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Mending Humanity's Broken Inner Ecology: An Integral Ecology and Theory in Action Towards Ecological Preservation

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Abstract

The ecological crisis is a pressing global challenge, manifesting in climate disasters, environmental degradation, and rising inequality. Frameworks like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals highlight the urgency of action, supported by religious leaders such as Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*. While these calls for change are crucial, this study explores a deeper aspect: the human inner ecology. It posits that lasting ecological solutions must begin within the individual. Grounded in biblical Christian anthropology, Pope Francis's vision of integral ecology, and Ken Wilber's Integral Theory, the research presents ecological preservation as an internal, transformative process. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, the study examines personal stories from diverse spiritual traditions of individuals who have undergone significant transformation in their relationship with nature. These narratives highlight shared practices such as mindfulness, soul purification, non-violence, and earth-centered rituals that fostered reconnection with both self and environment. The research also led to the development of a conscious ecological workshop program, aimed at cultivating self-awareness, emotional resilience, spiritual renewal, and ecological responsibility within youth and community groups. By emphasizing practical application, the study offers a model for ecological conversion, asserting that meaningful change begins not just in policy but in the healing of the self.

Keywords: Christian anthropology, environmental preservation, inner ecology, integral ecology, integral theory

Introduction

The ecological crisis has deeply affected human experience, with numerous natural and human-caused catastrophes resulting in the loss of millions of lives, economic disruptions, worsening living conditions, and further degradation of the environment. Recognizing its gravity, the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development addresses the ecological crisis through various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2024). Religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, have also responded, most notably through Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which comprehensively addresses environmental destruction and urges the global community to take immediate and unified action (United States Conference of Bishops, 2024). From local initiatives like waste segregation and the 4Rs of waste management (Eco Resources, 2023) to global agreements on issues such as biodiversity, ozone depletion, and transboundary pollution, various measures have been implemented to counter ecological deterioration (Lopez-Claros, Dahl, and Groff, 2020). However, as Pope Francis reiterated in his 2023 apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum*, these efforts remain insufficient, warning that the planet may be approaching a breaking point, with climate change disproportionately affecting the vulnerable. He calls for deeper economic and political cooperation, alongside individual commitment, emphasizing the need for a "pilgrimage of reconciliation" with the Earth (#69) (CAFD, 2024).

Responding to this call, this research embraces the challenge of exploring a unique approach to the crisis, one that centers on mending humanity's inner ecology, which is seen as broken and crucial to solving external ecological problems. Brokenness of inner ecology refers to a state of internal imbalance or fragmentation within a person's emotional, mental, spiritual, and relational life. It is the disruption of the natural harmony that exists between a person's inner world (thoughts, emotions, beliefs, values, and spirit) and their external environment (community, nature, and the world at large). This approach focuses on subjective and intersubjective consciousness, proposing that without healing the inner ecological state of individuals, efforts to preserve the outer environment may falter. Thus, this study aims to explore how healing the broken inner ecology of humanity can contribute to ecological preservation. The specific objectives of the research are to: (1) understand human inner ecology and brokenness in the context of biblical Christian anthropology, its relation to the integral ecology of Pope Francis, and the integral theory of Ken Wilber; (2) identify elements in different spiritualities that contribute to healing inner brokenness; and (3) propose a conscious ecology workshop that integrates theory and practice to equip individuals in contributing meaningfully to ecological preservation.

This inquiry draws from a rich body of literature that is aligned with the themes of integral ecology, ecological preservation, eco-spirituality, and the concept of mending humanity's broken inner ecology. Sean Esbjörn-Hargens

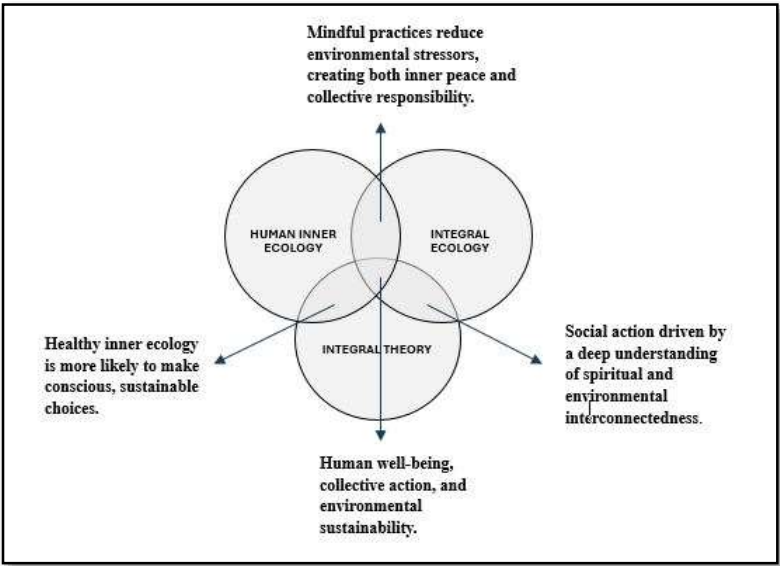
(2009) introduced Integral Ecology as a framework that blends scientific, spiritual, and cultural views on environmental issues. David Suzuki (2007) called for a sacred reconnection with the Earth, stressing that real change starts with a shift in consciousness. Gregory Bateson (1972) pointed out that many ecological problems stem from flawed ways of thinking. Building on this, Magill and Potter (2017) argued for a more holistic, interdisciplinary approach to environmental care. More recent local studies, like those by Alvin Nieva (2024), suggest that traits such as openness and conscientiousness may help promote eco-friendly behavior among Filipino workers. Similarly, Annabel Quilon (2024) observed that a spiritual connection to nature can enhance well-being, enabling people to experience joy in simple, present-day life.

This paper finds its significance in contributing to efforts to preserve the natural environment. More than just theoretical insight, this research offers a grounded, experiential approach to ecological sensitivity. It emphasizes that lasting change does not begin with policy alone but with attention to the inner landscape, where the journey of healing the environment truly begins.

Conceptual Model and Theoretical Framework

Figure 1.

Venn Diagram of Human Inner Ecology, Integral Ecology, and Integral Theory



Human Inner Ecology

Human **inner ecology** refers to the interconnectedness and balance within the biological, psychological, and emotional systems of the individual. Just as ecosystems rely on the interdependence of various organisms and environmental factors to thrive, a person's mental and physical health also depends on the harmonious functioning of different systems within the body. The concept of **inner ecology** highlights how our thoughts, emotions, and physiological processes are intertwined, and how disruptions in one area can affect others (McEwen, 2007). In a more holistic sense, **inner ecology** embraces the role of self-awareness and mindfulness in maintaining this balance. By encouraging a greater awareness of bodily sensations, thoughts, and feelings, individuals can foster a sense of unity between mind and body, which is essential for restoring equilibrium within the internal environment. This mirrors how ecologists work to restore natural ecosystems disturbed by external factors (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Additionally, just as the health of an ecosystem is influenced by factors like climate, biodiversity, and pollution, human well-being is also affected by factors such as nutrition, sleep, social support, and exposure to nature (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). The interplay between internal and external forces is a key component of maintaining overall health and resilience, as both biological and environmental factors play a crucial role in shaping emotional and mental states. This concept underscores the idea that human **inner ecology** is not only a personal but a relational phenomenon—dependent upon both internal balance and external connections to the environment.

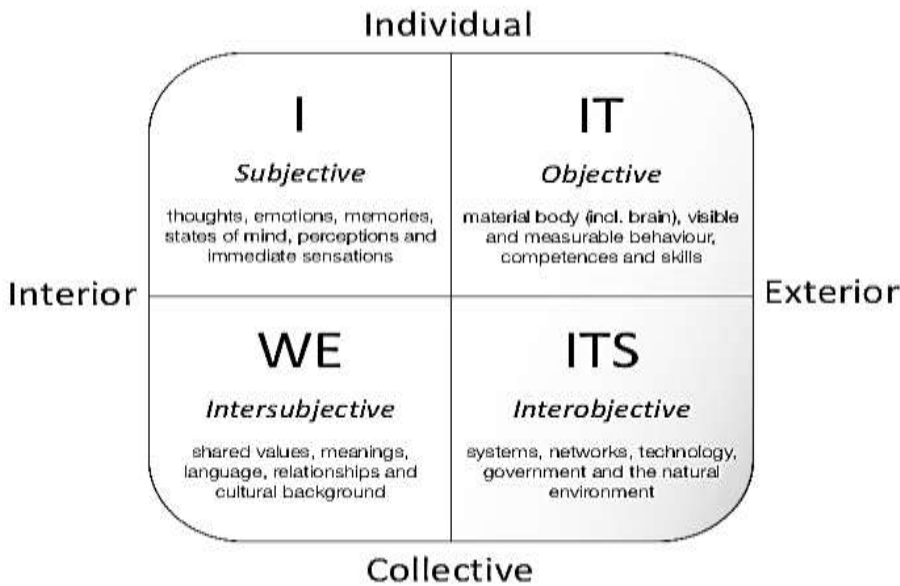
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Figure 2

Ken Wilber’s AQAL Model



Source: (Courtesy of Transformation Teaching, 2022)

Moreover, Integral Theory stresses that ecological crises cannot be resolved solely by external interventions. A deep internal transformation is necessary to shift how humans perceive and relate to nature. Wilber argues that by fostering both personal and collective growth, spiritually, psychologically, and culturally, we can begin to heal our fractured relationship with the Earth (Wilber, 2000). Integral Theory calls for an internal shift in human consciousness, complementing Pope Francis’ call for spiritual renewal in ecological engagement.

Ecological Preservation

Ecological preservation is crucial for maintaining the health of the planet's ecosystems and biodiversity. As human activities continue to deplete natural resources, ecosystems are increasingly threatened by deforestation, pollution, and climate change. Research indicates that preserving biodiversity is vital for the resilience of ecosystems, enabling them to recover from environmental disturbances (Cardinale et al., 2012). Efforts to conserve habitats, such as creating protected areas and enforcing sustainable land-use practices, help mitigate the impacts of these disturbances, fostering long-term ecological stability.

In addition to protecting existing ecosystems, ecological preservation also involves the restoration of degraded environments. Restoration projects, such as reforestation and wetland rehabilitation, play a key role in returning ecosystem functions and services to areas impacted by human activity (Chazdon, 2008). Furthermore, ecological preservation must also address the underlying drivers of environmental degradation, such as unsustainable consumption patterns and inadequate waste management. Effective preservation strategies require a collaborative approach that integrates scientific research, policy development, and community engagement to ensure a balanced relationship between human development and ecological sustainability (Garnett et al., 2018).

Operational Framework

This research is guided by a multi-step framework that moves from conceptualization to practical application. Initially, the study began with the conceptualization of humanity's inner ecology and the condition of brokenness, based on data gathered from online sources, framed within the context of Christian anthropology, integral ecology, and integral theory. This foundational approach grounded the study in both spiritual and psychological aspects, drawing from religious and ecological frameworks to explore how inner balance influences ecological action.

Figure 3

Operational Framework – Research Flow



Subsequently, an exploration of different spiritualities was conducted to identify elements that can aid in healing the brokenness of inner ecology. This exploration included various philosophical, theological, and eco-spiritual practices aimed at fostering individual transformation and consciousness. The intention was to explore how spiritual practices can function as tools for ecological responsibility, emphasizing personal healing as a precursor to global healing.

From this inquiry, key elements were identified, effective principles and practices drawn from various spiritual traditions that support the healing of inner ecology. These practices contributed to the development of a conscious ecology workshop, an intervention designed to mend broken inner ecology, a necessary step toward fostering ecological preservation. By integrating spiritual principles with practical ecological actions, this framework aims to bridge the gap between personal transformation and societal change.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This research adopts an exploratory and qualitative design, utilizing a narrative inquiry approach supported by digital archival collection methods and thematic analysis. Narrative inquiry, which centers on human experiences expressed through stories, is employed to explore how individuals, groups, or communities, representing a diversity of spiritual orientations, interpret their relationship with the environment and the notion of ecological responsibility. The study predominantly relies on, but is not limited to, digitally available narratives, including personal stories, essays, research papers, and other documents from a variety of spiritual and religious traditions. These narratives will be analyzed thematically to uncover shared themes and deeper meanings. Guided by an inductive approach, this research builds from specific stories to broader insights, ultimately aiming to generate a theory that connects the various themes related to inner ecology and ecological preservation. This “bottom-up” approach allows the data to guide the formation of new concepts, ensuring that the theory developed emerges organically from the narratives themselves (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Research Procedures of Data Collection

Data collection involved digital archival methods, drawing from a diverse collection of at least twenty-five sources found across various online platforms. These sources include personal narratives, stories, articles, essays, research papers, and e-books that discuss the intersection of spirituality and the environment, as experienced by individuals, groups, or communities from multiple religious and

spiritual backgrounds. These sources were purposefully chosen for their relevance to the study's central themes and to ensure a rich variety of experiences were represented in the analysis. These narratives offer valuable insights into both personal and societal shifts necessary for ecological preservation. While the materials were predominantly drawn from publicly accessible digital archives, the researcher took care to acknowledge the original authors and, where possible, inform them of their contribution to the study. Proper recognition and citation were given to all sources used, ensuring ethical integrity in the research process.

Measurement and Instrumentation

The available narratives and literature were intentionally selected to meet the study's analytical needs. Each narrative or text was examined to answer three central questions:

1. How does the narrative describe the inner ecology of humanity and its brokenness?
2. What specific ecological issues are discussed, and what attention is needed for resolution?
3. What essential principles or practices are emphasized in the narrative that can contribute to the development of a conscious ecology workshop program for ecological preservation?

These guiding questions allowed for a targeted approach to gathering data that was directly aligned with the research objectives and the design of the conscious ecology workshop.

Data Analysis / Analytical Tools

The analysis of the collected data treated personal and collective narratives as the units of analysis. Using thematic analysis, the researcher read through the narratives and identified recurring themes that emerged across the texts. These recurring themes were then compared and contrasted to uncover shared patterns, while ensuring that the uniqueness of each story was respected. This balanced approach allowed for the emergence of key themes related to inner ecology and environmental stewardship, while still honoring the rich diversity of personal experiences and spiritual perspectives. The researcher further explored the significance of these identified themes as core components in the design of a conscious ecology workshop. This workshop is aimed at healing the fragmented human inner ecology and preparing participants to contribute meaningfully to ecological preservation. By using thematic analysis, the researcher was able to distill actionable insights from the narratives, translating them into practical elements for the workshop program.

Results and Discussion

Upon careful consideration of the available online narratives or literature that were purposively chosen to address the main problem of this research through the attainment of the specific objectives, the researcher, by using thematic analysis, arrived at the following results:

Inner Ecology of the Human Person

The inner ecology of the human person refers to the internal environment of an individual, encompassing their bodily, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual states. This concept draws on ecological metaphors, the study of ecosystems, and the relationships between living organisms and their environment. Ecological principles such as interconnection, balance, growth, sustainability, and the cyclical nature of life resonate deeply with how we understand the human person as a complex system of interdependent elements. Just as an ecosystem relies on the balance and harmony of various components, so too does the inner world of a human being. This balance is determined by how the constituent elements of the person, body, mind, emotions, and spirit are nurtured and connected.

The themes discussed here were derived both from theological reflections on the human person and from biblical anthropology. These five elements, flesh, heart, mind, soul, and spirit, were chosen because they capture the essence of humanity as both a physical being and a spiritual entity, deeply intertwined with God and creation. The selection of these elements comes from scriptural studies that explore human nature as both created and fallen, with each element playing a critical role in both inner and outer ecology. The following table summarizes these elements:

Table 1
Constituent Elements of Inner Ecology of the Human Person

Constituent Elements of Inner Ecology	Biblical Term	Ecological Role	Inner Ecology	Relation to Outer Ecology
Flesh	<i>Basar/Sarx</i>	Creaturely humility	Accept weakness, embrace limits	Live simply, reduce the negative impact on others
Heart	<i>Leb Kardia</i>	Moral/emotional compass	Love, compassion, sensitivity	Solidarity, work for justice, care for the poor
Soul	<i>Nephesh Psyche</i>	Desire and longing	Orient toward God	Avoid consumerism, foster communion
Mind	<i>Lebab Nous</i>	Moral and rational discernment	Renewed conscience	Ecological discernment, resist technocracy
Spirit	<i>Ruah Pneuma</i>	Divine breath and force	Spiritual vitality	Co-create with God, protect life

Flesh (Hebrew – Basar / Greek - Sarx).

The flesh represents the whole, living human person viewed from the outside, highlighting human commonality with other creatures. It emphasizes the physicality and frailty of human existence, especially in its vulnerability and limitations. The Scriptures remind us that the human body is fragile and impermanent, underscoring the need for spiritual vitality to live fully. In Genesis 6:3, God says, “*My spirit shall not remain in human beings forever, because they are only flesh*” (NABRE). This statement points to the limitations of human strength, wisdom, and will when disconnected from God. The flesh teaches us humility, accepting our weakness, embracing limits, and living simply to reduce the impact on others and the planet.

The ecological role of the flesh is about recognizing our limitations and living in humility. The practice of simplicity and restraint can reduce our impact on others and the environment, just as the flesh teaches us to embrace human vulnerability and frailty.

Eco-lesson: The flesh calls us to live simply, recognizing our vulnerabilities and adopting a posture of humility toward our bodies and the earth. Practice could include caring for the body through rest, nourishment, and mindfulness, as well as adopting a simpler, more sustainable lifestyle to lessen our ecological footprint.

Heart (Hebrew- *Leb* / Greek - *Kardia*).

The heart is the emotional and moral center of the human person, a wellspring of life and relationships. It is a seat of feelings, moods, conscience, and deep relational capacity. Proverbs 4:23 says, “*With all vigilance guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life*” (NABRE). Guarding the heart means protecting our emotional and moral life, ensuring that our feelings, decisions, and relationships are aligned with God’s will. The heart is a space for deep reflection and spiritual sensitivity, much like a garden that needs to remain healthy.

The role of the heart in the inner ecology highlights the need for emotional health, moral clarity, and spiritual sensitivity. A healthy heart, just like a well-kept garden, needs attention and protection from harmful influences to thrive.

Eco-lesson: Just as an ecosystem needs care and attention to thrive, the heart must be guarded and cultivated. Practices like mindfulness, emotional regulation, and compassion can help protect the heart, allowing it to remain open and attuned to God’s presence and the needs of others.

Mind (Hebrew – *Lebab* / Greek - *Nous*).

The mind encompasses the intellect and moral reasoning of a person. It integrates thoughts, emotions, conscience, and desires, all of which shape decisions and actions. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, *"You shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength"* (NABRE). The mind, in this context, is understood as part of the whole inner person. It is through a renewed mind that we discern what is good and pleasing to God, as noted in Romans 12:2: *"Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind"* (NABRE). This renewal allows the mind to resist external pressures like consumerism or technocracy and to embrace ecological discernment.

The mind plays a crucial role in moral and ecological discernment, which directly impacts both the individual's inner ecology and their relationship with the environment. A mind aligned with God's will and attuned to His purpose brings clarity and peace, enabling discernment of ecological and moral choices in an increasingly complex world.

Eco-lesson: A renewed mind is essential for ecological thinking. It enables us to make decisions that promote sustainability and justice. A practical eco-practice involves engaging with material that challenges and refines our thinking, fostering discernment and wisdom in our choices.

Soul/Throat (Hebrew – *Nephesh* / Greek - *Psyche*).

The soul is the life-breathing, desiring self, and is integral to the inner ecology. Psalm 42:2 says, *"As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God"* (NABRE). This longing for God is a healthy expression of the soul's desire for communion with the divine. The soul's yearning for God reveals a deep spiritual hunger that sustains the inner ecology. When this longing is disordered, it leads to spiritual dryness, as individuals may try to quench their thirst with material gains or fleeting pleasures, as Matthew 16:26 warns: *"What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"* (NABRE). The soul's true fulfillment is found in alignment with God's will and the pursuit of spiritual integrity.

The soul teaches us that the deepest longing of the human heart is for communion with God, and this desire shapes the inner ecology. A healthy soul, properly ordered toward God, avoids the distractions of consumerism and material gain that can lead to spiritual emptiness.

Eco-lesson: The soul teaches us to prioritize spiritual growth over materialism. Practices like prayer, meditation, and silence nourish the soul, guiding us toward a deeper communion with God and fostering an ecology of virtue.

Spirit/Breath (Hebrew – *Ruah* / Greek - *Pneuma*).

The spirit represents the divine breath and sustaining energy that animates all life. Genesis 2:7 describes the creation of humanity: “*The LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life*” (NABRE). The **spirit** is the life-giving force, the divine presence that connects the individual to God. John 20:22 recounts, “*And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’*” (NABRE). The Spirit brings renewal and transformation, enabling humans to live fully alive, empowered to co-create with God and protect life.

The spirit represents divine vitality, and it is through the Spirit that humans are empowered to engage in God’s creative work. A healthy inner ecology is open to the Holy Spirit, leading us to protect life and engage in acts of co-creation with God.

Eco-lesson: The spirit calls us to live in alignment with God’s creative purposes. As co-creators with God, we are called to protect all forms of life, working toward the flourishing of creation. A vital eco-practice is actively engaging in stewardship of creation through acts of conservation, advocacy, and care for the natural world.

Broken Inner Ecology, Its Relation to Integral Creation and Integral Theory

Inner ecology is imbued with a symbiotic relationship among its constituent elements. When all these elements function harmoniously, a healthy inner ecology is established, producing a positive ripple effect on the outer ecology, particularly the natural environment. However, when the inner ecology is disrupted, the repercussions for the outer ecology are inevitable. The imbalance within the inner ecology, especially if it stems from spiritual, emotional, or cognitive brokenness, can lead to a wider **ecological collapse** (see Table 2). Inner ecology refers to the internal environment of an individual, their **body, heart, soul, mind, and spirit**, and the relationships among these elements. When in balance, the inner ecology contributes positively to a person’s well-being and the world around them. However, when disrupted, the consequences affect not only the individual but also the broader ecological system, including society and the natural environment.

Table 2.

Brokenness of Inner Ecology and Its Relation to Outer Ecology

Constituent Elements of Inner Ecology	Brokenness	Outer Ecology
Body/Flesh <i>Basar/Sarx</i>	Glorification of strength, denial of limits, obsession with appearance, or productivity	Overconsumption, environmental exploitation, disregard for bodily health, and the needs of others
Heart <i>Leb/Kardia</i>	Hardened heart, indifference, emotional detachment, apathy	Social injustice, lack of solidarity, failure to care for the vulnerable, and the environment
Soul/Throat <i>Psyche/Nephesh</i>	Disordered desires, spiritual emptiness, and addiction to material things	Consumerism, waste culture, and viewing nature as a commodity
Mind <i>Lebab/nous</i>	Confusion, pride, a technocratic mindset, and moral relativism	Blind technological development, exploitation without ethical limits
Spirit/Breath <i>Pneuma/Ruah</i>	Spiritual dryness, disconnection from God and others, despair	Loss of awe and wonder for creation, neglect of the sacredness of life

Theological and Philosophical Considerations

The interconnectedness of the inner ecology and outer ecology is most evident when one is disturbed. When human pride, greed, or disordered desires disrupt the inner balance, the consequences manifest outwardly. The body may be idolized or neglected, the heart may grow cold, the mind may become confused, and the soul restless. This internal disarray does not remain contained but affects the way humans interact with one another and the environment.

A hardened heart loses the ability to perceive the sacredness of life and creation, leaving individuals indifferent to the needs of others and the environment. The mind, confused and prideful, may endorse exploitative systems that harm both people and the planet. When the spirit is closed off from God’s breath, the natural world is no longer seen as a sacred gift but as a commodity to be controlled and consumed (Francis, 2015). This process underscores that inner brokenness leads to external destruction, whether through pollution, climate change, or social injustice.

Pope Francis (2015), in *Laudato Si'*, calls for an "ecological conversion" that begins not with external solutions like policies, but through an inner transformation of the human heart and consciousness. This inner conversion is a healing of the "inner ecology," which restores the human capacity to live with humility, gratitude, and responsibility toward one another and creation. As humans reconnect with God, who breathes life into their bodies and spirits, the Earth is no longer seen as something to dominate but as a "sister" with whom humans share a common home (Francis, 2015).

Ken Wilber's Integral Theory aligns with this vision, situating the inner life, subjective consciousness, emotion, spiritual awareness, and moral values within the "I" quadrant of his model (Wilber, 2000). When this interior dimension is fractured by sin, disconnection, or confusion, it leads to systemic disharmony that radiates outward, affecting all other aspects of life. Wilber argues that ignoring the inner quadrant, the realm of personal experience and values, leads to imbalance and dysfunction. Pope Francis echoes this, stating that the ecological crisis is not only a technical or economic issue, but a profound spiritual and moral crisis rooted in human brokenness (Francis, 2015). Both Francis and Wilber agree that an integrated approach is needed, one that begins by healing the "inner ecology" of the self.

What Happens When Our Ecology Collapses?

When the inner ecology collapses, the effects are far-reaching. Disordered desires in the soul give rise to consumerism, where material goods become the ultimate fulfillment, disregarding the sacredness of creation. A hardened heart leads to social injustice, perpetuating systems that harm the vulnerable and the environment. A confused mind promotes blind technological development, often with no ethical boundaries, exploiting the earth and its resources without regard for long-term consequences. Finally, spiritual dryness results in a loss of awe and reverence for life, neglecting the inherent sacredness of all creation.

The current ecological crisis, including pollution, biodiversity loss, climate change, and social injustice, ultimately reflects an inner collapse, manifesting in the ways humans relate to one another and the earth. When humanity is disconnected from its spiritual, emotional, and moral core, the world is treated not as a living entity to cherish, but as raw material to be extracted and consumed.

Implications for Healing: Integral Renewal

Both Pope Francis and Ken Wilber offer pathways for healing: a reconnection of the human spirit to God, a restoration of the moral compass in the heart, and a renewal of the mind through transformed consciousness. As Francis (2015) proposes, true ecological conversion begins with personal renewal, a

reordering of the inner life that leads to a compassionate, just, and sustainable way of being in the world. Wilber’s theory of integral growth reinforces this by asserting that true transformation must happen on all levels: spiritual, emotional, moral, and cognitive. When the human person is reconnected with the sacredness of creation, spirit, mind, heart, and body in harmony, this transformation will naturally reflect in a more just and sustainable relationship with the earth.

Healthy vs. Broken Inner Ecology

The concept of inner ecology can be understood through the lens of its five core elements: flesh, heart, mind, soul, and spirit. These elements function like the interconnected systems of an ecosystem. When balanced and nurtured, they form a harmonious inner ecology, influencing not only the well-being of the individual but also the health of the outer world. Conversely, when these elements are fragmented or unbalanced, they lead to a broken inner ecology, which affects both the person and their external relationships, including interactions with the environment. The following table outlines the differences between a healthy and a broken inner ecology in each of these five elements, as well as the transformation that occurs when the inner ecology is healed:

Table 3.

Healthy and Broken Inner Ecology in Comparison

Element	Healthy Inner Ecology	Broken Inner Ecology	Transformation
Flesh	Embraces physical limitations, lives simply, and respects creation.	Exploits the body, neglects self-care, and indulges excess.	<i>Simplifying life, reducing waste, and accepting limitations.</i>
Heart	Compassionate, sensitive, just, and in solidarity with others.	Numb to suffering, driven by selfish desires.	<i>Nurturing love, empathy, and justice in everyday actions.</i>
Mind	Discerns wisely, aligned with moral good, and seeks truth.	Conforms to worldly values, distracted, confused.	<i>Pursuing knowledge, spiritual insight, and moral clarity.</i>
Soul	Deep connection with God and creation, seeks spiritual growth.	Fragmented, disconnected, seeking fulfillment in materialism.	<i>Focusing on spiritual practices, like prayer and meditation.</i>
Spirit	Open to the Holy Spirit, co-creating with God and the earth.	Despair, disconnected from God, and from purpose.	<i>Reconnecting with God, embracing mission and renewal.</i>

A healthy inner ecology is characterized by balance, awareness, and connection between the five elements of the person: flesh, heart, mind, soul, and spirit. When these are functioning harmoniously, individuals experience inner peace, emotional sensitivity, and moral clarity, leading to positive relationships with others and the environment.

On the other hand, a broken inner ecology is marked by disorder, disconnection, and exploitation. When the elements of the inner ecology are misaligned, they lead to external consequences, including social injustice, environmental degradation, and spiritual emptiness.

Healing this inner ecology involves intentional transformation, simplifying life, nurturing compassion, seeking truth, and reconnecting with God and creation. This renewal of the inner ecology is the foundation for external ecological healing, affecting not only individuals but also the wider community and the environment.

Different Spiritualities' Concept of Inner Ecology

In general, inner ecology resonates with various principles in different spiritual philosophies. Below are some descriptions of inner ecology from different spiritual perspectives and how they maintain a balanced, harmonious inner world that is key to individual well-being and, by extension, contributes to greater global harmony by addressing specific ecological issues (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Inner Ecology from Other Popular Spiritualities

Other Popular Spiritualities	Inner Ecology (IE)	Process of Mending Broken IE	Ecological Issues Being Addressed
Buddhism	Ecological balance within, Mindfulness, Interconnectedness	Mindfulness meditation clears mental clutter, reduces attachments to consumer goods, develops compassion, fosters peace, and enlightenment	Overconsumption, materialism, disconnection from nature, lack of compassion towards all life
Hinduism	The interconnectedness of Atman and	Balancing gunas within – <i>sattva</i> (purity and harmony), <i>rajas</i>	Disruption of natural harmony, ego-driven exploitation of resources, and

	Brahman, spiritual growth, and peace	(activity and passion), and tamas (inertia and darkness)	ignorance of sacredness in nature
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Table 4.

Continued.

Other Popular Spiritualities	Inner Ecology (IE)	Process of Mending Broken IE	Ecological Issues Being Addressed
Islam	The spiritually balanced and morally upright inner life, in alignment with divine guidance	The practice of <i>tazkiyah al-nafs</i> (purification of the soul) and <i>dhikr</i> (remembrance of God)	Environmental degradation due to moral neglect, overuse, and pollution of divine creation
Taoism	Duality and balance of opposing forces within the universe and oneself. Harmonious and healthy existence	Aligning with the Tao (the Way), balancing the <i>yin</i> and <i>yang</i>	Imbalance in ecosystems, loss of harmony between human activity and natural rhythms
Confucianism	A well-ordered inner life leads to a well-ordered society	Practicing virtues such as <i>ren</i> , <i>li</i> , and <i>yi</i> . Personal reflection, fulfilling ethical responsibilities to others, and fostering both internal and social harmony	Breakdown in community and environmental stewardship, social injustice linked to ecological neglect
Jainism	Inner peace, purification, and liberation of the soul	Practice of <i>ahimsa</i> , or non-violence in action, thought, and intention. Meditation, simplicity, self-discipline, and a strong ethical code.	Violence against living beings, animal exploitation, overconsumption, and lack of restraint
Indigenous Spiritualities	Harmony between humans and the Earth.	Personal healing, growth, and sustainability	Land exploitation, loss of biodiversity, disconnection from ancestral knowledge, and Earth Ethics
New Age Spiritualities	Integration of physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual	Healing negative patterns and emotional blockages within the self	Emotional and spiritual disconnection from nature, unsustainable

health. Internal balance	meditation, energy healing, and mindfulness	lifestyles, and lack of inner awareness impact the outer world
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The idea of *inner ecology* points to nurturing a healthy, balanced inner life. Though each spiritual path uses a different language, they share a common goal: cultivating peace, harmony, and self-awareness. In Buddhism, mindfulness helps clear the mind and grow compassion (Hanh, 1987). Recent studies like those by Goleman and Davidson (2017) have shown that mindfulness can significantly reduce stress, help alleviate *eco-anxiety*, and foster greater environmental concern. Hinduism encourages balancing inner energies, or *gunas*, to reach spiritual clarity (*Bhagavad Gita*, n.d., Chapter 14, Verses 5–18). The contemporary scholar Vandana Shiva has connected the spiritual concept of interconnectedness in Hinduism to modern ecological ethics, asserting that ecological destruction is rooted in a loss of the sacred relationship with nature (Shiva, 2016). Islam emphasizes purifying the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) (*Qur'an* 91:9–10) from negative traits through prayer, reflection, and moral living (Al-Ghazali, 2007). *Omid Safi* has written about the Islamic ethics of sustainability and how Islamic teachings support an eco-conscious lifestyle that is deeply intertwined with spiritual purification (Safi, 2021). Taoism teaches alignment with nature’s flow (Kohn, 2008) through the balance of yin and yang (Lao Tzu, c. 6th century BCE/2009, Chapter 2). Taoism has inspired recent eco-philosophers such as Fred E. H. Kao, who highlights how Taoist principles align with sustainable living, stressing the Tao of simplicity and naturalness in the modern ecological context. Confucianism focuses on self-cultivation and living with virtue to create inner and social harmony (Yao, 2000). Confucian teachings have been increasingly applied in environmental ethics, where Cheng (2021) explores Confucian principles for fostering environmental responsibility in the modern era. Jainism is deeply tied to *ahimsa* or non-violence, not just in action, but in thought and intention. It is about creating peace within by letting go of harmful emotions like anger, pride, and greed, which are believed to weigh the soul down with karma (Tatia, 2005). Recent studies have linked the Jain practice of *ahimsa* to modern ecological activism, showing how it can help reduce both personal and institutional harm to the Earth (Jain, 2019). Indigenous traditions remind us that our inner well-being is deeply tied to the Earth’s health (Deloria, 2003), with Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) beautifully articulating the importance of “reciprocity” between humans and the Earth in her work on indigenous knowledge and ecology. New Age thought brings together emotional, physical, and spiritual healing balance (Chopra, 1994; Myss, 1996). The integration of energy healing, often applied in ecological contexts, helps individuals align their internal states with the Earth’s natural rhythms, as shown in Schneider and Goldstein’s (Feinstein, 2022) exploration of energy healing in addressing environmental crises.

All these traditions recognize that caring for our inner world is essential to living in balance with ourselves and the world around us.

Essential Shared Principle for Healing the Self to Heal the World

All these spiritual paths converge on the idea that mending one's inner world through balance, purification, mindfulness, or virtue is foundational to living in harmony with the external world. Inner ecology is seen not just as personal well-being, but as a moral and spiritual practice that directly informs how individuals interact with the environment. The significant core commonalities are as follows:

1. **Interconnectedness of Inner and Outer Realms.** Each tradition emphasizes a deep connection between the internal state of the individual and the external world, be it through the metaphysical unity of Atman and Brahman (Hinduism), the Tao and nature (Taoism), or the spiritual bond between humans and Earth (Indigenous traditions). This resonates with the recent *interdisciplinary* work on eco-psychology by *George and Ferraro* (2021), which shows that ecological consciousness arises from understanding the interconnectedness between all life, both human and non-human.
2. **Inner Balance and Ethical Living.** The cultivation of inner harmony, balancing opposing forces (Taoism), purifying the soul (Islam), or balancing the gunas (Hinduism), leads to ethical actions and compassionate behavior, which extend to how humans treat nature. *Interfaith eco-coalitions* are increasingly adopting these principles, showing the shared ecological ethics of diverse spiritual traditions as a foundation for sustainable living (*Interfaith Power & Light*, 2022).
3. **Mindfulness and Conscious Living.** Practices like meditation, prayer, self-discipline, and reflection are tools for cultivating awareness. This mindfulness leads to reduced materialism, non-violence, and sustainable living, fostering ecological preservation through conscious lifestyle choices. The rising field of *eco-mindfulness* (Cohen et al., 2021) demonstrates how these ancient practices are now being applied to reduce *eco-anxiety* and inspire environmental activism.
4. **Non-Harm and Compassion.** Many traditions, especially Jainism, Buddhism, and Indigenous spirituality, explicitly teach non-violence and reverence for all life, which translates into environmental stewardship and a lifestyle that minimizes harm to the Earth. Studies on *eco-compassion* in the last decade, including *Thompson* (2019), show the direct link between these practices and real-world environmental activism.
5. **Transformation through Self-Cultivation.** Whether through virtue ethics (Confucianism), soul purification (Islam), or holistic integration

(New Age), all traditions agree that transforming the self is a prerequisite to transforming the world. Ecological action starts within. This is supported by Wilber's (2000) integral theory, which emphasizes that deep transformation of both personal consciousness and collective actions is necessary for meaningful ecological change.

Across the world's spiritual traditions, there is a powerful and recurring theme: real change in the natural world begins with change in one's inner ecology. These paths all suggest that tending to our inner landscape is just as important as caring for the outer world. It is a reminder that how humanity treats the Earth often mirrors how humanity treats its constituent inner realities. This deeply resonates with Pope Francis's idea of "*integral ecology*" in *Laudato Si'*, where he writes that humanity cannot expect to heal the environment without also healing the human heart and society itself (Francis, 2015). Similarly, Ken Wilber's integral theory echoes this by showing how real transformation must address the inner and outer, the personal and collective, all at once (Wilber, 2000). These perspectives point to a simple yet profound truth that when humanity nurtures peace, balance, and compassion within, humanity naturally extends that care to the world around.

VIBES – A Proposed Conscious Ecology Workshop Program Framework

Intending to contribute to finding ways to ecological preservation, the researcher proposes a framework for a conscious ecology workshop program called VIBES or Vitalize, Inner Balance, Breakthrough, and Elevate Stewardship, with the theme statement "Preserving the Earth Through Inner Ecology Healing." This program framework bridges the healing of the inner ecology of the human person with the outward responsibility of caring for the environment. Young people today are particularly passionate about sustainability and environmental stewardship, and this version of the program aims to inspire individuals to heal themselves while actively contributing to the health of the planet. "VIBES" evokes the idea of high-energy frequency, and just as we heal and elevate our own inner lives, we also have the power to positively influence the world around us. It is designed to foster personal transformation and environmental consciousness, aligning inner balance with outer ecological action. The program has the following objectives:

1. **Vitalize.** Support individuals in revitalizing their mind, body, and spirit through sustainable energy practices, such as eco-friendly living, physical movement, and mindfulness, all while considering the ecological impact.
2. **Inner Balance.** Encourage emotional regulation, mental clarity, and mindful living, with an emphasis on ecological sustainability, teaching participants how to find peace while living harmoniously with nature.
3. **Breakthrough.** Guide individuals in overcoming personal obstacles, limiting beliefs, and environmental apathy, while encouraging active

environmental responsibility, such as reducing waste or engaging in community clean-up projects.

4. **Elevate Stewardship.** Promote higher consciousness through spiritual practices that connect individuals to the Earth, fostering an understanding of how personal well-being is tied to the health of the planet and encouraging sustainable practices in daily life.

Program Features

These are the core features that make the program unique and effective. From its structure and content to the tools and support provided, these features are designed to enhance participant experience and maximize learning outcomes.

1. **Free visitation and exploration of the ecological lab.** A two to three-hectare site with ornamental plants, medicinal plants, vegetables, fruit-bearing trees, a mini forest, a natural or manmade lagoon with different kinds of fish, and a small aviary. The site also contains a multi-purpose hall, a chapel, several shades of rest, and food stalls with an open dining area. The site is managed by professionally trained VIBES ambassadors. The ecological lab will be open on weekends for the public with limited access, but it will be open for the whole week for groups of people who seek to undergo the ecological workshop program.
2. **Satellite ecological lab.** A field lab that supports ecological studies and workshops in different locations. It is an extension of the main ecological lab.
3. **Weekly themes with ecological integration.** Each week could focus on a specific theme that blends personal well-being with environmental care. For example, Week 1 could focus on Vitalize with an emphasis on sustainable physical activity, while Week 2 explores Breakthrough through the lens of reducing carbon footprints and embracing conscious consumerism.
4. **VIBES ambassadors.** Create a group or ambassador program that encourages participants to share their journey of healing and eco-action. Young people can post about their environmental practices, share sustainability tips, and offer motivational insights on how caring for the Earth and themselves are interconnected.
5. **Eco-conscious daily check-ins.** Quick prompts for participants to check in on both their emotional state and ecological practices (e.g., "How are you feeling today? What positive environmental action can you take today?"). These help participants stay connected to both their inner ecology and the outer world.

Program Structure and Possible Activities

The overall framework of the program highlights its key components, and the variety of activities participants can engage in. It provides a clear overview of how the program is organized and what to expect throughout its duration. These activities shall be conducted within the main ecological lab or satellite eco lab, if necessary, and within the period the participants join the program.

1. On Personal Energy and Ecological Wellness (Vitalize)

Daily Eco-Activity: Engage in energy-boosting practices like morning stretching or exercise while being mindful of the environment (e.g., outdoor walks, nature runs, or eco-friendly habits like reducing energy usage at home).

Weekly Nature Immersion: Set aside time each week spent in nature, whether it is a hike, beach day, or simply sitting in a park to connect with the Earth and its ecosystems. Bring awareness to your surroundings and consider reducing waste while enjoying nature.

2. On Mindfulness and Ecological Harmony (Inner Balance)

Daily Mindfulness Practice: Incorporate mindfulness to deepen emotional awareness, with daily 5-minute check-ins or meditation. As a practice, participants can focus on sustainable living choices, like reducing single-use plastics or consuming less water.

Weekly Journaling and Eco-Reflection: Journal about how one's emotional-mental state and ecological behaviors influence each other. Reflect on sustainable actions that are aligned with inner peace and balance.

3. On Transformation and Environmental Action (Breakthrough)

Daily Affirmation for Change: Practice affirmations related to healing both the self and the planet. Example: "I release old habits that harm the environment and embrace new habits that nurture my soul and the Earth."

Weekly Eco-Challenge: Participate in weekly challenges, such as committing to a zero-waste day, planting a tree, or volunteering for a local environmental cause. These activities encourage both personal breakthroughs and ecological preservation.

4. On Higher Consciousness and Global Preservation (Elevate Stewardship)

Daily Acts of Environmental Gratitude: Show appreciation for the Earth by participating in small acts that help conserve nature (e.g., reducing waste, conserving water, or using reusable products).

Weekly Community Eco-Service: Involve yourself in environmental initiatives—whether it is planting a community garden, engaging in beach clean-up, or supporting sustainable businesses. Elevating others in your community through service strengthens the collective energy for ecological preservation.

Sample Weekly Theme

The sample weekly theme illustrates how the program content is organized. Each week is centered around a specific topic, providing focus and depth through related activities, discussions, and learning objectives:

Week 1: Vitalize - Eco-Power Your Life. Learn how to boost one's energy while reducing the carbon footprint. Activities include outdoor workouts, mindfulness, and making conscious decisions to reduce waste.

Week 2: Inner Balance - Nature's Flow. Incorporate nature into one's mindfulness routine. Practice eco-meditation, mindful walks in the woods, and eco-friendly living choices to find mental and emotional clarity.

Week 3: Breakthrough - Overcoming Ecological Blind Spots. Challenge individual habits and reflect on ways to reduce environmental harm. Whether it is reducing plastic consumption or advocating for climate action, finding new ways to break through old patterns and embrace sustainability.

Week 4: Elevate - Eco-Spiritual Advocacy. Elevate spiritual practice by participating in community sustainability efforts. Whether through environmental services or eco-spiritual reflections, engage in actions that elevate the soul and the planet's well-being.

VIBES invites individuals, especially young people, to embark on a transformative journey where they mend their ecology and positively impact the environment. By promoting sustainability in daily actions, meditation, community service, and eco-conscious choices, this program fosters a profound sense of connection to the Earth. By participating in VIBES, individuals are not only healing themselves but also contributing to a brighter, greener future for all.

Program Implementation Overview: VIBES Conscious Ecology Workshop

This program is a multi-phase initiative designed to empower youth through a unique integration of ecological education, emotional well-being, and spiritual development. Rooted in the VIBES framework, Vitalize, Inner Balance, Breakthrough, and Elevate Stewardship, the program provides a holistic pathway for young people to reconnect with nature, deepen self-awareness, and become responsible stewards of their communities and the environment. The implementation unfolds in four strategic phases:

Phase 1: Foundation & Planning focuses on building a strong core team, securing a natural site for immersive learning, and designing a comprehensive curriculum supported by tools for emotional and ecological transformation.

Phase 2: Pilot Testing involves running a small-scale version of the program to evaluate its effectiveness. Participant feedback, emotional and behavioral assessments, and facilitator insights guide the refinement of content and logistics.

Phase 3: Expansion & Outreach scales the program by training VIBES Ambassadors, youth leaders equipped to facilitate sessions and represent the program in diverse settings. Strategic partnerships and a strong digital presence support outreach and engagement on a larger scale.

Phase 4: Sustainability & Impact ensures the program's long-term viability by documenting outcomes, securing funding, gaining endorsements, and adapting the curriculum for wider and more diverse audiences, including children, teens, and professionals.

Through this structured approach, the program aims to create not just a one-time learning experience, but a sustainable, community-driven movement that nurtures mindful, eco-conscious, and emotionally grounded individuals ready to lead change from the inside out.

Conclusion

This research concludes that ecological preservation is inextricably linked to the healing of the broken human inner ecology. From the concepts and generalizations inferred through the findings, it is evident that the inner life of individuals, comprising the flesh, heart, soul, mind, and spirit, is ecologically significant. These elements mirror the interconnectedness found in natural ecosystems and, when disordered, contribute to environmental degradation. Through thematic analysis of narratives and spiritual literature, the research validates the premise that inner imbalance, whether emotional, moral, or spiritual, translates to patterns of overconsumption, alienation from nature, and technocratic

dominance, reinforcing the ecological crisis. Biblical Christian anthropology, Pope Francis' integral ecology, and Ken Wilber's Integral Theory collectively affirm the necessity of addressing the inner dimension as a prerequisite for meaningful environmental action.

Across diverse spiritual traditions, the concept of inner ecology emphasizes nurturing a balanced inner life. Despite differing languages and practices, they share a common aim: cultivating peace, harmony, and self-awareness. From mindfulness in Buddhism, balancing gunas in Hinduism, and aligning with nature in Taoism, to soul purification in Islam, self-cultivation in Confucianism, and non-violence in Jainism, each path guides inner healing. Indigenous and New Age spiritualities further link inner well-being to the Earth and holistic health. Together, they affirm that inner balance is vital for harmony within and with the world.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing field of integral and deep ecology by emphasizing the necessity of inner transformation alongside environmental reform. It expands ecological discourse to include physical, spiritual, and psychological healing as a legitimate and essential aspect of sustainability. Practically, this research offers a concrete initiative, the VIBES workshop program, which aims to cultivate ecological stewardship by healing inner fragmentation, particularly among youth. This program invites participants into a transformative journey that nurtures self-awareness, emotional and mental resilience, spiritual renewal, and ecological responsibility. The VIBES workshop also connects the broader conversations of eco-spirituality and mental health, demonstrating how personal growth can lead to collective environmental action.

This study draws a meaningful link between inner healing and caring for the environment, using theory and narratives of human experiences to explore that connection. However, it mostly relies on digital sources and existing literature, which can only go so far. To truly understand how people experience inner ecological transformation, future research should dive deeper into real-life stories through interviews, group conversations, or immersive fieldwork, especially across different communities. As for the VIBES workshop, it shows a lot of potential, but it still needs to be tested in the real world. Running pilot programs and following participants over time will help us see whether they inspire lasting environmental action, particularly among young people and other key groups.

Ultimately, the transformative process of healing one's inner ecology serves as the essential foundation for the restoration of the Earth itself. As individuals cultivate inner balance and coherence, humanity becomes capable of redefining its relationship with the natural world, shifting from domination to stewardship. It is through this inner alignment that the conditions for a truly sustainable and regenerative future are made possible.

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