

# Introduction to Ecopsychology: Why it Matters

## A 5-week course at the OVGC

**Instructor: Lori Pye, PhD**

The course explores the human ecosystem as another ecosystem among a myriad of other interconnected systems. We will examine how we humans work as an ecosystem (or not) in relationship to our self, others and the natural world.

Developing an ecopsychological ethos is important because how we live our lives depends on our ecology - how we understand our role with our home (our body, family home, community, culture and the planet) AND it depends upon our psychology - how we relate or not to our home.

Each week we will examine one ecopsychological principle. Participants will have journal questions to answer and bring to class each week to discuss and share with the group.

The objective is for each participant to leave with knowing a great deal more about their personal ecosystem and how this connects to the decisions they make or not in their lives and toward the planet. The course also helps to reconnect each participant back with the natural world in an organic and primary way.

### **Week 1: Everything Runs on Energy**

**Ecology** - an organism's energy and resources are finite, increasing inputs into one function results in a trade off in which there is a loss for other functions. The earth as well has finite resources and increasing demands on these resources results in despoliation and impoverishment for all organisms and habitats. There are limits to growth and resources - no population can increase in size forever.

**Psychology** - it takes a great deal of psychological energy to transform basic drives and instincts (I want, I must have), from being just purely biological and concerned with survival and serving of self, to more conscious patterns that serve nature and culture - a wider whole.

### **Week 2: Diversity is Necessary for a System to Flourish**

**Ecology** - ecosystems achieve stability / harmony / dynamic balance and resilience through richness and complexity of their ecological webs. The greater the diversity - the more resilient they will be. Diversity offer opportunity.

**Psychology** - it is the same for us humans. We need a flexible inner life, a resilient psychology to cope with life, we need a rich repertoire of ideas, approaches, ways of thinking or reasoning, communicating, learning, diverse social fabric, courage to try new things... as opposed to living in and creating a monoculture, monopsychology, monothinking. So that our inner life is full, creative, meaningful, our imagination is active.

### **Week 3: There is No Waste in the Natural World (but lots in human practices and behavior)**

**Ecology** - no organism or ecosystem generates unused or net waste in the natural world - everything goes somewhere or is used by another organism in some way. One species waste is another's food. Nature composts its own.

**Psychology** - we experience vast amounts of waste in human behavior and practices that drive destructive and dangerous practices toward self, others and the environment. Humans can engage in a psychological composting process.

### **Week 4: Change is Inevitable**

**Ecology** - an ecosystem is a flexible, ever-fluctuating network of variables that undergo change in order to flourish or die off.

**Psychology** - we also change - age - physically, developmentally, emotionally, psychologically and how we make transitions are important to our overall well-being. We adapt or die.

### **Week 5: Everything is Connected**

**Ecology** - nature is an amazing complexity of networks. All living systems communicate with one another and share resources across boundaries. As a result, events in Nature are connected, and what affects one organism or habitat can affect others as well.

Partnerships in Nature - life did not take over the planet by combat, but by cooperation, partnership and networking.

**Psychology** - we too are an amazing network of complexities. However, we live, create and design our lives and our world from a place of disconnection. We humans can imagine how to reconnect with self, others and the natural world.

**Course Requirements:** Participants keep a journal. I will suggest readings but not require them.