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If Thomas Berry was a Forest...

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If Thomas Berry was a forest one could travel for days and not reach the other side. He would be many cool, rich coves and secret trails that led to natural temples. He would be both diverse, lush marshes at his edges and high, lonely peaks rising higher.

From the tops of the ridges one could look over the vast forest of Thomas Berry feeling the collective hum of life. Soaring birds would land and make nests. Squirrels would gather acorns. Wolves would roam.

If Thomas Berry was a forest people would tell stories of hidden treasures and special places only known to a few. He would be a primary forest—old and new, diverse and immense.

A Tribute to the Living Knowledge of Thomas Berry

Thomas Berry was rich with enthusiasm the evening I spent with him a few years back. I recall,

I was escorted through the busy restaurant to a booth in which sat Thomas Berry back in a corner in a suit that had grown a bit too big. I could see the first stock market crash, the dustbowl, fields of corn and his many decades of living all woven into his presence.

I noticed immediately how his eyes sparkle when you catch them. His southern drawl warmed me but I had to tune into it, finding it soft and distant at first like a breeze stirring up leaves. But once my ear found his tune I heard his song loud and clear.

One of Thomas' main points that night was that we had to stop living in the 20th century and open up to the 21st century. This involves fundamental shifts in all aspects of our human culture. We need to consider the Gaia macrocosm not just the human microcosm. This sixth mass extinction we are now in has been spurred on by the astronomical growth in human population and economics.

He commented that there were 1 billion people in 1540, 2 billion in 1920, 3 billion in 1960 and soon we will push through 7 billion. He said the economic system has grown at six times that rate! These huge pressures on the environment are bringing

an end to the Cenozoic era. We pondered whether we would perish or awaken to a new Ecozoic era by reconnecting with nature? He seemed hopeful.

I see now years after this encounter with Thomas that my awareness has grown so much. I realize how we must keep alive the rich diverse forests of the world if we are to remain resilient.

In Wilderness is the preservation of the world

-Thoreau

At the edges of the forests we humans can truly thrive in connection with the surrounding ecosystems for the first time in recorded history. The time for us has come to evolve into **Gaian Consciousness**.

Thomas mentioned how important it is to give names to things. He recalled how hard it was to remember his nature experiences as a young child when he did not know the names of the plants. He shared how, when he had become a boy scout and learned the name "oak" for the tree he had known his whole life, the world of the oaks in all their diversity and detail opened up so much more. He could then remember the details of the forest through their names and share his experiences with others. He recounted an article he had written long ago called "Goldenrod". He seemed to have a great love for nature!

Our conversations were broken by the frequent appearance of waiters, but we held the focus well knowing the sacredness of our time together. We had a number of rounds of good, heartfelt laughter. And though the restaurant got louder as the dinnertime peaked, Thomas too seemed to become louder and more animated. Somehow the hours flew by. Our meal disappeared and became dessert and then this too was finished and it was time for us to go our own ways. We all rose together from the booth and Thomas gave me a hug and placed his hand on my head in a sort of a blessing (after all he is a priest) and let me know beyond words that I was on the right path. I will always carry that time with me. And as much as I enjoy his writing and the enthusiasm people have for the torch he has lit, I will most remember the gleam in his eyes and the assuring smile on his face as a man who has seen into the future and knows everything is going to be all right.