

In recent years, emphasis on Gaia, the Great Goddess, and Mother Nature has created the impression that traditionally nature has been conceived solely or primarily as female. Recently more studies have been appearing that convincingly chronicle the various appearances and disappearances in Western art and culture of a male counterpart to these female nature deities—the Green Man, consort, lover, and son of the Great Goddess. He persists in our popular culture in forms as varied as the Green Giant of frozen pea fame and Swamp Thing, the vegetable hero of the DC horror comic series. Aaron Kipnis suggests ways man can make the Green Man and his eco- masculinity (male involvement and concern for the environment) more present and real.

LEARNING FROM THE GREEN MAN

by Aaron Kipnis, Ph.D.

As men in quest of masculine soul many of us are attempting to heal our lives and reconnect with our authentic, deep masculinity. Unfortunately, the male initiation process is, for the most part, lost in this culture. In the absence of male initiation, many men during the last few decades have sought reconnection to soul through the feminine. Femininity, however, is not the primary cure for masculine wounds.

Indeed, the trend to personify soul and the earth as feminine effectively perpetuates the divorce of the male psyche from its own fecund, inner-masculine, life-affirming nature. The modern envisioning of nature and soul as feminine has done the same injustice to men as monotheism did to women through exiling and degrading the sacred image of the Goddess.

Many of us have heard much about the Earth Mother. However, when we regard nature as *only* our mother, we risk remaining forever boys in her service, disconnected from the masculine power to heal, engender, and support life. If men cannot imagine a masculine connection to nature, if it is conceived of as being other than them, then their feelings of separation may breed alienation from life.

The pressing need of our time is for us to become more potent, generative and embodied—powerful, mature men committed to life. For images of this masculine ideal some of us are turning toward the ancient *masculine* gods of the earth. One of these images is the Green Man. He is a masculine personification of nature—the Earth Father.

The new image of masculinity beginning to emerge from our quest is of a creative, fecund, nurturing, protective, and compassionate male existing in harmony with the earth and the feminine, yet also erotic, free, wild, playful, energetic, and fierce. This image is a far cry from the patriarchal hypermasculine, war-making hero or the feminized, deenergized, hypomasculine male who is subservient to the Goddess. Father Nature is beginning to reawaken as an equal partner alongside the resurgent Goddess. Why is it valuable for modern men to embrace earth-based masculinity and to understand our archetypal nature as "green men"? To answer this practical query we must first consider that over the last few millennia only a few mythological images have served as our cultural foundations for masculinity: the youthful, invincible hero, like Hercules,