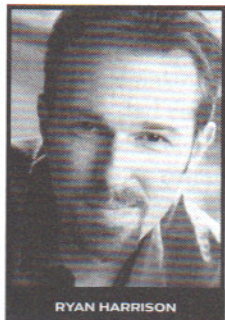


Suzuki Speaks

What do the ozone layer, money markets, the Amazon forest, an iPod, honey bees, the Church of the Brethren, rainfall, and you have in common? *Everything*. That is, according to the concept of interconnectedness.

I teach a course called "Spiritual Cinema" at the University of La Verne. Each semester as I unroll the unit in which the class explores the intersection of spirituality, interconnectedness, and film, and as we strive to make sense of the unseen lines that connect all of us to each other and (quite literally) to everything else, I am grateful for the documentary *Suzuki Speaks*.



RYAN HARRISON

David Suzuki, a Japanese-Canadian doctor of zoology, professor of genetics, radio/television personality, and recipient of more than 20 honorary doctorates, has made teaching others about environmentalism, sustainability, climate change, and clean energy the focus of his life's work. In

Suzuki Speaks, he brings each of these topics to viewers in ways that directly awaken and challenge them, weaving the pieces together in a dizzying digital tapestry of information.

With computer-generated images, Suzuki unleashes an attention-grabbing stream of vignettes that simultaneously entertain and educate. Interconnectedness is no small subject, of course, but Suzuki admirably compresses his message into a 45-minute documentary broken into bite-sized chunks that examine aspects of life as seemingly disparate as biological needs, economics and growth, youth, and (by the end of the film, a much-needed dose of) hope for reconnection.

One of the most salient and potentially life-changing segments of the film—and one that I believe should be comprehensively discussed within our church communities—is Suzuki's evaluation of humankind's relationship with the four elements: earth, air, water, and fire. He reminds us of the understanding that traditional, nature-based cultures and beliefs systems have always suggested: there is no environment "out there" that we as a species have to deal with. Rather, we *are* the environment, literally made up of the food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the energy of our fiery sun that is

released through digestion and metabolism.

If you follow this idea to its applicability in your life, it can have profound implications. On a spiritual level, this discussion opens us to new ways of understanding our relationship to God, to creation, and to our stewardship of the Earth. To put a new twist on a frustratingly simplistic bumper sticker phrase, what might our lives and world look like if we assumed the credo "God created it. I'm responsible for it. That settles it."? Can you truly believe in the sanctity of creation and not take better care of it? Further, what happens when you recognize that *you* are part of that sanctified creation? That everyone else is, as well?

Recognizing that we *are* the environment, and that by extension everything we do to it we are doing to ourselves, places us directly in the middle of a holy equation, rather than as observers who can choose to remain aloof. Suzuki lays it out there, plain as can be: there is no such thing as being aloof.

Suzuki Speaks diagnoses but does not prescribe. The result is that before the credits finish rolling, your head is full of questions: How can I personally make a difference in this global-sized issue? Where should I start? Are "small steps" good enough? Is there a "most important thing" to do or change right now? How do I awaken my family to the spirituality of interconnectedness? How can my church make a difference? What might that look like?

Fortunately—and I like to think that Suzuki recognizes this—we already are surrounded by the answers. When we give thought to these issues and the questions they raise, and then apply our collective wisdom, things start to "click." And when that happens, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain the status quo. (Good news for a people trying to continue the status-quo-shattering work of Jesus!)

So, consider it a challenge: get a copy of the DVD from your local library (most online and brick-and-mortar DVD companies probably won't have it), watch it with a church group, and ask the above questions. You may be surprised at how readily the answers to these important questions come and the ways in which you will feel called to respond. **M**

Ryan Harrison attends the La Verne (Calif.) Church of the Brethren where he started and led monthly Spiritual Cinema Circle gatherings for more than five years. He now teaches "Spiritual Cinema" at the University of La Verne, and is currently pursuing a terminal degree (PsyD of Health & Wellness) at the University of the Rockies.

ABOUT THE MOVIE

Title: *Suzuki Speaks*. **Released:** 2004. **Running time:** 46 minutes. **Director:** Tony Pappa. **Produced** by Avanti Pictures Corporation in association with CBC Television. Recipient of the 2004 Gemini Award for Best Science, Technology, Nature, Environment or Adventure Documentary Program. "We've framed the environmental problem the wrong way," David Suzuki says. "There's no environment 'out there' for us to interact with. We are the environment because we are the Earth."

