

[Xerox's Ecology Tutor](#)

Category : [May 1991](#)

Published by Anonymous on May. 02, 1991

Xerox's Ecology Tutor

Vegetarian Meditator Abhay Bushan Passionately Helps Mold a Techno-Giant into a Green Machine

"Brought up a vegetarian, I came here in 1965, married an American and accepted America lock, stock and barrel - democratic principles, affluence, everything, even meat," reminisces a balding Abhay Bushan of Palo Alto, California. "But I always felt I had to make some contribution to society. The idea was not to stay, but get a degree and go back and help India. But, more and more, I liked it here." He joined Xerox, swore off meat in 1978, and is today the copier titan's pioneering manager of Environmental Leadership Programs - saving trees with tough recycling mandates, protecting the soil by eliminating super toxins from copier fluids and meticulously massaging an ecological vision of "oneness" into the backbone of Xerox policies. India lost her son. Mother Earth adopted him.

Though he comfortably dons full executive dress, decorum and duty, Bushan is no corporate toady. He's independent-minded, creative, gutsy and gets a lot of his ideas from yoga. "I practice meditation at least half an hour every morning and cycle fortyfive minutes to and from work. That gives me time for more meditating and thinking." And contemplative Hindus are welcome at open-minded Xerox. They especially like Bushan. He has personal conviction - burns only one light bulb in his Sunnyvale office - and has enough fire to make their high-minded motto "Xerox recycles because we cannot duplicate the planet" do more than just jingle.

A graduate of the elite Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the heady young Bushan once envisioned technology as his personal path as well as India's economic avatar. But a year-long trip back to his homeland with his family in 1978 (a paid social service leave awarded by Xerox) turned him around. There, amidst stark poverty but wealth of spirit, he cauterized broken links to his childhood. MIT's cerebral theories palsied as more potent ideas, planted earlier by grandparents, sprouted. "My maternal grandfather, a contemporary of Gandhi, would make cloth

out of yarn into only half a kurta, for himself," Bushan remembers admiringly, "because that's all the average citizen could afford. Also, during that trip I overcame my fear of poverty. I realized basic spiritual values are the ones that make people happy. When I returned, I started simplifying everything." Back in the Xerox saddle and a posh office, Bushan secretly began redesigning his own interior, hammering and honing his ecological musings into sharper focus. "I started studying environmental issues and then got involved in Earth Day 1990, both in the US and in India. "Harmony with all life was what was important is to me, oneness. I was then manager of systems integration standard computer networking for Xerox work stations. But my heart wasn't in it." So he cautiously approached senior vice-president "Sandy" Campbell asking the company to let him spend 25% of his time on environment-related areas. Campbell responded, Why not full time! Elated, Bushan grabbed the reins. Under his tutoring, Xerox now packages in boxes made from recycled paper and, instead of throwing them out, reuses them five or six times. He, with others, have also inspired Xerox to substitute a citrus extract for ozone-eating chlorofluorocarbons in cleaning solvents and eliminate toxic wastes from toner fluids - saving millions of another resource, dollars.

He wants Xerox to function like nature and explains, "In nature, things don't go to waste. When a cycle is completed, there is no loss. We need to emulate this." Ecology has become for Bushan "almost a religion," he admits. "Though it derives a lot from the Hindu tradition, if you go to India, you will of course find a lot of inhumanity to man and environment. So in the end. It's always how you practice that matters."

PHILOSOPHER & Family Man

Bushan is Hindu, but likes to carve a definition that fits him rather than the other way around. He has studied the Gita and his work ethic reflects it. "Work not for the fruits of work but for the unity of life," he paraphrases Lord Krishna. Vivekananda and others imbedded their gems in him but it's the terse writings of an old American mystic called Peace Pilgrim (1908-1981) that really charges his spiritual cells. This peripatetic woman trudged 25,000 penniless miles in the name of peace - inner and outer - and left her entire message in a tiny 32-page plain leaflet. It echoes Hindu wisdom with a rain-shower of universalist positive and practical thinking. Lines like these reverberate in Bushan's mind: "I felt a oneness - oneness with all my fellow human beings, oneness with all creation. There is a feeling of endless energy - it just never runs out; it seems to be as endless as air. You just seem to be plugged in to the source of universal energy...Every one of us has a special place in the Life Pattern."

Her "four relinquishments" - of the lower self, feeling of separateness, possessiveness and negative emotions - and "four purifications" - of body, thought, mind and motive - are heard echoing in Bushan's voice, "You have to move from ego to conscience, from the lower self to the higher self. Our basic needs are simple. Other needs are ego needs. Harmony with all life is what is important to me, oneness with all life."

Bushan applies this oneness idea very personally. "I weigh 5 factors in making all my decisions: 1) its environmental impact 2) its ecological impact - between living beings 3) its economic impact 4) its impact on my health and 5) Is it fulfilling?"

Four women lovingly surround Bushan and fearlessly ground him when necessary. "My daughters taught me humility," he confesses with a wince, "and to be myself more. Kids force you to be totally honest. "After struggling to chain down the oldest one with his Indian value system, he soon changed strategies: "I went from autocrat to democrat. In India, children are often kept children. I think we have to trust them more and let them establish their own 'centers,' and shape their own convictions as individuals."

Article copyright Himalayan Academy.