

Relationship with Arne Naess

Bill Devall

I discovered Arne Naess while cruising through academic journals in the library at Humboldt State University, Arcata, California. I participated in Earthday, 1970, but as I became more deeply involved in conservation activism during the early 1970s, I was more and more dissatisfied with the philosophical writings underlying activism. I read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*, but I wanted more. I found what I was looking for in an essay by Naess in *Inquiry*, an interdisciplinary academic journal that Naess founded in Norway. Naess' essay was based on a talk he gave at an international conference held in Bucharest in 1972. In the essay, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement, A Summary," Naess contrasted the shallow ecology movement which is concerned with pollution and resource depletion with the deep ecology movement which is concerned with diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness.

I began to correspond with Naess who was at the University of Oslo. Naess responded to my typed letters with handwritten notes written on small pieces of paper. In later years, I would send him emails and his wife, Kit Fai would respond to me via email. During the years that Alan Drengson and I were editing *The Selected Works of Arne Naess*, especially Volume X, *Deep Ecology of Wisdom: Explorations in Unities of Nature and Cultures* our extensive correspondence was based on revising various versions of Naess' essays as his ideas evolved based on his continuing reflections on various topics.

I enjoyed listening to Naess talk in person. His quiet voice and his ability to reflect on his own experiences provided insights upon which I reflected. One time when Naess and I were traveling on an overnight train in Australia going from one academic conference to another, I asked Naess about his life in Norway during the Nazi occupation of World War II. Hitler kept about 500,000 troops in Norway throughout the war because he thought the allies would invade Europe through Norway. Naess said he wanted to be part of the resistance, but friends convinced him to remain on the faculty of the University of Oslo. He actually worked undercover for Norwegian

Intelligence. He was in close contact with members of the resistance, and he said that a few times, arms passed through his office at the university. The resistance in Norway provided the allies with important information on troop movements and other German activities in Norway. Some time after the war Naess was given an award for his contributions to intelligence during the war.

After the war ended, Naess was asked to lead a group of Norwegians who were given the task of bringing together Norwegians who had been tortured during the war, with the Norwegians who had done the torturing. The goal was to bring about reconciliation. Naess was very committed to nonviolent direct action and especially to Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence in the progress of society.

I was deeply involved in activism concerning the protection of old growth forests in the Northwest region of the United States, and I was constantly helping activists ask deeper questions about Place and protection of Place based on non violent principles.

From the early 1970s through the 1990s, Naess constantly sought to develop and clarify the bases of the deep ecology movement. While camping together with George Sessions he wrote a *platform* for the deep ecology movement. Naess suggested that many people coming from different religious and philosophical traditions could generally agree with the statements in the platform and when they realized their common agreements they could work together for social change.

Naess asserted that he was not an academic philosopher, but that he lived philosophy. He acted in the world and reflected on his actions in the world, and the actions of other people and on our treatment of nature. He demonstrated his approach through his actions at Tvergastein in the mountains of southern Norway. He wrote about his long relationship with the mountain in his essay "An Example of Place: Tvergastein." He describes his intimate relationship with plants, animals, snow, and the simplicity of writing inside the hut he built on the mountain. He used minimal amounts of wood to stay warm. He developed his own *ecosophy* while living in the hut over the course of many years. He called his philosophy *Ecosophy T* after the name of the place that became his Place. He traveled the world encouraging

other people to develop their own ecosophies because diversity and deep questioning were major aspects of his teaching.

I developed my ecosophy in my book *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends; Practicing Deep Ecology*. (1988)

Naess continued his talks and travels through the 1990s.

Many of the central ideas he developed are included in the recent anthology of his writings *Ecology of Wisdom: Writings by Arne Naess* edited by Alan Drengson and myself (2008 Counterpoint: Berkeley.)