sustainable management of the environment rest on a profound and intimate knowledge of the laws of nature in a specific locale or region. Similarly, Maharishi (1966, p. 171) has stated that “through the practice of Transcendental Meditation the individual maintains the purity of Being [pure consciousness] in the very nature of his mind and comes into harmony with his surroundings, and his surroundings come into harmony with him”. In the language of Vedic Science: Dharmo rakshati rakshitah (He who cares for Natural Law, Natural Law cares for him, धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः, *Manu Smṛiti*, 8.15). “In no other way”, Maharishi (1966) suggests:

Is it possible to turn one’s surroundings to one’s maximum advantage. Those who try to change their surroundings and convert them to their advantage by force are recorded in history as having only partially succeeded in their attempts. Even the greatest monarchs and dictators the world has known were not able to make full use of their surroundings. They were unable to mould all circumstances to their wishes because they had not developed themselves on all levels of life to win the favour of the laws of nature. It is necessary to be in tune with nature, raising the level of consciousness so that it enters the realm of harmony and

peace which lies in the eternal status of absolute, transcendental pure consciousness. (p. 100)

Certainly Maharishi (1966, p. 171) agrees that “other attempts to maintain harmony with the surroundings...all have their value” and being “compassionate to one’s surroundings” is of importance, but he also emphasises that “all this kindness and compassion and help for others [and the surroundings] will be more fruitful and valuable if the individual’s inner life is pure”. Application of Maharishi Vedic Science, specifically the growth of higher states of consciousness and coherence in collective consciousness, “will [thereby] fulfil the concern of wise men over ecological pollution and destruction and the wastage of natural resources” (Maharishi, 1978b, pp. 9-10).

### **5.4. Theme #7: We are Responsible for Conserving and preserving the Resources of Our Environment, and Therefore We Should Not Mistreat or Pollute Our Environment**

Indigenous traditions acknowledge the need to conserve and preserve their respective environments. Maharishi expands this principle by emphasizing the need to change consciousness when he says:

Our inability to see clearly is not due to some inadequate arrangement of the objects of our vision. Although, as a result of restoring our sight, we shall be better able to rearrange those objects, our first task is to reclaim our full powers of seeing. Although there are certainly many things in the world to be put right, we shall not be able to accomplish this humane ideal by merely reshuffling the environment. It will never humanly succeed until we can see and appreciate [our] environment at its full value, until we can envision all its possibilities with expanded mind and heart so that they may be actualized to the advantage of everyone and everything in nature (as cited in Fergusson & Bonshek, 2015, p. 219).

A common theme in both Indigenous and Vedic traditions suggests we should not mistreat or pollute our environment, but Maharishi (1978b, p. 9) “brings us the message

of oneness of human beings with nature and the environment—attunement with Natural Law”. Maharishi (1978b, p. 9) maintains that “to misuse or destroy the environment is to deal a fatal blow to ourselves because we are indivisible from our surroundings”; he has identified activities associated with “energy and other vital natural resources such as various metals” which have “succeeded in devastating [the] environment in terms of flora and fauna, and entire lakes, rivers, and forests have become the dealers of disease rather than refreshment, health, and pleasure” (p. 9) being particularly harmful.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

In answering research question 1, this paper has presented two Indigenous approaches to what we now call “sustainability”. Principles identified in these domains include the long-held realisation that humans are connected to and interconnected with the laws of nature in fundamentally important ways, and that everything in the universe is interdependent. Moreover, these cultures recognise that humans are responsible for conserving and preserving the resources of their environment. In the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people like the Wanindiljaugwa people, the level of environmental stewardship extends to conserving ‘the southeast wind’, and such conservation was even practiced at the species level (e.g., Leach, 2004).

Further, Indigenous cultures maintain they are stewards of the environment; they recognised that their health was intricately tied to the health of our environment and that environment should not be mistreated or polluted. In answering research 2 we have shown that Maharishi Vedic Science, derived from the ancient Vedic tradition, is also a tradition of sustainability, and many of the identified Indigenous views of the environment are supported and encouraged by Maharishi Vedic Science, thus providing a hope for a more sustainable human and environmental future.

## Acknowledgement

The authors wish to acknowledge the contribution of Herewini Austin, who reviewed the manuscript for indigenous accuracy and wrote in response: Nau te rourou, naku te

rourou, ka ora ai te iwi; “Your food basket, my food basket, together we feed the people. Our combined knowledge is to uplift and fulfil us all”.

## References

- Ahuriri-Driscoll, A., Baker, V., Hepi, M., Hudson, M., Mika, C., & Tiakiwai, S. (2008). *The future of rongoā Māori: Wellbeing and sustainability*. Christchurch, New Zealand: Institute of Environmental Science and Research and Ministry of Health.
- Aklujkar, A. (1996). The early history of Sanskrit as supreme language. In J. E. M. Houben (Ed.), *Ideology and status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the history of the Sanskrit language* (pp. 59-86), Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Alexander, C. N., Boyer, R. W., & Alexander, V. (1987). Higher states of consciousness in the Vedic psychology of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi: A theoretical introduction and research review. *Modern Science and Vedic Science*, 1(1), 89-126.
- Arnheim, R. (1969). *Visual thinking*. Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- Burrow, T. (2001). *The Sanskrit language*. New Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- Chandler, K. (2011). Modern science and Vedic science: An introduction. In M. Scaroni-Fisher & D. Fisher (Eds.), *Consciousness-based education and sustainability* (Vol. 11, pp. 397-430). Fairfield, Iowa: Maharishi University of Management Press.
- Cort, J. E. (2006). Green Jainism? Notes and queries toward a possible Jain environmental ethic. In C. H. Chapple (Ed.), *Jainism and ecology: Nonviolence in the web of life* (pp. 63-94), Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- Costanza, R., Graumlich, L., & Steffen, W. (Eds.). (2007). *Sustainability or collapse: An integrated history and future of people on earth*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Costanza, R., Graumlich, L., Steffen, W., Crumley, C., Dearing, J., Hibbard, K., ... Schimel, D. (2007). Sustainability or collapse: What can we learn from integrating the history of humans and the

- rest of nature? *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment*, 36(7), 522-527.
- Dillbeck, M. C. (Ed.) (2011). *Scientific research on Maharishi's Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program: Collected papers* (Vol. 6). Fairfield, Iowa: Maharishi University of Management Press.
- Eckersley, R. (2008). Wretched or contented? The politics of past life. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 13(2), 87-92.
- Fergusson, L., & Bonshek, A. (2015). *The unmanifest canvas: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi on the arts, creativity and perception*. Fairfield, Iowa: Maharishi University of Management Press.
- Fergusson, L., Wells, G., & Kettle, D. (2017). Principles and practice of sustainability in Maharishi Vedic Science. *Journal of Health and Environmental Research*, 3(3-1), 1-15.
- French, J. (2013). *Let the land speak—A history of Australia: How the land created our nation*. Sydney, Australia: HarperCollins Publishers Australia.
- Gammage, B. (2011). *The biggest estate of earth: How Aborigines made Australia*. Crows Nest; New South Wales: Allen & Unwin.
- Gelderloos, P., & van den Berg, W. (1989). Maharishi's TM-Sidhi program: Participating in the infinite creativity of nature to enliven the totality of the cosmic psyche in all aspects of life. *Modern Science and Vedic Science*, 2(4), 373-412.
- Griffiths, S., & Kinnane, S. (2010). *Kimberley aboriginal caring for country plan—Healthy country, healthy people*. Report prepared for the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, Halls Creek, Western Australia.
- Grove, R. (2006). Revolutionary weather: The climatic and economic crisis of 1788-1795 and the discovery of El Nino. In R. Costanza, L. J. Graumlich, & W. Steffen (Eds.), *Sustainability or collapse? An integrated history and future of people on earth* (pp. 151-168). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Haney, W. S. (1989). The theory of deconstruction and Maharishi's Vedic Science. *Modern Science and Vedic Science*, 2(4), 415-441.
- Hawke, G. (2016). *Grant Hawke: The holistic approach*. Lincoln, New Zealand: Landcare Research (Manaaki Whenua), Ngati Whatua o Orakei Maori Trust Board.
- Klein, U. (2000). Belief-views on nature: Western environmental ethics and Maori world-views. *New Zealand Journal of Environmental Law*, 4, 81-120.
- Langton, M. (2006). Earth, wind, fire and water: The social and spiritual construction of water in Aboriginal societies. In B. David, B. Barker, & I. J. McNiven (Eds.), *The social archaeology of Australian indigenous societies* (pp. 139-160). Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Acton, ACT, Australia: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Leach, E. (2004). *The structural study of myth and totemism*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Long, S., & Memmott, P. (2007). *Aboriginal mobility and the sustainability of communities: Case studies from north-west Queensland and eastern Northern Territory* (Working Paper No. 5). Alice Springs: Desert Knowledge CRC.
- Lozano, R., Ceulemans, K., & Seatter, C. S. (2015). Teaching organisational change management for sustainability: Designing and delivering a course at the University of Leeds to better prepare future sustainability change agents. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 106, 205-215.
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1966). *The Science of Being and art of living*. Washington, D.C.: Age of Enlightenment Press.
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1969). *Maharishi Mahesh Yogi on the Bhagavad-Gita: A new translation and commentary, chapters 1-6*. London: Penguin.
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1978a). *Enlightenment to every individual, invincibility to every nation*. West Germany: Maharishi European Research University Press.
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1978b). A time of crisis: Environment. *World Government News*, 9, 5-13.
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1994). *Maharishi Vedic University: Introduction*. Holland: Maharishi Vedic University Press.
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1995). *Maharishi's absolute theory of government*. Holland: Maharishi Vedic University Press.
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1996a). *Inaugurating Maharishi Vedic University*. India: Maharishi Vedic Vishwavidyalaya Press.

- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1996b). *Maharishi forum of natural law and national law for doctors: Perfect health for everyone, disease-free society*. India: Maharishi Vedic University Press.
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. (1997). *Celebrating perfection in education*. India: Maharishi Vedic University Press.
- Nelson, L. E. (2012). Ecology. In K.A. Jacobsen (Ed.), *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (Vol. 4, pp. 663-676). Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.
- Orme-Johnson, D. W., & Dillbeck, M. C. (1987). Maharishi's program to create world peace: Theory and research. *Modern Science and Vedic Science*, 1(2), 207-259.
- Orme-Johnson, R. (1987). A unified field theory of literature. *Modern Science and Vedic Science*, 1(3), 323-373.
- Prime, R. (2002). *Vedic ecology: Practical wisdom for surviving the 21st century*. San Rafael, California: Mandala Publishing.
- Ranugedevi, R. (2012). Environmental ethics in the Hindu Vedas and Puranas in India. *African Journal of History and Culture*, 4(1), 1-3.
- Setzer, S., & Fairchild, T. (1997). Consciousness and literary studies. *Modern Science and Vedic Science*, 7(1), 109-140.
- Sharma, R. (2015). Vedic science and environment. *International Journal of Research: Granthaalayah*, 3(9), 1-4.
- Steingard, D. S., Fitzgibbons, D. E., & Heaton, D. (2004). Exploring the frontiers of environmental management: A natural law-based perspective. *Journal of Human Values*, 10(2), 79-97.
- Street, B., Pishghadam, R., & Zeinali, S. (2014). Changes and challenges of literacy practices: A case of a village in Iran. *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language*, 3(1), 16-27.
- Sveiby, K-E., & Skuthorpe, T. (2006). *Treading lightly: The hidden wisdom of the world's oldest people*. New York: Allen & Unwin.
- Tilbury, D., & Cooke, K. (2005). *A national review of environmental education and its contribution to sustainability in Australia: Frameworks for sustainability—key findings*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage and Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability (ARIES).
- Tiwari, S. (2016). *Origin of environmental science from the Vedas*. New Delhi, India: Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan.
- Whakataki, K. (2016). *Toolkit guide, 2.0: A Maori perspective on sustainability*. Auckland, New Zealand: The Outlook for Someday Forum.