

KKNW – Conscious Talk Radio Interview, June 2, 2020

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Can spirituality co-exist with our 3D lives, especially when it comes to getting big things done like saving the planet? We talk to Jerry Yudelson, author of [The Godfather of Green: an Eco Spiritual Memoir](#). We think you'll find spirituality is everywhere, so let's put it to work!

BENNY: Welcome to Conscious Talk, radio that makes a difference. Well, coming up this hour on Conscious Talk: can spirituality coexist with our everyday lives, especially when it comes to getting bigger things done, like saving the planet? We'll talk to Jerry Yudelson, author of [The Godfather of Green: An Eco-Spiritual Memoir](#), and we think you'll find spirituality is everywhere, so let's put it to work.

And now, welcome your hosts for the day, Brenda Michaels and Rob Spears.

BRENDA: And thank you, Benny, and welcome, folks, to another hour of Conscious Talk, radio that makes a difference.

ROB: Well, our special guest today is Jerry Yudelson, and he's the author of 12 professional books in the field of green building and sustainable design, an arena where he's known globally as "The Godfather of Green", and interestingly enough, that's the title of his book, which we picked up. It jumped out of our pile. It's called, [The Godfather of Green: An Eco-Spiritual Memoir](#).

Jerry's nine-word resume reads simply, "Engineer by training, marketer by profession, and writer by avocation." He was a campus organizer for the very first Earth Day in 1970, which I actually remember well, and we celebrated just a while ago its 50th anniversary. Jerry, welcome to Conscious Talk.

JERRY: Thank you for having me.

BRENDA: So, Jerry, you've done a lot of work here for Earth Day and for the earth. How are you feeling with the situation that we are in, not necessarily the

virus that's unfolding, but just the shape that we have Mother Earth in?
How are you feeling about that?

JERRY: Well, you know, the first Earth Day was very successful on its own terms, which was to reduce the amount of air pollution and water pollution, to protect endangered species, etc., etc. All of that legislation that was enacted in the early 1970s in the aftermath of Earth Day has had a very positive impact on human health and on the environment.

When I was born, there were maybe two billion people on earth, and now we're approaching eight billion, and we're beginning to see huge countries like India and China, Brazil, Indonesia, all of these mega-countries are going through the same path of environmental destruction that we did in the United States and western Europe in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th century.

You'd have to say we have a much deeper problem area now, especially with global climate change, not on the far horizon but actually happening, so I would have to say it's time for a re-look at all of the things we've done and a rededication towards creating an environment that we and our children and children's children can live in successfully in harmony with the earth over the next seven, ten, fifteen generations, and we're not there yet.

BRENDA: Yes.

ROB: Yeah, it's interesting, I had a conversation yesterday with our oldest granddaughter, who lives in Los Angeles and has been there now for a couple of years and has been experiencing the smog and all those things which everybody swears is better, but she really feels it. And during this pandemic, with the traffic down, this is the first time she's seen blue sky, clear skies on a regular basis now for all these weeks, and she's really reconsidering her whole career. She now wants to be more in service to other people, and she now wants to start cooperatively working with other people to start urban gardens, do things like that, which is totally the opposite of where she was. She's been in the fashion industry as a photographer and hairstylist. So, I feel that there is some hope.

BRENDA: So, do you feel, Jerry, that people you know -- maybe you're not as connected because you're not seeing them -- but that you're feeling like there is some benefit of this virus as far as pointing out the direction we've been moving in and that we need to really switch directions?

JERRY: You know, it's a very interesting question, Brenda. I would say that people worldwide are seeing the same thing. When they have reports from Venice (Italy) about clear waters in the lagoon and seeing dolphins, etc., well, those dolphins were actually there, but everything was so muddy with all the tourist traffic that they couldn't see below the surface of the water.

People are beginning to see, "Wait a minute, maybe another world is possible, and we don't have to terrorize the planet with a pandemic to get there. Maybe there's a technology fix for some of this. Maybe there's a way to live well, live in harmony with the earth." And it sounds like your granddaughter is having this sort of consciousness arousal, if you will. All of a sudden, she's beginning to see different possibilities.

And so, while you really can't say, "Gee, what a great benefit," I do think that one of the results of what people have is the question: do they really want to go back to air so polluted in Delhi and places like that, that you can't even breathe it without literally shortening your lifespan? And even in Los Angeles, when I was growing up, it was one day out of every two was a first-stage smog alert, unhealthy air. Now, it's one day out of every four or five (before the pandemic.)

But everyone is saying, "Well, why can't we just switch all those diesel buses to electric?" The answer is, yeah, we can. "Why can't we switch all of those two-stroke scooter engines that are all over Asia to electric?" And the answer is, yes, we can. So, I think one of the results of this is that there will be *renewed political pressure* on changing our infrastructure to use renewable energy, electric motors instead of gasoline, etc., and that that is going to accelerate in the next decade.

BRENDA: We really agree with you that we feel that that is a necessity right now.

ROB: Yeah. So, what we're really interested in, and tying in with your book, is this idea of shifting consciousness underneath, because this is a unique memoir in that it combines an inner spiritual experience and your contemplations about all of these things we've been discussing with your outer work as an environmentalist. So, your background was engineering, if I have that correct. So, how did you start to move from engineering to more consciousness?

JERRY: Well, in the late '60s and early '70s, we had race riots in American cities. We had the Civil Rights Movement. We had the anti-Vietnam War Movement. We had the drug-infused counterculture. This was a time of tremendous ferment, and even though I was trying to hide out in engineering school, for both undergraduate and graduate studies, it influenced me. I was living through these times. I was demonstrating against the war. And when Earth Day came along, it really looked like an opportunity not just to be against something like pollution, but to articulate a whole different vision for how we should move forward, and so that began to stir something in me.

After Earth Day, I was teaching environmental studies at UC Santa Cruz, and I met a young woman who was just graduating; we became a couple, and she had a tremendous spiritual longing and kind of pulled me along. Most of the people that I knew as engineers didn't really have any spiritual interests, so to speak, and at that time, if you wanted to meditate, maybe you took a TM course. I tried it, and I had the usual experience that all I could do was to think about what I'm going to have for dinner, making up my shopping list, and all that stuff. All of a sudden, I was watching the mind, and it was just racing.

So, after a few years of what I call "snacking at the spiritual smorgasbord" in the San Francisco Bay Area at that time, we happened to be referred to a very charismatic Indian guru who was visiting the U.S. on a world tour. He was an amazing being, and he had this unique quality that just by being around him, you got into meditation, because he was in that state all the time.

BRENDA: Right. I'm going to stop you there, Jerry, because we're going to run off to a quick break here in a second. But it's such a great story about how

you got interested, and we'll pick up on that and finish that up here in this next segment.

We're here with Jerry Yudelson. The book is The Godfather of Green: An Eco-Spiritual Memoir. Stay tuned. We have a lot more to come. You're listening to Conscious Talk, radio that makes a difference.

[Musical interlude]

ROB: And welcome back. Yes, you are listening to Conscious Talk, and we're so glad you tuned in. Brenda really loves that, tuning in. We've been doing this show for almost 19 years and learning right along with you, so we invite you to go to ConsciousTalk.net, catch up with some of the shows you missed. They're all free. Or you can just search for Conscious Talk podcasts on the Net, and you will find us and quite a collection of shows. I'm Rob Spears.

BRENDA: And I'm Brenda Michaels, and we're here today with Jerry Yudelson. The book is The Godfather of Green: An Eco-Spiritual Memoir. You were telling us, Jerry, the story of how you got involved in spirituality and the environment, and you had met with this master. You said just being in his presence was meditating, and we understand that, because those special masters, if you will, live in that very calm, peaceful, meditative state, but very present. Is that what you felt?

JERRY: Yes. So, I found an energy and a dynamic there that was mesmerizing for me. I was a hard case. I was an engineer. I had a professional career. I had a girlfriend. Life was moving along very nicely, and yet, there was still this sense of something unsettled, something that was waiting for me. And when I met him, he was very interesting, because he said, "Don't follow me because you feel something. Stick around, hang out, and see if you change, and if you change, maybe you'll want to then have what I have to offer, which is really a lot of inner growth." He never pushed anybody to follow him. He just offered the experience.

It took almost a year before I had an experience where I understood that he was my teacher, and a year later, I moved into his ashram first in Oakland, and then went to India for three months to live in the ashram

there, and then back to the ashram in Oakland. In all of this time, I was having these intense meditative experiences that I chronicle some of in the book, and it was changing something in me. Even though I had all this spiritual vocabulary, I'm not sure I really could describe it well, but I was becoming more open, more loving, more accepting of other people.

BRENDA: And is that you then basically fell in love with the environment? Because I know when you start to make that shift, and your heart opens, and you deepen into who you really are, that spirit being expressing through the physical body, you literally love everything, and you especially love your planet.

ROB: Yeah, it's one of the things that we've always said, that spirit is everywhere. It's everything. But not everyone marries the idea of spirituality and ecological concerns, but it seems in your story that it's a natural.

JERRY: It used to be a pejorative for environmentalists to be called "tree huggers". I had an experience a little over a year after I met this master where I was on a retreat with him in Northern California, and I came out of a meditation session as you suggested, full of this feeling of oneness, this feeling of love for the earth. We were in a redwood forest up in the far northwest corner of California, and as I came out of the meditation hall, I embraced a tree in the immediate vicinity and just felt this sense of oneness. Of course, if you love something, you want to protect it.

So, it was really at that point that I switched internally from being an intellectual environmentalist who wanted to stop pollution, to being somebody who had a much more emotional and physical attraction to the earth. I had been hiking and camping and all that stuff, but it was at that point I really felt an inner surge.

And then, of course, I began to look for, well, how can I bring these two things together? Because in a professional career, you're supposed to be a detached observer, if you will, and lots of people were activists, but that's not the route I had chosen. So, I was trying to bring these two together, and it's not just about loving the earth, it's about all the people you have to work with to achieve that kind of goal.

That's when I kind of ran up against my own persona of being this super-smart and king of the hill guy that I had grown up with. I began to realize that it's only through working together, it's only being part of a community, whether it's a community of seekers or a community of activists or a community of government officials -- as I was for a while when Jerry Brown was governor -- that you get things done.

So, there's a bit of humble pie that you have to eat, and it actually tastes pretty good. If you understand the spiritual path or if you're practicing meditation, you begin to realize that you can achieve these higher states not only with reverence but that you also must have humility.

BRENDA: Yes.

ROB: Yeah, it's kind of like a parallel we've talked about for years when it comes to spirituality. We like to compare it. When we do religion versus spirituality, we say that spirituality is the experience of God and religion was the politics, and I recognize that in your story. It was the engineering and then the other processes that you were really good at and familiar with, that was the politics side, and then along came this experience you had, and it changed your life.

BRENDA: Well, and, Jerry, the two main messages I get out of what you just said and what Rob added to it is, number one, that humility, what we share with our clients when we do our spiritual and emotional coaching, is that the guard at the gate is them, meaning that ego structure, if you will, that personality side, if you will, or persona, you called it, is the guard at the gate. Two, the humility and the heart centeredness and the wisdom that the heart has to offer, it's the guard, and until you can, like you said, maybe eat some humble pie, surrender, whatever you want to call it so that you can carry some humility, it's very difficult to get to that place where you can look upon all that is as part of you and vice versa and feel a love for it, and wanting to take care, wanting to steward Mother Earth, which is what I believe we came here to do. We came here to be stewards of Mother Earth, not to plunder her.

JERRY: Well, that may have been our original charter. I think the allegory of the Garden of Eden is that we also want to eat the apple, and it's that dynamic, the tension between wanting to have a comfortable life, a satisfying life, and effect of eight billion people on the planet with the current state of our technology. There's certainly a role going forward for people to do technological innovations, but there's also a role for maybe rethinking our entire approach and rethinking our mission here, our human experiment. "Human experiment" is probably the best term, because we don't know how it's going to turn out, right?

BRENDA & ROB: Right.

JERRY: We're the lab rats.

BRENDA: Right.

BRENDA: But you know that wanting to eat the apple? There's nothing wrong with wanting to eat the apple. Where we go awry, if you will, is that we don't want to just eat one or two or maybe three apples, we want dozens of them. No, we want hundreds of them. No, we want thousands of them. It's that side of us that lives in not-enough-ness, where we can't get enough because we don't believe, we don't understand, really, we are enough and there is enough. So, with that kind of attitude of there's never enough, we're either going to hoard or we're going to be over-bloated with everything, because that's what makes us feel secure.

Which leads me back to the second message that you were talking about, which is all of this is so doable when we shift consciousness. When we actually move from head to heart, when we actually deepen into who we really are, then all of this is doable, and that creative side you talked about, technology and other things, they come almost naturally, almost magically when we live from that place. So, I guess the big thing is we really do need to shift our consciousness on this planet if we want to really thrive instead of stumbling around struggling and surviving.

BRENDA: That is just my perspective, and I had to put it in there, Jerry, because I know, reading your book, you're very much in line with all of this.

ANNOUNCER: Alternative Talk 1150, local talk for the body, mind, and soul.

[Musical interlude]

BRENDA: Hey, welcome back, and thanks for tuning in with us here today on Conscious Talk, radio that makes a difference.

Jerry Yudelson is one of those people. His book is The Godfather of Green, and it's an eco-spiritual memoir. You can go to jerryudelson.net, to learn more.

So, Jerry, I was pontificating the last few minutes of the last segment on really our perspective, and I felt it was part of yours, too. Maybe you want to pick up on that?

JERRY: Yeah. I think we're at a unique point in human history. We've had 250 years of the Industrial Revolution. We've actually been able to create prosperity for half the people on earth right now, our global middle class, which means in a way that they don't worry about tomorrow's meal. They don't worry about next week's meal. Maybe 10 percent of the people in the world are still in dire poverty, but they're being raised out of that. So, we've actually created something positive, because if you go back and read history, you realize that 99 percent of people in villages and farms lived at the edge of starvation for most of recorded history.

Suddenly we have this great, but false prosperity, and it's been bought at a huge price, and the huge price is depletion of the earth's ability to support us well into the future and seeding the atmosphere with excessive carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, which are going to be with us for literally hundreds of years as far as we know now, and then heating up the oceans and acidifying the oceans so that coral reefs are now disappearing.

So, we've bought this false prosperity at a great price, and now we have to figure out how we're going to pay for it. There are lots of great solutions out there. One source is *Project Drawdown*, which is a fantastic summary of everything we need to do, and now it's up to us to do it.

This generation of elders that I represent who were there at the first Earth Day, we're going to pass from the scene soon enough, and it's going to be for the baby boomers and their children, and the Gen X, and Gen Y, and Gen Z, the Millennials, they're going to have to figure out to clean this thing up. But I think what we've left behind is a legacy of what I'd like to call "humanity's superpower", and humanity's *superpower* is the research and development establishment that we have created worldwide through academia, through government, and nonprofits that can tackle problems.

Just today, I heard that Oxford University in the U.K. is testing a vaccine for coronavirus, Covid-19, and a factory in India is gearing up to produce 40 million doses of it. In the past, we just had to let pandemics run their course, and it was brutal. Now, we're beginning to see, well, maybe within 12 to 18 months we'll figure this one out. So, to me, that is really humanity superpower, and that's what gives me a lot of hope and a lot of optimism about what we can do to reverse the course of global warming.

ROB:

Yeah, well, and one of the things, obviously, in your story which threads throughout the book and then you hook into your thoughts of spirituality and the green movement, etc., you were involved in not just Earth Day, but early days of the solar movement. You moved into wind energy. You've had all these experiences, and now you've actually seen them come back in more available ways. So, I have to really agree with what you've said. We put those things out there, and then we refine them, and we get better at them, and we really do have those possibilities.

So, when we come back from this break, I'd like to ask you, have you tell us a little bit about how you see environmentalism today. I mean, some of us are pretty fatalistic about the way things are, others are hopeful. But what is it that you're seeing on the horizon, perhaps, that we can give people some hope?

Well, you're listening to Conscious Talk. We're here with Jerry Yudelson. His book is [The Godfather of Green](#). It's subtitled, "An Eco-Spiritual Memoir". His website is jerryudelson.net, and we'll be right back.

ANNOUNCER:

Alternative Talk 1150, talk radio for the body, mind, and soul.

[Musical interlude]

ROB: And welcome back. Hey, we're so glad you're still with us. But if you just tuned in, we're here with Jerry Yudelson. He has a wonderful book, called The Godfather of Green: An Eco-Spiritual Memoir. Jerry's been involved with these issues from the first Earth Day and made great strides learning about spirituality, being involved in that world of consciousness. He was physically involved in the solar movement early on before it really became popular. He was around when wind energy was just starting to take hold, mostly in those times because of tax breaks and similar things.

But, Jerry, it's all good and it's all moving forward here in Washington State. We've seen a lot of improvement. What do you see for environmentalism on the horizon that gives you hope?

JERRY: Over time I think environmentalism has switched a lot of its focus. At the beginning, it was all like a red light, "Stop doing these bad things. Stop putting toxic chemicals in the air and in the water," and so forth. And over the last generation, it switched to saying, "Well, we still have to stop the bad actors, because they are out there, but we need to have green light stuff that's positive," similar to the way the solar and the wind industry got started with tax incentives in the 1970s and 1980s.

I think when I was working for Governor Jerry Brown in California promoting solar energy commercialization, developing that industry, we thought things would happen pretty fast. What it turned out was that by the mid-'80s when those tax benefits went away, oil prices had dropped in half and the Reagan Administration was no longer favorable to all this, so a lot of that push went into an R&D mode, and it took 20 years until the Obama Administration came into power in 2009 for all of this hard work to suddenly blossom.

If you look today, something like 70 to 80 percent of all new electric power capacity that's added each year in the U.S. is solar and wind. So, in that sense, we won! It will soon be 100 percent. We won't be building coal plants anymore in the U.S. You won't be building them in a lot of other places, in Germany and in other places. But we're still building

them like crazy right now in China and India, because they see it still as the cheapest fuel.

But I guess my point is, it took the better part of 30 years for that to happen, and our problem today is we don't have 30 years to make another energy transition. We basically have a decade to start making major strides towards getting off fossil fuels, introducing renewables, and decarbonizing our economy. We have to make progress this decade, and that is where the rubber meets the road between environment and economy is we have to convince people that this is an economic benefit, which it is, not an economic detriment or cost, and then our current way, which results in huge impacts on human health through air pollution, through plastics pollution of the environment, etc., that that is a very costly way, that we just haven't measured how costly it is because basically it's unpleasant to have to change things.

One of the things that I think is the bigger issue now, is not technology, it's culture. It's what our parents told us was the way things are, what we may have told our children is the way things are, and so we don't have a cultural basis for a sustainable economy. That dialogue needs to happen. It needs to get into our campfire stories, so to speak. And if you listen to the media, you never get this, because the media's whole job is to keep you hooked on bad things long enough to listen to their commercials. That's their whole business model.

BRENDA:

And let me interrupt you there, Jerry -- because that's what I was thinking sitting here as you were talking about all this -- is exactly the problem. It's a cultural problem. It's not even so much an economic problem, but the beliefs that we have as a culture how the economy should be, what we can do for our work to make money and be sustained.

And because you brought up the media, which is a great point as well, if you will, I'll coin the phrase "powers to be", those that control the media, the powers, the ones with the billions of dollars that pretty much make all the major political and economical decisions on the planet. How do we get to them? How do we shift that consciousness? Because it's like going through muddy water, and you break through to a little clear area,

but it doesn't get to really expand out that much because it's stopped by that particular structure. How do we really break through?

JERRY:

Well, I think the counternarrative is that we have now our own media. We have now our own social media. We have ways to communicate with each other that are not mediated by these large power structures, and on that media, there is a lot of change happening. There is a lot of discussion happening, whether it's Twitter or Instagram or whatever media you're using now. That discussion is ongoing. So, what it really is looking for are vehicles to ride into the political and economic arena rather than having to bring up stuff totally from scratch. If you're a politician, that never works.

So, I do think we're in a changing period. One of the words I just love, because I used to study German language, is *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times. The spirit of the times has shifted. We've gone past the "Oh, crap" moment, like we're in a big fix, and we're now moving towards the, "Well, let's do something about it" moment, and that is going to define, I think, the politics of the 2020s, the current Presidential election notwithstanding. We are determined to make this thing work for all people, and I think that is breaking through.

And, to answer your first question, there's a tremendous pressure on existing power structures, for example on insurance companies, not to insure coastal properties that will be inundated by the rising oceans, not to insure coal power plants. The minute you take away insurance, things don't happen. The same pressure is on financial institutions, on investments by university endowments. So, there's no place to hide anymore if you're a bad actor, and I think that is one of the realities of our cultural shift going forward.

BRENDA:

Yes, we agree with you. I'm glad you said that the way you did, because we absolutely agree that this is what will help shift culture. More than anything else, this is going to help. And as people shift their consciousness, as we know, when you and I and Rob and people in this level of consciousness uplift others and uplift ourselves, it's like pinging

the string on the web of life, and that consciousness goes out, and it affects others, so it all works together.

ROB: Yeah, and here we are in a break, and it probably won't be the last. We consider ourselves as a culture to be slow learners. Let's face it, sometimes we really need to get hit over the head with a cosmic 2x4. Well, and this time it's happening. Will we shift or will we not shift to new considerations of how we can organize our lives, what we're going to organize around for an economy? So, we have a great opportunity, and I imagine when you're out speaking to people that that's one of the subjects.

BRENDA: Yes, and your book, The Godfather of Green, is a great book to introduce out there to the world now, Jerry, because we love that you have taken spirituality and environmentalism and woven them together, because they absolutely go together. And looking at it from those points of view are very, very helpful and very uplifting, and we really thank you for doing the work you're doing out there in the world and for writing this wonderful book. We really do appreciate who you are and what you're putting out there. It's very important.

BRENDA: Thank you so much, Jerry, for joining us today. We really appreciate it, and, folks, as always, thank you. Have a beautiful day, and we'll see all of you next time right here on *Conscious Talk*.