

All forms of life deserve reverence

Approach in reverence all forms of life. In the least significant is hidden the key to the most significant. All works of life are significant - yes, marvellous, surpassing and inimitable. Life does not busy itself with useless trifles. To issue from the workshop of nature, a thing must be worthy of nature's loving care and most painstaking art. Should it not be worthy of your respect, at least?

Mikhail Naimy

The very first thing I saw in Carefree the other day was a bulldozer brutally biting into a Palo Verde, our state tree. The entire site, slated for an office complex, was stripped to bare earth by the end of that day. The place of this desolation is along Cave Creek Road, just east of "Our Place" restaurant.

Recoiling from this shocking sight, I thought yet again of Albert Schweitzer's credo of reverence for life. And realized, sadly, that our world of speed and greed still has so very far to go before reaching such a reverence.

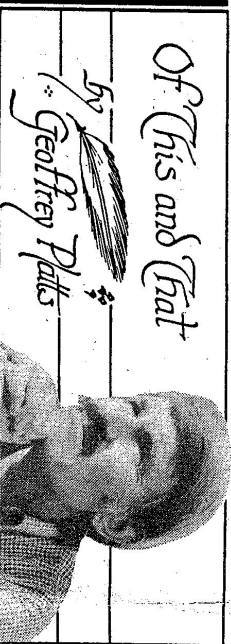
An immense pity, really, because only when, as a society, we learn to revere nature, will we come to revere the humanity in one another. On that far-off day the world will become a pleasant and peaceful place. I can say, in all truth, that I never met a lover of nature who I did not like as a

human being. If that sounds unreasonable, then think back on your own encounters with people in nature.

There was a ray of insight and wisdom in a recent letter to the editor, quoting Schweitzer also. A Cave Creek lady, bless her, wrote: "I hope enough speak out that destroying this land fosters more destruction, and more and more and more. Then what? The

(which he lived out religiously in his day-to-day life) came to him in a moment of revelation while voyaging up the Ogowe River in the Congo: "Reverence for life."

From that moment on, he showed reverence to all living things - not only humans, but insects and plants, even. He pointed out, quite truly, that all living things share the inextricable bond of life. That the



final destruction will not be seen in the land only, but in the people - oldsters, youngsters and in betweeners. I have worked with them all. People need nature."

Who, then, was this Albert Schweitzer? He was a man earlier this century who first gained world renown as a concert organist. Then, in his thirties, he abandoned this gift of great music and took up medicine.

When qualified as a doctor, he left for darkest Africa and spent the last 50 years of his long life tending the sick in a simple jungle hospital of his own building.

The name for his philosophy

fate of a mere ant or leaf is finally that of a human being.

When the miracle that is life is removed from ant or leaf or human, then all are equally leveled by death. It is life, vibrant and vivid, that connects all animate creatures.

Therefore, Schweitzer reasoned, this living link must be honored and revered. If you should think him hopelessly eccentric or wildly impractical, then listen to how he explains his reverence for life in this excerpt from his essay, "Man and Creature."

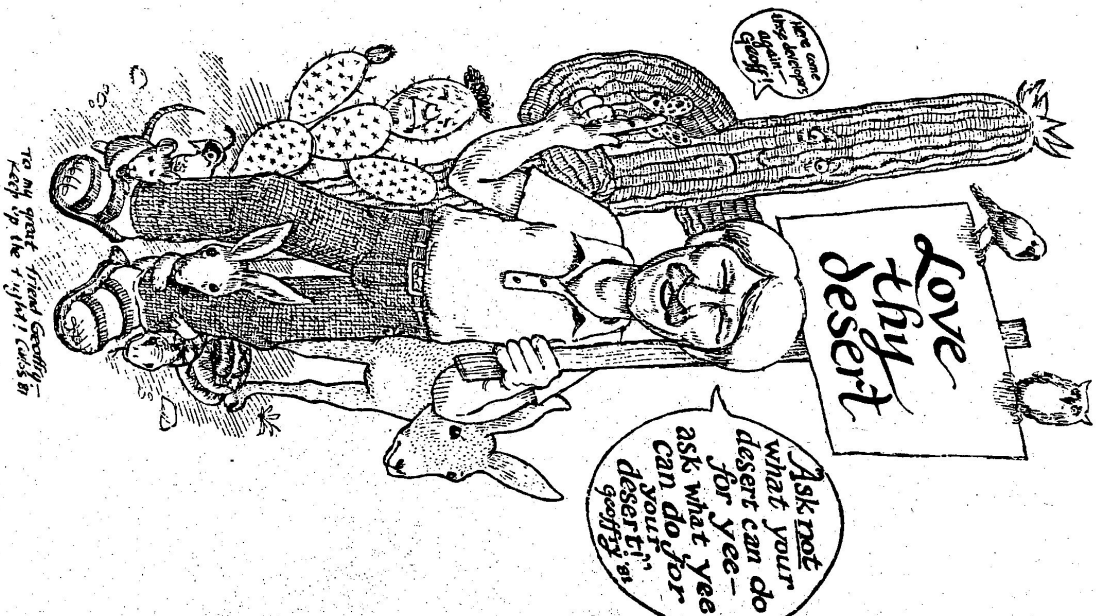
To the truly ethical man, all

life is sacred, including forms of life that from the human point of view may seem to be lower than ours. He makes distinctions only from case to case, and under pressure of necessity, when he is forced to decide which life he will sacrifice in order to preserve other lives. In thus deciding from case to case, he is aware that he is proceeding subjectively and arbitrarily, and that he is accountable for the lives thus sacrificed.

The man who is guided by the ethics of reverence for life stamps out life only from inescapable necessity, never from thoughtlessness. He seizes every occasion to feel the happiness of helping living things and shielding them from suffering and annihilation.

Whenever we harm any form of life, we must be clear about whether it was really necessary to do so. We must not go beyond the truly unavoidable harm, not even in seemingly insignificant matters. The farmer who mows down a thousand flowers in his meadow, in order to feed his cows, should be on guard as he turns homeward not to decapitate some flower by the roadside, just by way of thoughtlessly passing the time. For then he sins against life without being under the compul-

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Sin of Necessity.

When we help an insect out of difficulty, we are only trying to compensate for man's ever-renewed sins against other creatures.

I salute Schweitzer's sentiments - and aspire to such a reverence. Not an easy thing to attain, though. It demands a daily, unending discipline of awareness. It means, for example, making a conscious effort to avoid trampling on ants and plants. It means remembering to help a struggling bug out of a pail of water. It means making a special stop along a road to shoo a snake to safety. Or relocating a rattlesnake in the desert instead of killing it. It means leaving a spider in the house when it's doing no harm.

No, I haven't forgotten people. It also means being kind, helpful and considerate to unfamiliar persons as well as to friends and family. Practicing loving-kindness, in short. All these extra exertions on behalf of living things take time - of which we claim we don't have enough.

Does this make the discipline a

dreary, joyless one, then? Schweitzer thinks not.

Life outside of us is an extension of the life within us. This compels us to be part of it and to accept responsibility for all creatures, great and small. Life becomes harder when we live for others, but it also becomes richer and happier.

I had the pleasure of running into an environmental companion-at-arms a while ago. She was out collecting signatures in defense of our desert (bless her, too). She mentioned that, whenever she and her husband next build in the desert, their house will be raised on stilts. The native flora and fauna will thus live undisturbed beneath them.

I was profoundly impressed. An agreeable way of desert-dwelling - yet one with the bare minimum of ecological damage. Now that is reverence for life.

But how many will delicately do likewise? Where is that sensitivity with our "builder-brotherhood?" Seems that the vast majority of them know only reverence for money. And the latter's a dead, inanimate, thing.

By the way, if any of you reverential desert stewards would care to comment on the wiping out of all the life-forms on that piece of once-living desert mentioned at the start of this column, the telephone number displayed on the site sign for the public's benefit is 488-3567. Do call that number. I don't believe the architect and builder know about our community's desert-minded feelings.

In conclusion, I say: Hasten the day when reverence for life becomes an integral part of our way. It will bear hidden gifts for us on a personal and intimate level, too. For, in the fullness of its fruition, reverence for all life becomes ultimately reverence for self. And that must surely be the loveliest of all human attainments.

A man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him... that of plants and animals as that of his fellow-men. And when he devotes himself helpfully to all life that is in need of help.

Albert Schweitzer