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This is Our Home - So Please Help Care For It

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This is Our Home - So Please Help Care For It

By Alaina Bernard
UCF Forum columnist
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I love the movie “Contact” about a scientist played by Jodie Foster, who has an extraordinary experience traveling through space. In the end, when she could not explain the experience, she ended up finding her faith in something unexplainable.

The movie has always reminded me that there is something bigger than us, but that sometimes our connection to that power is hard to tangibly identify. Many religious teachings share that we are all connected through something bigger, and should treat each other with kindness and respect. But why does that not apply to the planet Earth? We seem to sometimes forget or fail to see the connection between us and this place we call home.

Kris Tompkins, founder of Tompkins Conservation, a worldwide ecological organization, profoundly said: “I think first and foremost, people only protect the things they love. And you can’t love something unless you inherently identify with it.”

Learning about our place in ecology is a piece to finding our identification with the larger system.

For example, our connection to coral reefs may seem as distant as Mars is to Earth. However, these reefs are [one of the more valuable ecosystems on the planet](#), supporting some of the most diverse habitats and providing services estimated at \$375 billion each year. This includes the value they provide to prohibiting shoreline erosion (especially during tropical storms), finding new medicines, supporting ecotourism and fishery economies, as well as producing oxygen.

Another example can be found in Israel. The rapid decline of Jerusalem’s historic monuments, which connect half of the planet’s population through their respective

religious beliefs, is from climate change and local energy dependence. The growing Israel is becoming more dependent on non-renewable energy, and gets waves of air pollution from refineries. The coal and oil plants send sulfur into the region, and when it rains, that sulfur pours over the historic structures, eating the limestone features built through the centuries.

Our link to the past helps define who we are, and our current and future actions can retain, or crumble, those connections.

I commonly hear in my line of work that people just do not know what to do to protect our planet, or they just don't have time. The truth is that every action has a reaction, so performing individual efforts to be more sustainable certainly will make a difference. So I thought I would share a simple list of what you can do to help save our home.

- Buy organic food when possible and use green cleaners. They lack toxic chemicals, are less energy intensive to produce, and are good for your health, too.
- Buy only what you need. Nothing more.
- Save money and be green by turning off lights, setting the dishwasher to not dry (dishes can air dry), washing laundry in cold water, and setting thermostats to automatically adjust throughout the day.
- Turn the water off when you're brushing your teeth.
- Buy a water filter that goes on your sink faucet instead of spending a lot on bottled water.
- Park your car as quickly as you can in the parking lot instead of driving around or waiting for a spot. This will save you gas and you'll get a bit of exercise.
- Reduce, reuse, recycle, in that order.
- Be kind to others, which includes animals and people alike. Kindness creates a positive community for us all to share.
- Practice the concept of "Leave No Trace," by not removing shells at the beach and rocks in the water. Although beautiful, these features create homes or places for animals and insects to hide.

Future generations deserve an opportunity to call Earth home, and our ability to identify with ecological systems will help sustain them. Learning from the Iroquois, we should make sure our actions support seven generations ahead. This ecological concept supports creating a sustainable system, where we can feel connected to something bigger than our individual selves.

It is not just about the trees and the birds and the butterflies, it is about doing what is better for the entire ecosystem as a whole, as we are all one connected community sharing the planet earth.

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