

A Sacred Balance: a reading by Dr. David Suzuki

BY FARHAD DASTUR

The Sacred Balance:

Rediscovering our Place in Nature

Dr. David Suzuki and Amanda McConnell

Greystone Press and The David Suzuki Foundation

This point is not a new one. Suzuki has been speaking about environmental and social justice issues since the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's influential book, *Silent Spring*. Through all those years both his methods of persuasion and the content of his message have remained essentially constant.

Saturday's talk had his signature blend of metaphor, analogy, emotional appeal, vivid imagery, humour, anecdote, personal narrative, and alarming extrapolations of scientific data. He quoted the report *Warning to Humanity*, an urgent plea to immediate environmental action written and endorsed by the world's most eminent scientists.

He reminded us, for example, that humans are essentially big blobs of water held together with some organic thickener. He pleaded for us to acknowledge that humans are animals and, therefore, depend upon a healthy ecosystem. What would happen to stores, he observed, if they truly understood the implications of their signs, "No animals allowed?"

Suzuki has been a clear, consistent and articulate voice for such issues as deforestation, unrestrained growth, pollution, over-fishing and the rights of indigenous

peoples. What surprised me most about Saturday's talk was that Suzuki's approach to

it. That polemical approach was not evident on Saturday. Suzuki's new approach is to

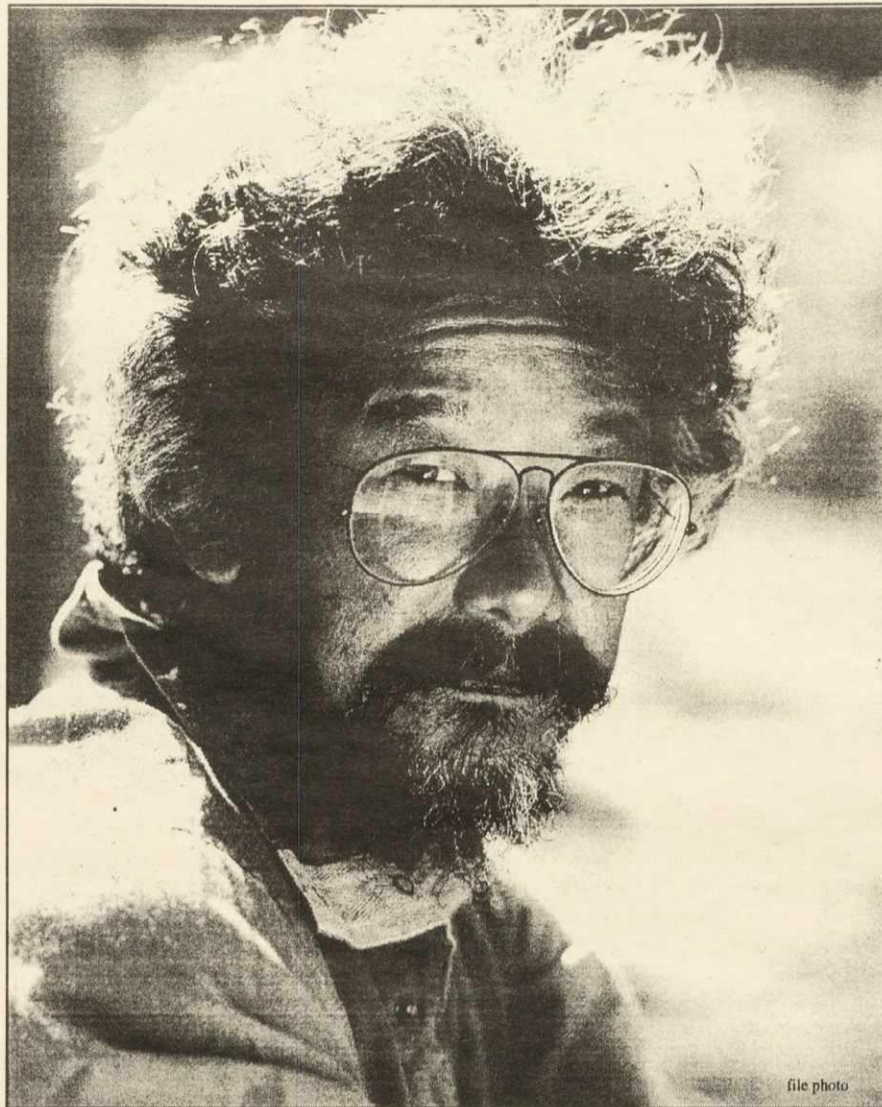
Because these values support life, they are non-negotiable. Secondly, he proposed that the

environmental movement move beyond the politics of confrontation and argumentation towards a people-centred, coalition-building, and value-grounded philosophy.

Deforestation, for example, should not be debated in the oppositional terms of jobs versus the environment. People need to first endorse the intrinsic value of trees and their vital role in cleaning the air and sustaining biodiversity. Then people need to ask what are the available options in terms of meaningful, long-term employment, preservation of sacred spaces, multiple recreational uses and ecological balance. The correct decision will be the one that takes into account people's desire for social justice, equity, stability, and future sustainability.

Suzuki's new approach is a mature, sophisticated and effective strategy for change. It is a fresh and welcome approach given the sordid state of our planet's health on the eve of the Millennium.

The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering our Place in Nature is available from Frog Hollow Books for \$29.95.



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effecting change seems to have transformed. In the past his mission was to wake people from their self-destructive slumbers. He would paint a bleak picture of the problem and imply that only two choices were available: continue the madness or stop

take the strategic position that all groups with competing interests must start with a common set of non-negotiable values. These values—which he calls "sacred" because they are worthy of our reverence, include the right to clean air, water, soil, and energy.

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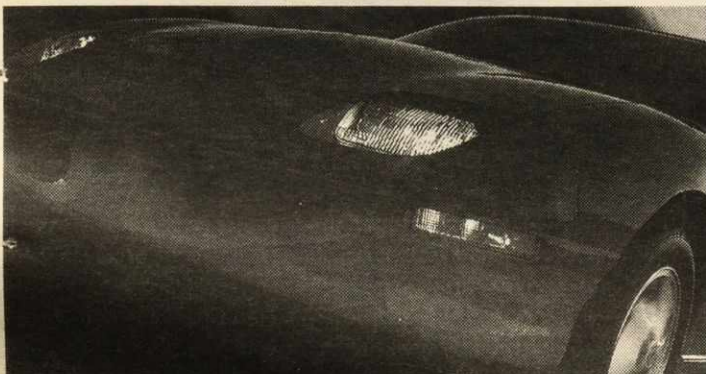
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