

Earth and Spirit:

Bringing Ecology into Adult Religious Education



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Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth is an independent organization related to the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Our mission is to facilitate and support the work of Unitarian Universalists, by affirming and promoting the seven principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association, including the seventh: “to affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are all a part.” We do this by focusing on the theological, spiritual, and ethical aspects of human values and activities that affect the health and sustainability of living Earth.

Our vision is that Unitarian Universalists recognize and embrace the moral imperative to live in covenant with the web of life through personal, congregational, and denominational practices.

As you use these materials, we hope that you will make an opportunity to educate yourself and others about the important mission and work of Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth. Please feel welcome to contact us at office@uuministryforearth.org for information about our current programs.

This resource is made possible by the generosity of individual donors and congregations. Please consider making a donation today. Your gift will help UU Ministry for Earth develop additional resources. You may donate online or send your contribution to Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth, 1034 SW 13th Ave., Portland, OR 97205.

Thank you for your commitment to Earth ministry. Working together, we will transform our individual and congregational lives into acts of religious witness, discarding our harmful habits for new behaviors and practices that will sustain life on Earth.

This Manual and additional resources are available on the UU Ministry for Earth website at <http://uuministryforearth.org/>

This Manual is designed as a resource for you to use to create an adult religious education program on UU faith and ecology for your congregation. Rather than creating a set curriculum for congregations to follow, we decided to compile a reference work that congregations can use to design adult RE programs specifically geared to their needs. We encourage you to search for additional materials published after 2005, but the resources listed here will give you a good start.

NOTE: Some URLs in the 2005 edition are not accessible in 2013. These original URLs are shaded in the text. Links to similar websites are provided.

You are welcome to adapt the materials in this Manual to make it as easy as possible for you to design a curriculum for your congregation. If you use or adapt the materials, please credit the original authors when applicable and reference UU Ministry for Earth in any reprints or adaptations. We encourage you to print sparingly, using recycled paper and soy ink.

In addition, we invite your participation in the UU Ministry for Earth email discussion group on global warming. To join, go to <http://lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/globalwarming>

YOU

I came upon You
in the Deep Silence of a cathedral,
filled with centuries of prayer and uplifted praise.
I came to rest,
In the lake Isle of Innisfree, with its bee-loud glen.
I turned and saw a tiny budding flower,
in a field of weeds,
Fresh, and young, and innocent in the morning dew,
a meadow in early spring.

I looked up into the Eternal heaven,
and lost myself there as a comet burned,
new trails across your Ocean sky.
Then You showed me the Book of Life
with the wisdom of ancients, outgrown,
words forming, as I turned the pages.

A summer storm came, wild and unpredictable,
rain in the desert
hot as an iron
smoothing out crumpled sheets
against the rock that does not give way,
except to Love.
Melting
in a rushing river, a roaring river,
racing, in Divine Madness
a love swoon
for Your Ocean, for Your Self.

I came upon You,
the prayer of my heart
answered.

Christine Lacedra, from her book, *The Nearness of You*

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Introduction: How to use this Manual

This manual is designed as a resource for YOU to use to create an adult religious education program on UU faith and ecology for your congregation. Rather than creating a set curriculum for congregations to follow, we decided to compile a reference work that congregations can use to design adult RE programs specifically geared to their needs.

There is a wealth of material available, primarily through the Internet, in a variety of formats – electronic, print, video and DVD, etc. Similarly, we are faced with a wide array of issues concerning the natural world around us, its health, and our place in it. Congregations are likely to have differing interests, and they may very well want to design RE programs that relate to local ecological concerns.

Another advantage of a resource manual is that it remains a work in progress. As congregations have success in creating adult RE programs on ecology, we invite them to tell us about their programs and to send us material that we can include in future editions. In this way, we are able to grow organically, reflecting our nature as part of the interdependent web of all existence. So, we urge you to approach this manual as a resource from which you can obtain ideas to help you to create a program that meets the specific needs of your *congregation* and your locality.

We begin by providing materials to assist you in addressing some underlying theological issues, and we urge you to make consideration of these issues part of your adult RE programs.

- What do we as Unitarian Universalists have to add to the discussion of environmental concerns in our modern world?
- Is there a spiritual dimension to ecology?
- Why shouldn't our congregants address environmental issues through specifically environmental organizations (the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), and so forth)?
- How has our Western Judeo-Christian tradition influenced humanity's approach to the natural world? Has it been helpful or harmful?
- Does that tradition provide us with tools to address environmental concerns?
- Does our UU tradition add anything to what is provided by Jewish and Christian traditions?

These are important questions, and we urge you to give your congregants an opportunity to discuss them. From our experience, we believe that at least two sessions should be devoted to discussion of our unique UU theological perspective, before moving on to consideration of some substantive issues to which we might apply our thinking.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the Manual provides examples of adult RE curricula that were found to have worked successfully in various congregations. These are intended

to serve as examples, which you should tailor to suit your congregation's particular needs. They are intended to give you ideas, rather than to provide a framework that you should follow rigidly. As you find that certain things work or don't work, please let us know, so that we can continue to refine this manual.

I. Ecology and Faith

What Does the UU Movement Have to Contribute?

The purpose of this part of the manual is to help you to find ways to discuss – within your own congregation -- the role that religion has historically played in defining the relationships among the Spirit, humans, and nature. This is only the starting point, of course. We move on to consideration of positive roles spirituality might play as we try to move toward a more ecological view of the world, and, specifically, what Unitarian Universalism has to contribute toward this effort?

The readings from scripture and other sources, on the pages that follow, can be photocopied and handed out to participants in an adult RE course. They are intended to be used as bases for discussion. Primarily, they help us to see what various religious traditions have to say about the relationship among the Divine, humans, and nature, based on ancient sources. Some of them can be seen to carry negative implications for a healthy ecological relationship. Others might be read to point the way toward deeper ecological understandings and relationships.

Commentary that follows these readings is intended to help the course facilitator to lead a discussion in which participants have an opportunity to wrestle with religious traditions, and to consider how various traditions have applied these core teachings. The commentary can be shared with the class, or not – that depends on the facilitator.

So – how to get started with this conversation? One very helpful way to begin the discussion in an adult RE setting is to open with a short video that presents some of the major issues. The UU movement has not produced a video that sets forth a UU perspective on these issues, so we pretty much have to use videos from other traditions as a starting point. This has some advantages. It enables us to show material that presents Jewish, Christian, and other traditions' viewpoints, and to contrast those perspectives with a UU vantage point.

The list of resources at the end of this section contains references to various videos that might be used. The author has had good success with a video produced by the National Council of Churches, called "God's Creation and Global Warming." It is a well-produced, 12-minute video, with beautiful photography, and a diverse range of articulate speakers, Jewish and Christian. It provides a good overview of traditional Judeo-Christian views. Humans are seen as having been created in the image of "God" and as having been given dominion over the animals and plants of the earth. However, the video tells us, humans have also been enjoined to be good "stewards" of creation, taking care to preserve and maintain the Earth.

Everyone in the class sees the same video presentation, so we begin with the same introductory material. The video provides an opportunity to discuss the fundamentals of the traditional Judeo-Christian view. Then, the class can be given an opportunity to consider what the video would be like if it were to be made by UUs.

- What would we do differently?
- Do we agree fully with the stewardship model, or would we take it further?
- Doesn't stewardship retain humans in a hierarchy and above the natural world?

- What would a model based on the interdependent web of all existence (our UU 7th Principle) look like?
- Is it possible to envision a model in which humans are not “above” the rest of creation?
- And if so, where is “God,” the divine, in that picture?
- Is “God” part of the web of existence, as well, neither higher nor lower?

The materials also provide readings from Muslim and Buddhist scriptures, as well as a few more modern Judeo-Christian sources. Following these is some brief commentary on views of the Divine, humans, and nature within these traditions. These can be used to draw comparisons with the Judeo-Christian tradition and with our own UU developing perspective. There are wonderful reference materials available on these traditions; some are included in the list of references. In the future, we would like to be able to add materials on other faith traditions, such as Hinduism, and various indigenous earth-based traditions, such as Native-American and neo-pagan traditions. We would welcome contributions of materials on these subjects.

You also might want to explore with a class some modern philosophies/theologies that address the relationship of the Spirit, humanity, and nature. Some of these have been influential in Unitarian Universalist thinking. Examples include: process theology, eco-feminist theology, the Gaia hypothesis, liberation theology, and the New Cosmology. Obviously, each one of these theories could take up an entire course, and more, but you may wish at least to introduce class participants to some of these ideas. Resources for discussing these theories are also listed in the references section of the Manual.

Passages from Ancient Scriptures

(Bible: New Revised Standard Version)

Hebrew Bible

Dominion

So *Elohim* created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, Male and female, he created them.

Elohim blessed them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Gen 1:27-28).

“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea;

unto your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. (Gen 9:1-3).

Stewardship

Six years you shall sow your land and gather its yield; but in the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves. (Exodus 23:10)

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God. (Lev 19:10-11).

Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord; you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. (Lev 25:3-4).

You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely.

The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely. (Lev 25:18-19).

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.

Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land. (Lev 25:23-24).

Kinship; Interdependent Web

Then Yahweh formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

And Yahweh planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Gen 2:7-8)

Then Yahweh said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.

So out of the ground Yahweh formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature was its name.

The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

So Yahweh caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

And the rib that Yahweh had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Gen 2:18-22).

Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail . . . ?

What is the way to the place where the light is distributed, Or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

...

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you?

...

Who has the wisdom to number the Clouds? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,

When the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together? (Job 38:22, 24, 34, 37-38).

Can you hunt prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert?

...

Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?

Do you observe the calving of the deer?

Can you number the months that they fulfill,

And do you know the time when they give birth?

(Job 38:39-40; 39:1-2)

Is it at your command that the eagle (*Heb.: vulture*) mounts up and makes its nest on high? in the clouds?

It lives on the rock and makes its home in the fastness of the rocky crag.

From there it spies the prey; its eyes see it from far away.

Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is.

(Job 39:27-30)

New Testament

Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed;
nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is! For, in fact,
the kingdom of God is among [or within] you. [Luke 17:20-21 (NSRV)]

It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here!' or 'Look, there!'
Rather, (the Father's) imperial rule is spread out upon the earth, and people don't see it.
(Thomas 113)¹.

But if by God's finger I drive out demons, then for you God's imperial rule has arrived.
(Luke 11:20).

Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew's version
of the Lord's prayer, Mt 6:10).

Jesus said, "If your teachers say to you, 'Look, the kingdom is in heaven,' then the birds
will get there before you. But the kingdom is within you, and it is outside you. If you
know yourselves, then you will be known; and you will know that you are the sons of the
living Father. (Thomas 3, Mitchell trans.).²

Later Judeo-Christian Views

The high, the low
All of creation,
God gives to humankind to use.
If this privilege is misused,
God's justice permits creation to punish humanity.
(Hildegard of Bingen)

¹ Translation from Funk, Robert W., Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*,
(San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 531.

² Stephen Mitchell, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 146.

The world, we are told, was made especially for man – a presumption not supported by all the facts . . . Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? (John Muir)

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, animals, or collectively: the land . . . it changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for its fellow members, and also respect for the community as such. (Aldo Leopold).

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the biblical concept of dominion is quite different from the concept of domination, and the difference is crucial. . . . [F]ollowers of the tradition are charged with the duty of stewardship, because the same biblical passage that grants them “dominion” also requires them to “care for” the earth even as they “work” it.³

Islam

Do you see how all things in the heavens and the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, trees and beasts, and men in abundance, pay homage to God? (*Qur'an* 22:18)

Assuredly the creation of the heavens and the earth
Is greater than the creation of humankind;
Yet most people understand not. (*Qur'an* 40:57).

Like the ground turning green in a spring wind.
Like birdsong beginning inside the egg.
Like this universe coming into existence,
the lover wakes and whirls
in a dancing joy,
then kneels down
in praise. (Jelal-ud-din Rumi)

To God belongs all things in the heavens and on the earth; and it is he who encompasses all things. (*Qur'an* 4:126).

³ Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance*, p. 243.

Buddhism

In safety and in bliss
May all creatures be of a blissful heart
Whatever breathing beings there may be
Frail or firm . . . long or small
Seen or unseen, dwelling far or near
Existing or yet seeking to exist
May all creatures be of a blissful heart. (*Sutta Nipata*)

Being rock, being gas, being mist, being Mind,
Being the mesons traveling among the galaxies with the speed of light,
You have come here, my beloved one . . .
You have manifested yourself as trees, as grass, as butterflies, as single-celled beings,
and as chrysanthemums;
But the eyes with which you looked at me this morning tell me you have never died.
(Thich Nhat Hanh)

Watching a spider at work,
I vow with all beings
to cherish the web of the universe:
touch one point and everything moves.
(Robert Aitken)

Garbage becomes rose.
Rose becomes compost—
Everything is in transformation.
Even permanence is impermanent.
(Thich Nhat Hanh)

Ecology in Some Major Faith Traditions (by Craig Scott)

Hebrew Scripture — Dominion, Stewardship, and Kinship

Dominion

Our Unitarian-Universalist Seventh Principle calls on us to respect “the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part.” Short and to the point, but this 7th Principle captures the essence of what needs to be said about the web of life and our part in it. This is not, of course, the prevalent view in the modern world of the relationship among humans, nature, and the divine.

Western Judeo-Christian scripture and doctrine have espoused other, more prevalent, views of humans and nature, and some of these views have done a great deal of harm over the centuries.

In the very first chapter of Genesis, the author, whom scholars refer to as the “Priestly writer,” recounts how *Elohim*, his name for God, created the world. All was chaos, waste, and darkness, the earth was a “formless void,” and the first thing that *Elohim* created was light. Step by step, *Elohim* created the sea, the sky, and the land, and then began to populate it with fish, birds, and animals. Finally, the author describes *Elohim*’s creation of humans:

So *Elohim* created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, Male and female, he created them.

Elohim blessed them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Gen 1:27-28).

And later in Genesis, after the account of the great flood, this same author recounts how *Elohim* said to Noah and his sons:

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth,

and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea;

unto your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. (Gen 9:1-3).

So, in this “dominion” creation account, the author tells us that God created humans in his own image (and yes, God is definitely male here), and gave them dominion over the earth, including all the plants and animals. In effect, humans were created to be little gods, or little generals for God, here on earth, holding god-like powers over the rest of creation. Unfortunately, this view of creation, sometimes called “dominion theology” by scholars, has been prevalent throughout the history of development in the West. And it continues to be the dominant view, as humans go on using up the world’s resources at an unsustainable rate.

These passages were written more than 2,500 years ago, in the context of Middle Eastern societies that were agrarian in character. The populations consisted primarily of peasants who took their flocks into the hills or who struggled to eke out a living by farming the arid soil. In this context, the idea that humans would ever actually subdue the world might have

seemed desirable, but probably also seemed far-fetched. However, times have changed, populations have exploded, and we are in serious danger of over-exploiting the world's resources. So it is not too surprising that critiques of dominion theology have been a very recent phenomenon. An article written by a professor at UC Berkeley, and published in the journal *Science*, in 1967, opened up scholarly debate about the adverse effects of dominion theology.⁴ Although debate continues, and dominion theology has its apologists, most progressive scholars today are looking for scriptural and doctrinal authority to support a more ecological view of humans and nature.

Stewardship

“Dominion theology” is tempered somewhat by biblical injunctions that require humans to be good stewards. Thus, for example, the author of the book of Leviticus shows us God telling the Israelites, through Moses, that they must give farmland a rest every seventh year:

Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune
your vineyard, and gather in their yield;

but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for
the Lord;

you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. (Lev 25:3-4).

These injunctions were meant to enable the Hebrew people to live within their resources, so that the land would continue to sustain them:

You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances,
so that you may live on the land securely.

The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill
and live on it securely. (Lev 25:18-19).

Humans were given the land only as tenants, and they must care for it and maintain it:

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine;
with me you are but aliens and tenants.

Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide
for the redemption of the land. (Lev 25:23-24).

So, the Bible enjoins humans to be good stewards of the land, and this certainly helps to moderate some of the harshness of dominion theology. This concept of stewardship has become popular within the field of environmental ethics. For example, Al Gore used the stewardship model for caring for creation in his book, *Earth in the Balance*. Gore writes:

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the biblical concept of dominion is quite different from the concept of domination, and the difference is crucial. . . . [F]ollowers of the tradition are charged with the duty of stewardship, because the same biblical passage that grants

⁴ See Lynn White, Jr., “The Historic Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” in Spring, David, and Eileen Spring, Eds., *Ecology and Religion in History* (New York: Harper Torchbooks. 1974). 15-31. This article originally appeared in the March, 1967 issue of *Science*.

them “dominion” also requires them to “care for” the earth even as they “work” it. [*Earth in the Balance*, p. 243].

Thus, the concept of stewardship calls on humans to be responsible and to care for the earth. Note, however, that it does not disturb the underlying premise of dominion theology -- that humans are created in the image of God and that they stand in some sort of hierarchical relationship to the rest of creation. Under this view, humans have authority and control over nature. Although they are enjoined to use their authority responsibly, they are above nature in the hierarchy, and they occupy a place of particular importance, with special status and power. So, even if we add stewardship to the picture, we are still a long way from an ecological worldview. What we need is a view of humans and nature that sees the environment as more than just a backdrop for human drama, that sees the natural world as what sustains us. A view that focuses, in other words, on sustainability and distributive justice, on our profound dependence on each other and on the earth.

Kinship; the Interdependent Web

Our Unitarian Universalist 7th Principle provides us with an ecological lens through which we might view the relationship between humans and the earth. The model of the interdependent web of existence stands in opposition to the dominion theology of humans and nature that we find in Genesis. Rather than occupying a dominant position over the earth, humans are seen as being part of an interdependent system of relationships. The image of the web is important because it illustrates the interdependence of all things – something that affects one part of the web affects the entire web, and the web cannot exist when parts of it are removed; every part is essential. Buddhist activist and teacher Robert Aitken put it this way:

Watching a spider at work,

I vow with all beings

To cherish the web of the universe:

Touch one point and everything moves.

It is also essential that our 7th principle includes the phrase, “of which we are a part.” We need to remember that humans are just as much a part of ecosystems as all the other plants and animals, so that everything we do affects every other part of the system. So, if the concept of the interdependent web stands squarely opposed to dominion theology, does this mean that we have to jettison the Bible altogether, along with 3,000 years of Judeo-Christian tradition, in order to follow the UU 7th Principle?

As it happens, the Bible also provides abundant support for a theology based on the interdependent web. Chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis, which contain the Garden of Eden story, were written by another author than the “priestly” writer of chapter one, and they contain a completely different creation story. This creation story uses the name “Yahweh” for God – the translation is usually “lord” or “lord God” – and the author is therefore known to scholars as the Yahwist writer. At some point these two stories were combined into a unified, but inconsistent, book of Genesis. In the Yahwist version, creation begins not out of a chaotic void, but with an uninhabited world, in which Yahweh has not yet made it rain, and there is no one to till the soil. In this account, the first act of creation occurs when Yahweh forms the first human out of the dust of the ground and breathes life into Adam’s nostrils. Only then does Yahweh plant the Garden of Eden, and begin to create trees and rivers, animals and birds, and of course Eve, from Adam’s rib.

So in this account, humans are made from arable soil and not in God's image. It is important that arable soil is the medium of creation, because it is clear in this account that humans have been created, not to rule over the earth, but to cultivate the soil in the garden. The Hebrew word used for this purpose means "to serve," as opposed to the word that is translated "to subdue" in dominion theology's creation story. Thus, this writer sees the human as the servant, not the master, of the land, emphasizing human interdependence with, rather than dominion over the earth.

In the Garden of Eden account, the *animals* are also created from the soil, and humans are not distinguished from other forms of life, but identified with them. In fact the same phrase, "living beings," is used for both humans and animals, although many translators have been unable to accept this usage and have attempted to make unwarranted theological distinctions. The priestly writer of chapter 1 sees humans, created in God's image, as distinct from other forms of life, while the Yahwist writer views humans as made, like the animals, from arable soil, and thus related to other forms of life.

The Book of Job provides a set of very powerful images of the interdependent web of existence. After Yahweh subjects Job to a series of privations to win a bet, He appears to Job as a voice from a whirlwind, and speaks to Job in some of the most beautiful poetry to be found anywhere in world literature. Yahweh speaks with obvious pride and delight of the wildness of the natural world, of things that are inexplicable and painful but unbearably beautiful, of the rightness of the natural world, which brews in Yahweh, and in us, a fierce and intoxicating joy. The author writes movingly of Yahweh's pleasure in the wonders of the natural world (these are just a few examples):

Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail..?

What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,

Or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

...

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you?

...

Who has the wisdom to number the Clouds? Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,

When the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together? (Job 38:22, 24, 34, 37-38).

And then the voice from the whirlwind begins to speak of Yahweh's delight in the wildness of the animals:

Can you hunt prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert?

...

Do you know when the mountain goats give birth?

Do you observe the calving of the deer?

Can you number the months that they fulfill,

And do you know the time when they give birth?

(Job 38:39-40; 39:1-2)

The author ends this beautiful imagery of the natural world with Yahweh telling Job about vultures:

Is it at your command that the eagle (*Heb.: vulture*) mounts up and makes its nest on high? in the clouds?

It lives on the rock and makes its home in the fastness of the rocky crag.

From there it spies the prey; its eyes see it from far away.

Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is.

(Job 39:27-30)

What kind of an answer is this? Job demands justice of Yahweh, and complains that otherwise the world makes no sense, and in response Yahweh shows Job an image of little vultures drinking blood! Yahweh ignores Job's demands completely, and answers with what seems to be a total *non-sequitor*. But if we think about it, we can see that the author has given us an ecological model of the world. He shows us a world of interdependent parts, each one of which is equally important: humans are not at the center of things, and they play no greater role than baby vultures, or lions, or antelopes, or, for that matter, than trees and rain clouds, mountains and oceans. The author gives us a vision of the world in which humans are not made in the image of God and are not meant to rule over the earth. Instead, the author describes a world of interconnectedness, in which each creature is equally important and all are part of the interdependent web.⁵

The author of Job may have been the first great nature writer, but many writers since have echoed this theme. Thus, for example, John Muir wrote:

The world, we are told, was made especially for man – a presumption not supported by all the facts . . . Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation?⁶

The great naturalist and writer, Aldo Leopold, used the term “land ethic,” for what we call the interdependent web:

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, animals, or collectively: the land . . . it changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for its fellow members, and also respect for the community as such.⁷

⁵ Nature Writer Bill McKibben provides a marvelous discussion of the Book of Job and its ecological implications in Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994).

⁶ John Muir, *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1916).

⁷ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford, 1949).

The New Testament – The Kingdom of God

Jesus of Nazareth was an important social critic and activist in the tradition of many Old Testament prophets who challenged the existing order. As a Jewish peasant of the 1st Century Middle East, Jesus confronted a multi-layered system of oppression, and he challenged it in a number of ways, offering an alternative social vision.⁸

- There was the oppression of the Romans and the Herodian kings who served under them;
- A very small wealthy elite monopolized most of the wealth in society at the expense of the peasants;
- The patriarchal society was both hierarchical and male-dominated.
- Under the oppressive system controlled by the Temple in Jerusalem, priestly elites, including lawyers, scribes, and Pharisees imposed a purity system that was rigidly hierarchical and repressed women, slaves, the disabled, and so on.

This domination system, of course, is seen by eco-feminist scholars as a system that must be challenged. Oppression of women and other groups was typical of a broader culture of oppression that extends to the earth as well.⁹ According to this view, human domination of nature is inextricably linked to systems of gender, class, and racial domination. Thus, to begin to articulate a different relationship to the earth, we must approach the issue in terms of eco-justice, bringing about a social reordering that overturns these systems of domination. In his attacks on the domination system, Jesus went beyond simply acting as a social critic; Jesus articulated and advocated an alternative social vision.

This social vision provides powerful arguments for a theology of ecology lies in what various scholars have characterized as the “kingdom of God” passages. Most notable in this regard are the following:

The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is! For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among [or within] you. (Luke 17:20-21)

It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, ‘Look, here!’ or ‘Look, there!’ Rather, (the Father’s) imperial rule is spread out upon the earth, and people don’t see it. (Thomas 113)

Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew’s version of the Lord’s prayer, Mt 6:10).

⁸ See, Marcus J. Borg, *The God we Never Knew* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997) and Crossan, John Dominic, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

⁹ See, e.g., Rosemary Radford Ruether *Gaia and God*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), and Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

Jesus said, "If your teachers say to you, 'Look, the kingdom is in heaven,' then the birds will get there before you. But the kingdom is within you, and it is outside you. If you know yourselves, then you will be known; and you will know that you are the sons of the living Father. (Thomas 3, Mitchell trans.).¹⁰

As Jesus describes the kingdom, it is open to anyone who can perceive it, and it does not require the mediation of the Temple or the priests. It can also be seen as a social vision, articulated by Jesus in his prophetic role. As such, it contrasts the kingdom of God with the kingdoms of Herod, Caesar, and so forth. It is what life would be like on earth if God were king and Herod and Caesar were not. It may also refer to the community of those living under the kingship of God. In a world governed by the kingdom of God, the poor would be blessed, gender and purity restrictions would not exist, and the domination system would be replaced by God's domination-free reign. Notably, in the Lord's Prayer, we pray for the existence of this kingdom *on earth*, as well as in heaven. (Mt 6:10).

How is Jesus' alternative social vision, as articulated in his "kingdom of God" teachings, helpful to creation of an ecology-based theology? First of all, in his "kingdom of God" teachings, Jesus provides a pathway for challenging systems of domination and setting forth an egalitarian and inclusive social vision. As leading eco-feminist scholars have pointed out, systems of domination over nature are coextensive with systems of domination over other oppressed groups, especially systems of domination over women. Jesus' alternative social vision is domination-free. Although we are unlikely ever to attain a totally domination-free system, it nonetheless serves as a worthy social vision, one that provides a context for an ecological vision in which humans are not seen as dominant over nature. Such is the "dream of God" as articulated in Jesus' teachings of compassion and the kingdom of God.

Sallie McFague takes the argument a step further, and points to a further ramification of "kingdom of God" imagery. Jesus' life and teachings suggest that the shape of the earth, as "God's body," includes all, especially the oppressed, the needy, the outcast.¹¹ She suggests that the list of the oppressed and outcast should include the planet itself and its myriad creatures, including outcast humans, focusing on oppressed vulnerable, suffering *bodies*. This view suggests that nature also falls in the category of the "oppressed," and that even microorganisms have their place in creation, independent of their usefulness, or threat, to humans. She refers to a statement by the World Council of Churches on the "integrity of creation:"

The value of all creatures in and for themselves, for one another, and for God, and their interconnectedness in a diverse whole that has unique value for God, together constitute the integrity of creation.

¹⁰ Stephen Mitchell, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 146.

¹¹ McFague, *Ibid.*, 164.

Islam

Tawhīd

Seyyed Hossein Nasr points out that the study of ecology fits very closely with traditional Islamic cosmological sciences, which “are based on the interrelation between things, on the unicity of nature, on synthesis and the vision of the whole within which alone the parts have meaning.”¹² Nasr bases this statement on the Islamic principle of unity (*al-Tawhīd*), the basic principle on which all else depends.¹³ Or, as Parvez Manzoor puts it, “Every discussion of ethics in Islam must, of necessity, proceed from *Tawhīd* as it is the *sine qua non* of the Islamic faith.”¹⁴

Tawhīd is not precisely translatable, but it is important that we try to get some understanding of its meaning. Islam is, above all else, based on the certitude of *Tawhīd*: the unity of God. *Tawhīd* is both a theological and metaphysical principle that gives Islam its unique profile. *Tawhīd* is also a teleological axiom: the universe has been created by God, who is also its final end. And as an ethical rule, *Tawhīd* dictates that God is the only source of all values. Sufis might say that *Tawhīd* is experienced as the all-pervasive unity of the phenomenal world. According to Manzoor, a better translation than unity would be “an act of unification or the assertion of unity.”¹⁵ This gives it a more active sense, so that it might be described as the *integrative* Divine force at work in the world.

The poet Jelaluddin Rumi expresses the concept of *Tawhīd* throughout his work, as in this example:

Like the ground turning green in a spring wind.

Like birdsong beginning inside the egg.

Like this universe coming into existence,

the lover wakes and whirls

in a dancing joy,

then kneels down

in praise.¹⁶

¹² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Science* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing, 1976) 228.

¹³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1978) 4.

¹⁴ S. Parvez Manzoor, “Environment and Values: The Islamic Perspective,” in Sardar, Ziauddin, ed. *The Touch of Midas: Science, Values and Environment in Islam and the West* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984) 155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Rumi, Jelaluddin, “Birdsong from Inside the Egg,” in Coleman Barks, trans., *The Essential Rumi* (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1997) 275.

Tawhīd is not just a mental attitude; it requires correct action as well as correct thinking.¹⁷ It is important for westerners to understand that whatever a Muslim does, thinks, or feels is motivated by this quest for unity. According to Ismail Al-Faruqi, the principle of *Tawhīd*, or the unicity of God is at the center of Muslims' attitude toward nature.¹⁸ It is also important to understand, however, that *Tawhīd* does not imply a form of monism, pantheism, or panentheism, i.e., it does not mean that there is a continuity between God and the world. God remains wholly transcendent; *Tawhīd* does not mean that God is immanent, i.e., present in the natural world.

Tawhīd does mean, however, that the ultimate aim of all sciences within Islam is the unicity of nature and unity with God. Any science that does not have unity with God as its central tenet would not be an acceptable science within Islam. It is important to note that Islam does not make the western distinction between science and religion, between the secular and the sacred. Yunus Negus argues that science within Islam has never pretended to be free of values. Indeed, it has a distinctive character because it arose within the value system of the *Shari'a*; it was never independent of the needs of the community, nor disobedient to the will of *Allah*.¹⁹ Nasr goes so far as to suggest that the main reason that modern science never arose in Islam is the presence of metaphysics and religious doctrine that refused to desacralize nature:

The most basic reason is that neither in Islam, nor India nor the Far East was the substance and stuff of nature so depleted of a sacramental and spiritual character, nor was the intellectual dimension of these traditions so enfeebled as to enable a purely secular science of nature and a secular philosophy to develop outside the matrix of the traditional intellectual orthodoxy.²⁰

Nasr points out that the *Qur'an* refers constantly to the phenomena of nature as signs of God to be contemplated by believers. Therefore, those traditional Muslims who engaged in the study of science did so, like the Hebrews, to discover in nature the signs or tokens of the Glory of God. Indeed, the Arabic word *āyāt* means not only signs of God in nature, but also events in the soul of humans, casting the human soul and nature as the microcosmic and macrocosmic counterparts of the celestial archetypes in the *Qur'an*. Stated another way, nature "is an emblem of God; it is a means through which God communicates with humanity."²¹

Thus, we can see that adoption of a principle like *Tawhīd* within the Jewish and Christian traditions might pose a way for the western world to resacralize the natural world and to abolish the duality between secular and sacred. At least we can see that there might be much to learn from Islam in this regard. *Tawhīd* seems particularly useful, because there is no comparable principle that might be invoked from Christianity or Judaism, nor from the

¹⁷ Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1985) 202.

¹⁸ Quoted by Manzoor, *ibid*.

¹⁹ Yunus Negus, "Science Within Islam," in Khalid, Fazlun M. with Joanne O'Brien, eds., *Islam and Ecology* (London: Cassell Publishers, 1992) 46.

²⁰ Nasr, *Man and Nature*, 97-98.

²¹ S. Nomanul Haq, "Islam and Ecology: Toward Retrieval and Reconstruction," in *Daedalus*, Vol. 130, No. 4 (Fall 2001) 46.

world of science. Indeed, it can be argued, and has been, that the Bible and the Jewish and Christian traditions have perpetuated an ethic that sanctions human exploitation of and dominion over the earth, based on passages such as Genesis 1:27-28.

The Nature of Creation

In the genesis story in the *Qur'an*, God announces to the angels that he is about to create man and woman *before* there is any transgression. Life on earth is part of the very concept of the human being, not a punitive fall from grace. Humans are not in a state of disgrace in the world of nature and nature is not in any sense profane or unredeemed.²² Under the Christian transformation of the Hebrew creation story, creation is seen as fallen and nature to grace. Thus, nature is desacralized, secularized, and devoid of any sacramental value.

Islam has nothing comparable to the Christian notion of “the fall,” and thus of a de-sacralized nature. Indeed, within Islam the natural world is not profane; all of nature is holy ground. Nature is full of signs (*āyāt*) of God. As the prophet Muhammad said: “All of nature is a mosque.”²³ Nature is thus subject to the divine will and humans have an obligation to treat nature as a trust. Within the Islamic perspective, humans’ debasement of nature leads to humans’ own debasement and amounts to a revolt against *Allah*. From the *Qur'anic* perspective, nature is anchored in God, metaphysically and morally. “To God belongs all things in the heavens and on the earth; and it is He who encompasses all things.” (*Qur'an* 4:126).

Stewardship (*Khalīfa*) and Trust (*Amāna*)

When God announces in the *Qur'an* that he is about to create humans, he says that he is creating them to be his *Khalīfa* (steward, or vice-regent) on earth. Under this principle of vice-regency, humans are made God’s servants, his custodians of the natural world. Thus, humans are created as special beings, elevated above all the rest of the creation, but at the same time, a trust (*amāna*) is imposed on them to care for nature. Humans are made in the image of God, but by virtue of their covenant (*mīthāq*) with God, they hold the land as trustees. Humankind’s superiority lies not in higher control or power but in its accountability to God. This trust (*amāna*) entails a kind of global trusteeship. Thus is created a moral dimension – by the very principle of their being human, humans are committed to following the *Shari’a* (sacred law) of God.

Thus, human beings’ purpose for being on earth is the fulfillment of the divine will. Humans are enjoined to read the signs of God (*āyāt*) in the natural world. Humans have accepted nature as a trust, and thus are deputies of God, possessing no authority beyond that of stewardship. Therefore, the Islamic rationale for an ethics of ecology rests on the *Qur'anic* concepts of *khalīfa* (vice-regency) and *amāna* (trusteeship). Humans are given the right to dominion over nature only by virtue of their creation in the image of God and covenant, not as rebels against heaven.

²² Ibid., 147.

²³ Manzoor, 160-161.

Buddhism

The Concept of Emptiness

The Dalai Lama, religious head of the Tibetan people, has frequently been asked to address the topic of ecology from a Buddhist perspective, and his responses tend to be puzzling to westerners. For example, in his *Foreword to Dharma Gaia*, a collection of essays on Buddhism and ecology, His Holiness wrote: "If we develop good and considerate qualities within our own minds, our activities will naturally cease to threaten the continued survival of life on earth."²⁴ In a 1990 forum at Middlebury College on "Spirit and Nature," the Dalai Lama gave an even more puzzling response. He stated that he had nothing to say about ecology or the environment, he interpreted the word "nature" as a reference to "the fundamental nature of all reality," and he entered into a discourse on the Buddhist concept of emptiness.²⁵ He summed up the essential nature of reality by quoting the central doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism: "Form is emptiness and emptiness is form" (from the *Heart Sutra*). Thus, as in his introduction to *Dharma Gaia*, His Holiness shifted attention away from the natural world and toward human nature and the purification of the mind. In Mahāyāna philosophy, to say that "form is emptiness and emptiness is form" is to say that all things are empty of any inherent "nature" or "identity." Purifying the mind means stripping away false concepts of the nature of things and resting content with their "emptiness."

To state the point another way, Buddhism teaches that the mind is the forerunner of all things. If one acts with an impure mind, i.e., out of hatred, greed, and delusion, suffering is the inevitable result. Thus, it could be argued, pollution exists in the environment because there is psychological pollution within the minds of humans. If one wants a clean, nonpolluted environment, then one must start with oneself, adopting a lifestyle that springs from a mind purified of ego-clinging and of acting out of hatred, greed and ignorance.²⁶

What are we to make of the gap between Dalai Lama's words and the conventional image of the Buddhist attitude toward nature as one of reverence? It seems that the Dalai Lama was not expressing a Buddhist attitude of hostility toward nature, but rather that he had more important topics in mind.²⁷ Early Buddhist teachings and stories, after all, are set in nature. The Buddha and his disciples live in the forest, meditate under trees, and live in harmony with the living creatures of the forest.²⁸ Thus, Buddhism does not posit a philosophy of attempting to dominate or destroy nature as appears in much of the Hebrew Bible, and throughout the traditions of Judaism and Christianity.

²⁴ Allan Hunt Badiner, ed., *Dharma Gaia* (Berkeley; Parallax, 1991).

²⁵ See Malcolm David Eckel, "Is There a Buddhist Philosophy of Nature?" in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology* (Cambridge: Harvard 1997) 328-329.

²⁶ Lily de Silva, "Early Buddhist Attitudes Toward Nature," in Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds., *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000) 91-103.

²⁷ Eckel, *ibid.*, 338.

²⁸ See, Donald K. Swearer, "Principles and Poetry, Places and Stories: The Resources of Buddhist Ecology," *Dædalus*, 130:4, Fall 2001, 232-233.

Interdependence and Compassion

The Dalai Lama (it might be argued) began with the concept of no-self (or emptiness) before he could sketch the outline of a response to the natural world.²⁹

The Buddhist response to the natural world includes the concepts of “interdependence” and “compassion,” but it begins with the impulse to purify the mind and to cultivate one’s own sense of self. It then moves in concentric circles outward through the sense of one’s interdependence with a network of all beings, to a sense of affection and love for all existence. But the importance of the Dalai Lama’s approach is that there is no center in the self; the network of existence takes on the appearance of a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. Thus, unlike other religions, which might be characterized as anthropocentric, theocentric, or cosmocentric, for example, there is no “centrism” to Buddhism. We could say that it is “acentric.”

Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, tells the story of the pre-enlightened Buddha, as he was sitting under a pipal tree in the forest. The Buddha looked up and saw the entire universe in a pipal leaf imprinted against the sky. In the leaf, he saw the sun and stars, because without sunlight and warmth, the leaf could not exist. He also saw the presence of clouds, because the leaf could not exist without rain. And then he saw all of earth, time, space, and mind – i.e., the entire universe – existing in that simple leaf.³⁰ At this point, Siddhartha saw that his body and the leaf were one, and thus grasped the essential emptiness of all phenomena – that all things are empty of a separate, isolated, unrelated self. Thus, he became aware that the key to liberation lay in the principles of emptiness, interdependence, and non-self.

Malcolm Eckel argues that nature is important in Buddhist thought because it is the place that is made holy by the quest for enlightenment. It is in this world that we seek enlightenment, and the natural world functions as a teacher as we meditate on impermanence. Enlightenment is made present in this body and this earth. So, Buddhists might see the earth as holy, but this sense of the holy avoids any sort of theism. That is, the sense of the earth as holy does not come from outside; it arises from the application of human discipline, imagination, compassion, and awareness. This is the force of the Dalai Lama’s focus on emptiness; human beings themselves must take responsibility for the harmony, health, and wellbeing of the setting in which the quest for enlightenment takes place.³¹

The Role of Meditation Practice

Out of concern for the entire cosmos, Buddhist environmentalists extend lovingkindness and compassion beyond humans to include animals, plants, and the earth itself.³² And their way of doing so is often to undertake meditation practice designed to develop emptiness and acentrism. Joanna Macy, for example, uses a *metta* (lovingkindness) meditation, in a form that she learned from a Tibetan nun.³³ The meditation progresses from one’s self, to those closest to us, and on outward in concentric circles, to include all

²⁹ Eckel, *ibid.*, 344.

³⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Old Path White Clouds* (Berkeley: Parallax, 115-117).

³¹ Eckel, *ibid.*

³² Swearer, 227.

³³ Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self* (Berkeley: Parallax, 1991) 40-42.

beings who share this planet and time in a sense of interconnectedness and interdependence. And then, she extends lovingkindness further still, beyond the earth, to other solar systems, other galaxies, and other Buddha-fields.

Other scholars and teachers have recommended similar practices to develop compassion for the earth and its creatures. Zen teacher Robert Aitken has written a beautiful, simple set of verses for developing awareness of and compassion for our natural surroundings. For example:

Watching a spider at work
I vow with all beings
to cherish the web of the universe:
touch one point and everything moves.³⁴

Thich Nhat Hanh has written a series of beautiful *Earth Gathas* for use in daily mindfulness practice. For example, a *gatha* for recycling:

Garbage becomes rose.
Rose becomes compost –
Everything is in transformation.
Even permanence is impermanent.³⁵

Selected Passages from Thomas Starr King's Writings on God, Humans, and Nature

Rev. Thomas Starr King served as minister of the Unitarian Church in San Francisco from 1860-64. He was an important missionary of Unitarianism on the Pacific Coast during the Civil War period, and he worked tirelessly to keep California within the Union. King loved nature and loved to travel, and he put these interests to good use during his brief time in San Francisco. He traveled extensively throughout California and the Northwest, and, fortunately for us, he wrote about his travels. These selections from King's sermons and letters are provided here as an additional resource to show the ecological sensibility of a 19th Century Unitarian minister.

We are providing these selections because Starr King's works are long out of print; these excerpts were discovered during the course of research in the archives of the library of the Graduate Theological Union, in Berkeley, CA.

On an earthquake in San Francisco:

We were waked about two o'clock by a spasm of our two-story wooden house. It seems as though the ghost of Samson was making a spirit-rapping movement in it, shaking all

³⁴ Robert Aitken, "Verses for Environmental Practice," in Kaza, *Dharma Rain*, 471-473.

³⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh, "Earth Gathas," in Badiner, *Dharma Gaia*, 195-196; also in *Dharma Rain*, 446-447.

the doors and thrilling all the timbers at once. And such a roar! *I tell you it was sublime!* We don't have any spitting thunder in this climate. We roll it into one seventy-four broadside, load up the old earth and fire her. *I mean to move to a country where they have them every week.*³⁶

On a comet in 1861:

A modern French atheist has ridiculed the exclamation of David, "The heavens declare the glory of God!" He says that the heavens declare the glory of Kepler and Newton and La Place. David is right, and so is the Frenchman right in what he affirms, though he is insane in what he denies. The magnificence of the sky ought not to abase human nature with a feeling of worthlessness. The greatness of man is written in star-type as well as the infinitude of God. Nothing less than an intellect kindled from the Perfect Reason could have discerned the reach and detected the laws, and foreannounced the motions of the heavens.³⁷

On his first view of the Sierras:

This is my first view of the mountain chain which, next to the Himalaya, bears the most beautiful name of any ridge on the planet – the Sierra Nevada. And it lies out there, eighty miles on, under clouds that mimic its pinnacles and swells, like the street and wall of the New Jerusalem. Only the colors are in reverse order, as befits the reflection of heavenly glory in an earthly medium.³⁸

On his theory of "Mountain Principles:"

All pure genius, brethren, is beneficent as the mountains. It invites up. God gives its capacity to very few There are such things as mountain principles and mountain thoughts in individual life. That soul is in a lamentable condition that lives only on the flats of worldly and mercenary customs or on the wretched level of paltry pleasures There are many souls in which God creates mountains anew every year. He stirs the deeps of their hearts by some pungent visitations of the Spirit, and straightaway they send up aspirations for something better . . .³⁹

On his first encounter with redwoods, at the Mariposa Grove in Yosemite:

The Mariposa grove stands as the Creator has fashioned it, unprofaned except by fire, which, long before the advent of Saxon white men, had charred the base of the larger portion of the stalwart trees . . .

³⁶ Unpublished, typed letter of January 22, 1863 (GTU Archives) (emphasis added).

³⁷ "The Comet of July 1861," *Christianity and Humanity: A Series of Sermons by Thomas Starr King*. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co. 1877. 329.

³⁸ "A Journey in California – Visit to a Cave," letter to the Boston Transcript, August, 1860.

³⁹ "Lessons from the Sierra Nevada" in *Christianity and Humanity*, 299-300.

Why will not the old patriarch take advantage of that ripple through his leaves and whisper to me his age? Are you as old as Noah? Do you span the centuries as far as Moses? Can you remember the time of Solomon?⁴⁰

On *nature* as scripture:

I read under the pines of Lake Tahoe, on that Sunday afternoon, some pages from a recent English work that raises the question of inspiration. Is the Bible the word of God, or the words of men? It is neither. It is the word of God breathed through the words of men, inextricably intertwined with them as the tone of the wind with the quality of the tree. We must go to the Bible as to a grove of evergreens, not asking for cold, clear truth, but for sacred influence, for revival to the devout sentiment, for the breath of the Holy Ghost, not as it wanders in pure space, but as it sweeps through cedars and pines.⁴¹

On nature and its purposes:

This is the exhibition in one picture of the munificence of the Creator. All this is for man, for his education, for his delight, for his food, for his equipment, for his coronation, through the comprehension and the right use of it all, with glory and honor.⁴²

Whatever enlarges our conception of the opulence of nature, and makes us connect its affluence with the Creative Spirit, increases the possible force upon our hearts of the central doctrine of Christianity, -- the love of God.⁴³

Is not part of the object of this opulence to lead those who see or contemplate it to bow before the riches of God's art and goodness? What if the earth had been sombre in its drapery? What if the eclipse had been our common tone of light? Ah, brethren, let us recognize the Father's goodness in the cheer and joy of the natural beauty, and let us think of the nearer presence of our maker with solemn delight. He asks us to think of him, not as robed in thunder and awe, but as hidden in light and glory.⁴⁴

Brethren, this question of color in nature, broadly studied, leads us quickly to contemplate and adore the love of God. If God were the almighty chiefly, -- if he desired to impress us most with his omnipotence and infinitude, and make us bow with dread before him, how easily the world could have been made more sombre, how easily our senses could have been created to receive impressions of the bleak vastness of space, how easily the mountains might have been made to breathe terror from their cliffs and walls,

⁴⁰ "A Vacation Among the Sierras, No. 4," letter to the Boston Transcript, November, 1860.

⁴¹ "Living Water from Lake Tahoe," in *Christianity and Humanity*, 316-317.

⁴² "A Vacation Among the Sierras.—No. 4, Ibid.

⁴³ "Lessons from the Sierra Nevada," in *Christianity and Humanity*, 290.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 294.

how easily the general effect of extended landscapes might have been monotonous and gloomy!⁴⁵

I love the Quaker simplicity and calm But God is not an infinite Quaker, though he is the infinite Friend. The world is not clothed with russet, and the flowers are not gray, and the winds are not forbidden to play on the forest harps. I bow to the strength of the Calvinist character, and its service in the education of the human race in the rugged resistance to tyranny and the rugged assertion of the holiness of God. But nature is not Calvinistic in color, . . .⁴⁶

Never since the creation has a particle of that water turned a wheel, or fed a fountain for human thirst, or served any form of mortal use Has there been any waste of its wild and lonely beauty? . . . If not a human glance had yet fallen on it, would its charms of color and surroundings be wasted charms?

No, brethren; we must test uses in this universe by a higher thought. Though no form of secular service could be won out of Lake Tahoe, it would fulfil a noble and glorious purpose if it gave sacred pleasure to human visitors. And though no human eyes should ever look upon it, it would serve a holy purpose, as a gem of the Divine Art, by giving pleasure to the Almighty It is to express the fullness of his thought, the overflow of his art, the depth of his goodness, and to enjoy the expression of it, that God compacts the globes in space, and adorns them with splendors like the Himalaya and the Andes, and sprinkles upon them the brilliance of lakes and seas, and binds them into mighty harmonies, and beholds them obey his central will.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "Living Water from Lake Tahoe," *Ibid.*, 308-309.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 322-323.

II. Resources

Curricula

Northwest Earth Institute

www.nwei.org. Many UU congregations report that they have used curricula for discussion courses provided by NWEI, and they further report that results have been good. Currently, NWEI offers courses on: Voluntary Simplicity, Deep Ecology, Discovering a Sense of Place, Sustainable Living, and Globalization. NWEI does not currently offer courses that expressly cover a spiritual/religious/theological approach to environmental subjects.

Earth Ministry

www.earthministry.org. This organization has an extensive website with numerous suggestions of resources for studying various environmental subjects concerning congregational life, such as: transportation choices, food choices, energy conservation, recycling and composting, water conservation and care, landscaping and grounds care, and financial stewardship.

Web of Creation

www.webofcreation.org. This Interfaith, Chicago-based organization maintains a website that contains abundant references to curricula and resources that might be used by congregations. It is affiliated with Meadville-Lombard Theological School (One of 2 UU seminaries), and the Eco-Justice Working group of the National Council of Churches, among other organizations.

Cry of Creation

This is a curriculum on global warming and global justice, produced by Earth Ministry for Interfaith Climate and Energy Campaign. It can be purchased from Earth Ministry at www.earthministry.org or downloaded from <http://interfaithpowerandlight.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/CryOfCreation.pdf> .

Videos and DVDs

- ***God's Creation and Global Warming***. This professionally-made film was produced by the National Council of Churches of Christ Eco-Justice Working group (www.nccecojustice.org). It includes a diverse range of speakers and beautiful photography. It provides an excellent introduction to the traditional Jewish/Christian perspective on environmental stewardship, and serves as excellent entry point into this subject. It can be ordered for \$10 per copy by emailing the Eco-Justice Working Group at info@nccecojustice.org (as of 6/27/2013).
- ***Affluenza***. This PBS documentary is excellent for use in a course for either adults or teens on ecology. About an hour long, the film examines American materialism and consumerism in a scathing, but often humorous, approach. It then looks at the voluntary simplicity movement. Available from Bullfrog Films, <http://bullfrogfilms.com/>

- ***The Air We Breathe***. This video traces the damaging connection between suburban sprawl, our addiction to the automobile, air pollution, and disturbing increases in asthma and other respiratory diseases. 49 min. Available from Bullfrog Films, <http://bullfrogfilms.com/>
- ***Baked Alaska***. Looks at the battle over the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in the context of Alaska's accelerated warming. 26 min. Available from Bullfrog Films.
- ***Earth Ministry***. <http://earthministry.org/resources/suggested-publications/by-type/videos> The Earth Ministry website contains an extensive list of videos on a range of environmental subjects. Some are somewhat dated, but many of the references are useful. Also contains information on how to order or rent the videos.
- ***Bullfrog Films***. <http://bullfrogfilms.com/>. This company specializes in films on the environment. It often makes films available at relatively low rates to church groups and other nonprofits.

Websites on Faith and Ecology

The World-Wide Web contains a wealth of material on ecology and on faith and ecology. So much material, indeed, that we do not try to here to list everything that might be found. We do, however, list some important sites to provide you with a way to begin searching. Often, one site leads us to several more useful sites. Here, we include references to important sites that link faith and ecology. We also list many sites relating to global climate change because that is the topic of our current UUA Study Action Issue, and because it is such an important subject.

- **UU Ministry for Earth:** <http://uuministryforearth.org>
- **National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group:** <http://nccecojustice.org/>
- **Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life:** <http://www.coejl.org/>.
- **National Religious Partnership for the Environment:** <http://www.nrpe.org>.
- **Earth Ministry:** <http://earthministry.org/> (Offers many resources for congregations).

Websites on Global Climate Change

Faith Organizations

UUA Study Action Issue on global warming:

<http://www.uua.org/statements/statements/8061.shtml>

Interfaith Power and Light <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>

The Interfaith Power and Light program is mobilizing a national religious response to global warming while promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency and conservation. This organization was begun by the Regeneration Project, an interfaith ministry devoted to deepening the connection between ecology and faith.

<http://www.theregenerationproject.org/>.

California Interfaith Power and Light: <http://www.interfaithpower.org/> is the organization that began the Interfaith power and light movement.

To find your state affiliate go to <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/about/state/>

Non-governmental Scientific Study Organizations

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): <http://www.ipcc.ch/>. (U.N. created agency to study climate change).

Union of Concerned Scientists (USC): <http://www.ucsusa.org/>.

A project of UCS on climate change actions in California or The Northeast:
<http://www.climatechoices.org/>.

The Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (formerly Pew Center's climate change site)
<http://www.c2es.org/>

Climate Action Network: <http://climatesolutions.org/> (Worldwide network of NGOs working on climate change).

Climate Change Knowledge Network: <http://www.iisd.org/cckn/> (Research results in developed and developing countries, hosted by International Institute for Sustainable Development).

Statement of the Joint Science Academies on global warming, June, 2005:
<http://nationalacademies.org/onpi/06072005.pdf>.

Activist Organizations

Stop Global Warming. www.stopglobalwarming.org. A virtual march against global warming. UUA President Bill Sinkford recently (June, 2005) added a statement of support to this campaign.

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) <http://psr.org/> and <http://psr.org/environment-and-health/> including a 2005 study on U.S. energy security, *Powering Foreign Policy*.

Climate Crisis Coalition. <http://www.climatecrisiscoalition.org/> (An organization for activism on global warming, including noted Author Ross Gelbspan, among many others).

Kyoto and Beyond. <http://www.kyotoandbeyond.org/>. (People's ratification of Kyoto Protocol).

Natural Resources Defense Council. <http://www.nrdc.org/globalWarming/default.asp>
(Contains a great deal of information on global warming and other environmental subjects).

350.org. Resources for local activities that connect to global actions. <http://www.350.org/>

U.S. Government Sources

Pentagon Study on Climate Change: <http://www.areco.org/Climate%20security.pdf> (Need Adobe Reader). Feb. 2004. Original URL
http://www.ems.org/climate/pentagon_climatechange.pdf.

NASA material on Climate Change:
<http://www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/earthandsun/earthshape.html>.

U.S. Government's climate technology program: <http://www.climatechange.gov/>.

U.S. EPA's climate change site: <http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/>

[original URL <http://yosemite.epa.gov/oar/globalwarming.nsf/content/index.html>

U.S. Dept of Energy, energy efficiency and renewable technology program:
<http://www.eere.energy.gov/>.

Energy Star Program: <http://www.energystar.gov>.

Lawrence Berkeley Lab: www.lbl.gov/.

Lawrence Berkeley Lab's energy audit tool: <http://www.homeenergysaver.lbl.gov/>.

Organizations Promoting Alternative Energy

American Council for an energy efficient economy: <http://www.aceee.org/>.

American Solar Energy Society: <http://www.ases.org/>.

American Wind Energy Assn.: <http://www.awea.org/>.

Solar Living Institute: <http://www.solarliving.org/>.

Rocky Mountain Institute: <http://www.rmi.org/>.

Real Goods: <http://www.realgoods.com/> (Products for sustainability, including solar).

Climate Solutions: <http://www.climatesolutions.org/> (Practical information for reducing emissions).

Co-op America online green pages: <http://www.greenpages.org>.

Alliance to Save Energy: <http://www.ase.org>.

Other Sources

E/The Environmental Magazine: <http://www.emagazine.com/>. (Many articles on climate change).

Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences Article on climate change in California:
<http://www.pnas.org/cgi/reprint/101/34/12422.pdf> (Need Adobe Reader; authors include some Lawrence Berkeley Lab scientists).

Climate Change News. UU global warming activist publishes this newsletter and sends frequent bulletins as well. Subscribe at ChadTolman@aol.com.

Print Resources

General Resources on Faith and Ecology

Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale, Religions of the World and Ecology Book Series, formerly *The Harvard Series on Religion and Ecology*. For anyone interested in faith and ecology, this publication series is an indispensable resource. It is hosted by the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.
<http://fore.research.yale.edu/>. Series editors, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim).

.The Religions of the World and Ecology Series was developed by the Center for the Study of World Religions (CSWR), Harvard Divinity School, as a result of research and conferences from 1996-1998.

An introductory essay to each of the volumes written by conference organizers Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim entitled, "[The Challenge of the Environmental Crisis](#)," provides an introduction to the topic of religion and ecology.

The list of titles is available at <http://fore.research.yale.edu/publications/books/cswr/>. Titles include:

Christianity and Ecology (2000)

Judaism and Ecology (2002)

Buddhism and Ecology (1997)

Islam and Ecology (2003)

Hinduism and Ecology (2000)

Indigenous Traditions and Ecology (2001)

Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment, by Stephen Scharper. (New York: Continuum, 1997). This study contains perhaps the best summary available of leading modern theologies concerning ecology, including:

The New Cosmology (Berry, Swimme),

Ecofeminism (Ruether, McFague, Shiva)

Liberation Theology (Boff).

Process Theology (Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne [a UU], John Cobb),

The Gaia Hypothesis (Lovelock)

The Earth Bible Series. Edited by Norman C. Habel and Vicki Balabanski. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001 – present). This series, produced in Australia, attempts to reinterpret the Bible in ecological terms. The first four volumes cover the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), Volume 5 is entitled *The Earth Story in the New Testament*.

The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation by Bill McKibben. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmanns, 1994). McKibben uses the Old Testament Book of Job as a vehicle for telling of his own journey interweaving his faith and commitment to ecology. This beautiful little book is now out of print, but it shouldn't be. It can still be located online or through used book sellers.

Noah's Garden (1995), and ***Planting Noah's Garden*** (1997), by Sara Stein (both published by Houghton Mifflin). These books were recommended by Robert Frommer, Grounds Coordinator at Community Unitarian Church in White Plains, N.Y., for inspiration and practical tips on making the congregation's grounds more native, and to promote biodiversity.

Earthlight Magazine: <http://www.earthlight.org/>. (Combines ecology and spirituality in articles, art, poetry, etc.)

E/The Environmental Magazine: <http://www.emagazine.com/>. (Many articles on climate change).

Yes Magazine: <http://www.yesmagazine.org/>. (A periodical on ecology, simple living, etc., Offers resources for education on ecology).

The New Cosmology

Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990) (reprint edition); *The Great Work* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

Brian Swimme, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996).

Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992).

Ecofeminist Theology

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992);

Sexism and God Talk (Boston: Beacon, 1993);

Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions (Oxford, U.K.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

Vandana Shiva (India), *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (Zed Books, 1989).

Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply (South End Press, 1999).

Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit (South End Press, 2002).

Liberation Theology

Leonardo Boff (Brazil), *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).

Ivone Gebara (Brazil), *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis, 1989).

Process Theology

Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1929)

Charles Hartshorne (Unitarian), *Beyond Humanism* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1968).

John B. Cobb, Jr., *Is it too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (Beverly Hills, CA: Bruce, 1972); and *Sustainability* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992).

Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon, 1986)

Jay McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: a Theology of Reverence for Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1989).

Gaia Hypothesis

James Lovelock, *Gaia: A new Look at Life on Earth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979)

Sustainability, Simplicity

Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Ecology for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

Jay McDaniel, *Living from the Center: Spirituality in an Age of Consumerism* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000).

Cecile Andrews, *The Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

Juliet B. Schor, and **Betsy Taylor**, eds., *Sustainable Planet: Solutions for the Twenty-First Century* (Boston: Beacon, 2002).

Michael Schut, Ed., *Simpler Living Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective* (Denver: Living the Good News, 1999)

III. Sample Course Plans

On the pages that follow are course plans that have been used in UU Congregations.

We provide them as examples of different approaches that you might want to follow in creating a course to use in your own congregation. They are not intended to serve as curricula to be followed rigidly, although you are free to make use of them as you see fit in creating your own course.

Six-Week Course on Eco-Theology (Faith and Ecology) Sample Course Outline

1. Locating a UU Worldview that Incorporates Humans, Nature, and the Elements of Our Faith
2. Eco-Theology in Various Faith Traditions
3. UUs and Global Climate Change: Our Study Action Issue
4. Sustainability, Consumerism, and Simplicity
5. Thinking About the Food We Eat
6. Where do we Go from Here?

Extra Class Session – Thinking about the Water that Sustains Life (This session can be substituted for one of the above sessions or added to the course).

For the full course, see [Chapter IV, Faith and Ecology Course](#)

Six-Week “Earth in Crisis” Course Outline from Bull Run UUs, Manassas, VA

Join environmental biologist Jack Harper and ecological anthropologist O.G. Harper in the 6-part Religious Education series "Earth in Crisis" to discuss the devastating human-induced impacts to the planet and ourselves. You may participate in the sessions of your choice in the Bull Run UUs RE office.

Topics:

1. Climate
2. Extinction
3. Population
4. Globalization
5. Consumption
6. Sustainability

NOTE: Some URLs in the 2005 edition are not accessible in 2013. These original URLs are shaded in the text. Links to similar websites are provided.

Climate - Tuesday January 11th, 7:30 - 9:00 - We start with the most serious environmental threat, Earth warming, examining its causes and consequences. The effects of global warming on high latitude ecosystems and their human populations are already apparent. Does the new forecast of an accelerated time table for Earth warming imply that the problem cannot be solved? Are governments siding with the short term interests of entrenched industries?

[National Geographic](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0409/feature1/index.html)
<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0409/feature1/index.html>

[Natural Resources Defense Council](http://www.nrdc.org/globalWarming/default.asp)
<http://www.nrdc.org/globalWarming/default.asp>

[Union of Concerned Scientists](http://www.ucsusa.org/)
<http://www.ucsusa.org/>
http://www.ucsusa.org/global_environment/global_warming/index.cfm [not accessible in 2013]

[Hadley Centre Simulation](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate-change)
<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climate-change>
http://www.met-office.gov.uk/research/hadleycentre/images/HadCM2_IS92a+SO4_spinning.mpeg
[not accessible in 2013]

Extinction - Tuesday January 18th, 7:30 - 9:00

We have entered the 6th period of the mass extinction of plants and animals on Earth. In this century it has been estimated that half of all living species will become extinct. We will discuss the processes of human-induced extinction and the current estimates of endangered birds, mammals, and fish. What is the role of human culture in the deterioration and destruction of natural ecosystems? How can this mass extinction be brought under control?

[The Sixth Extinction](http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/hall_tour/extinct.html) (American Museum of Natural History)
http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/hall_tour/extinct.html [not accessible in 2013]

[MASS EXTINCTION UNDERWAY](http://www.mysterium.com/extinction.html)
<http://www.mysterium.com/extinction.html>
<http://www.well.com/user/davidu/extinction.html> [not accessible in 2013]

The Sixth Great Extinction: A Silent Examination
<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2012/03/28/the-sixth-great-extinction-a-silent-extermination/>
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/9902/fngm/> [not accessible in 2013]

[Earth faces sixth mass extinction](http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn4797#.UeB6k0Hvspg)
<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn4797#.UeB6k0Hvspg>
<http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn4797> [not accessible in 2013]

[SPECIES: UNPRECEDENTED EXTINCTION RATE, AND IT'S INCREASING](http://www.iucn.org) (IUCN, International Union for conservation of Nature).
www.iucn.org
http://www.iucn.org/iyb/about/species_on_the_brink/species_climate/ (Species and climate change) accessed July 2013
http://www.iucn.org/info_and_news/press/species2000.html [not accessible in 2013]

[How Will the Sixth Extinction Affect the Evolution of Species?](http://www.actionbioscience.org/newfrontiers/myers_knoll.html) (ActionBioScience)
http://www.actionbioscience.org/newfrontiers/myers_knoll.html

Population - Tuesday January 25th, 7:30 - 9:00

The United Nations has forecast that world population will rise from 6.3 billion at present to 8.9 billion by the year 2050. Largest increases will be in the developing countries, particularly India and sub-Saharan Africa. Already it is estimated that population is 20% above the Earth's carrying capacity. What impacts does population growth have on the planet and what are nations and the world community doing to stabilize growth rates?

[U.S. and World Population Clocks - POPClocks](http://www.census.gov/popclock/)
<http://www.census.gov/popclock/>
<http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html> [not accessible in 2013]

[United Nations Population Fund](http://www.unfpa.org/public/)
<http://www.unfpa.org/public/>

State of World Population
<http://www.unfpa.org/swp>
<http://www.unfpa.org/swp/swpmain.htm> [not accessible in 2013]

[Population Beyond the Numbers](http://www.worldwatch.org/world-watch-magazine-september-october-2004)
<http://www.worldwatch.org/world-watch-magazine-september-october-2004>
<http://www.worldwatch.org/press/news/2004/08/16/> [not accessible in 2013]

[Social Development and Population](http://www.worldwatch.org/live/discussion/18/)
<http://www.worldwatch.org/live/discussion/18/> [not accessible in 2013]

[Urbanization: An Environmental Force to Be Reckoned With](http://www.prb.org/Articles/2004/UrbanizationAnEnvironmentalForceToBeReckonedWith.aspx)
<http://www.prb.org/Articles/2004/UrbanizationAnEnvironmentalForceToBeReckonedWith.aspx>
<http://www.prb.org/Template.cfm?Section=PRB&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=10186> [not accessible in 2013]

[New Study Gives United States a "C" for Lagging Support of International Reproductive Health and Population Efforts](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2004-12/plos-nsg120204.php)
http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2004-12/plos-nsg120204.php
http://populationaction.org/news/press/news_120204_p&p.htm
http://www.populationaction.org/news/press/news_120204_p&p.htm [not accessible in 2013]

Globalization - Tuesday February 1st, 7:30 - 9:00

Globalization not only impacts economies worldwide but also affects the flow of ideas, disease, plants and animals, people, technology, and culture. Americanization, drug traffic, and the imposition of multinational corporations and nations further complicate and destabilize lives. We will examine the effects of globalization on Jamaica, a microcosm of a third world nation struggling against the forces of international commerce and banking.

[YaleGlobal On Line](http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/about-globalization)
<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/about-globalization>
<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/about/index.jsp> [not accessible in 2013]

[The Globalization Web Site](http://sociology.emory.edu/faculty/globalization/)
<http://sociology.emory.edu/faculty/globalization/>
<http://www.sociology.emory.edu/globalization/> [not accessible in 2013]

[Economic Globalization, UUA Statement of Conscience](http://www.uua.org/statements/statements/13439.shtml)
<http://www.uua.org/statements/statements/13439.shtml>
<http://www.uua.org/csw/DSOCEcoGlob02.pdf> [not accessible in 2013]

[Globalization for Whom?](http://harvardmagazine.com/2002/07/globalization-for-whom.html)
<http://harvardmagazine.com/2002/07/globalization-for-whom.html>
<http://www.harvard-magazine.com/on-line/070280.html> [not accessible in 2013]

[Measuring Globalization](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2004/03/01/measuring_globalization_economic_reversals_for_ward_momentum)
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2004/03/01/measuring_globalization_economic_reversals_for_ward_momentum

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=2493&PHPSESSID=d6211b46774928efb78509e9458f952a [not accessible in 2013]

[Kerala Struggles with Globalization](#)

<http://www.bruu.org/greencorner.htm> [not accessible in 2013]

[Life and Debt](#) A Film by Stephanie Black

<http://www.lifeanddebt.org/about.html>

Consumption - Tuesday February 8th, 7:30 - 9:00

Consumption, though necessary for humankind, is accelerating at such a pace that the planet's water resources, air quality, biodiversity, and human health are being severely impacted. We will examine the cultural responses to diminishing natural resources and inequalities of distribution. Are more resource wars in our future? What are the alternatives for consumption to provide better lives for all?

[The State of Consumption Today](#)

<http://www.worldwatch.org/node/810>

<http://www.worldwatch.org/features/consumption/> [not accessible in 2013]

[Consumption and Consumerism](#)

<http://www.globalissues.org/issue/235/consumption-and-consumerism>

<http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Consumption.asp> [not accessible in 2013]

[Global Review: What's Driving Consumption?](#) [not accessible in 2013] – Resource could not be located.

<http://www.bostonreview.net/ndf.html#Consumption> [not accessible in 2013]

[Why Consumption Matters](#) [not accessible in 2013]

http://www.sierraclub.org/sustainable_consumption/tilford.asp [not accessible in 2013]

[Dying for Consumption](#)

<http://www.commondreams.org/views04/1210-26.htm>

Sustainability - Tuesday February 15th, 7:30 - 9:00.

The present global system encompassing economies, ecosystems, and human societies is unsustainable. What can we learn from nations and cultures near sustainability? How do succeeding generations react to environmental deterioration? Can sustainability be realized? Is the "good life" that we seek compatible with sustainability? How can we participate in the cultural transformation that is needed to avoid continual global deterioration?

[2005 Environmental Sustainability Index](#) (Environmental Performance Measurement Project)

<http://www.yale.edu/esi/>

[Nations Ranked as Protectors of the Environment](#)

http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/24/science/24enviro.html?_r=0 or

<http://www.triplepundit.com/2005/02/nations-ranked-as-protectors-of-the-environment/>

http://www.truthout.org/docs_05/012605X.shtml [not accessible in 2013]

[Environmental sustainability possible within a generation](#)

<http://davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/nature-challenge/>

http://www.davidsuzuki.org/WOL/News_Releases/web_of_life02050401.asp [not accessible in 2013]

Sustainability

<http://www.epa.gov/sustainability/>

[The Sustainability Report](#)

<http://sustreport.org/>

<http://www.sustreport.org/home.html> [not accessible in 2013]

Jared Diamond: *Why Societies Collapse*

http://www.ted.com/talks/jared_diamond_on_why_societies_collapse.html (Jared Diamond TED 2003Talk, Filmed Feb 2003)

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/bbing/stories/s707591.htm> (Jared Diamond lecture at Princeton University, 27 October 2002) [not accessible in 2013]

Reading Course on Sustainability, UU Church in Eugene, Oregon

Beginning September 20, 2004 we will meet at 7pm, for a total of six sessions, every second Monday in the UU Church's Social Hall for about two hours, unless discussion draws us later into the evening. After the opening session, meetings are October 4 and 18 and November 1, 15, and 29.

Each of us will read a book on sustainability. For starters, we will bring a stack of books you can choose from, and a list of other books, journal articles, and web sources. Let's spend some time looking through the books and maybe reading short passages to one another before choosing which each wants to report on. Alternatively, you may have read a series of articles, or taken a class, or have a background pertinent to sustainability that you'd like to share. If you are more of a spectator than a participant in this kind of "sport," you are welcome to join in just the same and share in the discussion. We will begin this first night with our take on Lester Brown's "*Plan B*."

Your first "homework" will be a simple report of what you've read, with several of us reporting each meeting. Your report should include three elements:

1. The facts or arguments presented.
2. Your take on the reading's pertinence to the wide meaning of "sustainability."
3. Your personal, emotional reaction to the material.

The point is to generate further discussion (UU style?), not to have all the answers. However, we'd love to hear the answers, too, if you have them. Your second "homework" is to write a Letter to the Editor about what you've learned and what it means for our survival as a culture, or maybe as a species. You don't have to send it in for publication, but we hope you will.

There's a starting book list below in case you want to start your book before the class begins, but don't limit your selection to this list. You have sources we don't.

- ~ Lester Brown, "Plan B" and "Who will feed China?"
- ~ Terry Tempest Williams, "Red"
- ~ EF Schumacher, "Small is Beautiful"
- ~ Aldo Leopold, "A Sand County Almanac"
- ~ Daniel Quinn, "Ishmael" and "My Ishmael" and "Beyond Civilization"
- ~ Myron Arms, "Cathedral of the World"
- ~ David Orr, "Earth in Mind"
- ~ Alan Durning, "How Much is Enough?"
- ~ Al Gore, "Earth in Balance"
- ~ David Abram, "The Spell of the Sensuous"
- ~ Thom Hartmann, "The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight"
- ~ Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, and Jorgen Randers, "Beyond the Limits"
- ~ William Kittredge, "The Nature of Generosity"
- ~ Stephen Schneider, "Global Warming"

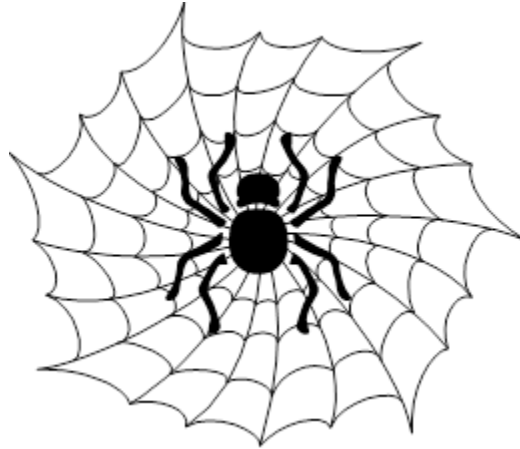
- ~ Edward Goldsmith, "The Way: An Ecological World View"
- ~ Jerry Mander, "In the Absence of the Sacred"
- ~ Ross Gelbspan, "The Heat is On"
- ~ Lester Brown, "Tough Choices: Facing the Challenge of Food Scarcity"
- ~ Thomas Berry, "Dream of the Earth"

Connect with us by e-mail, or simply show up on Monday, September 20, 2004 at 7:00 pm in the UU Social Hall. For more information contact _____ or _____.

IV. Faith and Ecology Course

Sample Flier (for Faith and Ecology course)

What Does Ecology



Have To Do With Our UU Faith? What Does the UU 7th Principle tell us about Global Warming?

- ❖ Come to discuss these and other questions about Faith and Ecology.
 - ❖ Thursday evenings, April 4 – May 9 (6 sessions)
 - ❖ Location:
 - ❖ Potluck dinner at 6 p.m.
 - ❖ Worship at 7 p.m.
 - ❖ Class starts promptly at 7:30 p.m.
- Come to all or just the class!

Facilitated by _____ Tel: _____ e-mail _____

Faith and Ecology

Session 1 - Locating a UU Worldview that Incorporates Humans, Nature, and the Elements of Our Faith

Chalice Lighting and Reading

Opening song: (#389 in Singing the Living Tradition)

Gathered here in the mystery of the hour
Gathered here in one strong body
Gathered here in the struggle and the power
Spirit draw near.

Introducing the Course

Why this course?
Why theology? A starting stipulation.
Flexibility – What are our interests and priorities?

Watching the Video “God’s Creation and Global Warming.” This 12-minute video can be ordered for \$10 per copy from the National Council of Churches of Christ Eco-Justice website: <http://earthministry.org/resources/suggested-publications/for-adults/videos/god2019s-creation-and-global-warming>

Sharing our Ideas

Discussion Questions [Possible questions to use, depending on how the class proceeds; probably can’t cover them all]:

- If UUs made a video about Global Warming, how would it be different from this video, sponsored by the National Council of Churches?
- Why is our theology of nature important? [Contrasting our view with the evangelical/fundamentalist view].
- What can we find in the following about a worldview concerning humans, nature, and the divine:
 - Our UU heritage
 - Our Seven Principles
 - Henry David Thoreau
 - Thomas Starr King [handout]
 - Seventh Principle Project; Green Sanctuary Program
- In an important journal article, Lynn White Jr. argued that "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen... Christianity...not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted it was God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."
 - Do you agree that the view that humans are created in God's image, and that God humans gave "dominion" over the Earth contributed to our present environmental condition?
 - Do you think that this view is prevalent in 21st century America?

- In the video, many of the speakers refer to humanity's "stewardship" over the earth?
 - Do you agree that stewardship is a biblical concept? Do you find it a useful one? (see Al Gore).
 - If so, why isn't it more prevalent today?
 - Is stewardship just a more benign version of dominion, i.e., that humans are still in charge, but they must rule wisely?
- Consider the concept that humans might be a co-equal, but not greater, part of creation (kinship).
 - Do you see this as a viable eco-theological concept?
 - Do any of the speakers in the video articulate this concept?
- The UU Seventh Principle calls on us to affirm "respect for the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part."
- Which of these theologies, Dominion, Stewardship, or Kinship, best supports the principle of the interdependent web?
- Lynn White, Jr. wrote that Christianity is "anthropocentric," (i.e., human-centered). Can you think of other "centrisms" that might be more ecological?
 - Theocentrism? (God-centered; e.g., Thomas Starr King and John Muir).
 - Cosmocentrism? (Universe-centered; e.g., Aldo Leopold).
 - Is stewardship anthropocentric, do you think, or is it something else?
 - What "centrism" would you say best describes the interdependent web concept?

Exploring Ecology and Faith in Various Religions – an Introduction

[Here the facilitator can give a brief overview of the various traditions that the class will cover and the scriptures on which they are based.]

Readings from major faith traditions [Hand out a photocopy of "Ecology in Some Major Faith Traditions" (by Craig Scott), pp. 16 - 29 of this manual and give to class].

Closing Circle

Reflecting

Singing: Spirit of Life (#123 in *Singing the Living Tradition*, © 1993 by The Unitarian Universalist Association, Beacon Press, Boston.)

Spirit of Life, come unto me.
 Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.
 Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;
 Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
 Roots hold me close; wings set me free;
 Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

Faith and Ecology

Session 2 - Eco-Theology in Various Faith Traditions

Chalice Lighting and Reading

Opening song: (#188 in Singing the Living Tradition)

Come, come, whoever you are,
Wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving,
Ours is no caravan of despair.
Come, yet again, come.

Exploring Faith Traditions

- What is Theology; Why does it Matter?
- Judaism and Christianity
 - Dominion
 - Stewardship
 - Kinship – the interdependent web
 - Jesus and the Kingdom of God

Islam

- Tawhīd (Unity)
- Khalīfa (stewardship) and Amāna (trusteeship)

Buddhism

- Interconnectedness
- Acentrism

Some Modern Theologies of Humans and Nature

- The New Cosmology
- Ecofeminism
- Liberation Theology
- Process Theology
- The Gaia Hypothesis

Questions for discussion:

- As we compare and contrast theologies of dominion, stewardship, and kinship, let's consider the following questions:
 - Do humans occupy a special place in the cosmos, i.e., with some sort of dominion over nature?
 - If so, then how do we reconcile humanity's special status with our 7th principle, "respect for the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part?"

- If not, how does the concept of stewardship apply? I.e., is stewardship consistent with kinship/the web?
- How does God/the divine fit into the interdependent web? Is there any place for the spirit in such a system?
 - Theism, pantheism, and panentheism.
 - Do any of the speakers in the video articulate the concept of the interdependent web?
- One way of looking at Jesus is as an activist who articulated an alternative social vision, i.e., a new "kingdom of God," in which systems of domination would be overthrown.
 - Can you think of some of the systems of domination that existed in Jesus' time?
 - Does overthrowing these systems of domination have any relevance to reversing humans' domination over nature?
- Consider the concepts of Tawhid (Islam) and Interdependence (Buddhism).
 - Are there areas of conflict? Of compatibility?
 - Would either or both be helpful to conceptualizing the relationship between humans and nature in terms of the "interdependent web of all existence?"
- Consider Process theology, Ecofeminist theology, and liberation theology.
 - How do they conflict? How might they be reconciled?
 - Which of these fits with a world view based on "the interdependent web of all existence?"

Closing circle

Reflecting

Singing: (#395 in Singing the Living Tradition)

Sing and rejoice

Sing and rejoice,

Let all things living now

Sing and rejoice.

Faith and Ecology

Session 3 - UUs and Global Climate Change: Our Study Action Issue

Chalice Lighting and Meditation

Opening Song: (#396 in Singing the Living Tradition)

I know this rose will open,
I know my fear will burn away,
I know my soul will unfurl its wings,
I know this rose will open.

Global Climate Change – the issues

- Reviewing some basic facts
- Resources to learn more (web; publications; handouts)
- Weighing competing claims
- Impact in our own lives

The UU Study Action issue

- Basic Information – Where to find it; the Resource Guide etc.
<http://www.uua.org/statements/statements/8061.shtml>
- Role of UU Congregations in the Study Process (handout; from the resource guide)
- Action – What can UU congregations do?

Policy Considerations

- What should the U.S. role be?
- Kyoto Protocol
- Is it a question of business/development vs. future generations?
- Energy Policy

Congregational Responses to Global Climate Change

- Our Green Sanctuary [other environmental] Group [guest speakers]
- Our [Solar Energy/Other] Project [guest speakers]
- Responses at the state and local levels [guest speakers]
 - Renewable energy & energy efficiency
 - Vehicle emissions

Discussion:

- How do we mobilize for action at the individual and congregational levels?
- What actions are most appropriate for us to take, in terms of feasibility; in terms of effectiveness?
- How can we best embody our character as a community of faith in our work to try to alleviate the effects of global climate change?

Reflecting – Final thoughts on what UU congregations can/should do?

Closing Circle

Singing: (#413 in Singing the Living Tradition)

Go now in peace, go now in peace,

May the spirit of love surround you,

Everywhere, everywhere, you may go.

Faith and Ecology

Session 4 - Sustainability, Consumerism, and Simplicity

That happiness is attained through limitless material acquisition is denied by every religion and philosophy known to humankind, but is preached incessantly by every American television. ~ *Robert Bellah*

Chalice Lighting and Reading (William Henry Channing; # 484 in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

Singing: (#16 in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free,
'tis a gift to come down where we ought to be,
and when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight,
'till by turning, turning, we come 'round right.

Watching the Video: *Affluenza* [PBS Documentary, obtainable from Bullfrog Films, <http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/>].

Questions to Consider:

- Is the way of life we enjoy in this country unsustainable? Is it one that cannot be replicated throughout the rest of the world?
- Do you agree that Americans, although they possess great material wealth, are not happy?
- What can we do about the fact that Americans consume more than our share of the world's resources?
- What can we do about the consumerist lifestyle portrayed in the video?
 - As individuals?
 - As a church community?
 - Is it too late? Is it even possible to reverse this way of life?
- Can you think of some specific steps that we might take in our own lives, and in the life of this community, to reduce our consumption of resources?

Closing Circle:

Singing: (#123 in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

Spirit of Life, come unto me.
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;
Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

Faith and Ecology

Session 5 - Thinking About the Food We Eat

Chalice Lighting and Reading

Eating with the fullest pleasure – pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance – is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend. ~ *Wendell Berry*

Opening song: (to the tune of the Doxology; #371)

Rejoice in love we know and share,
in love and beauty everywhere;
rejoice in truth that makes us free,
and in the good that yet shall be.

Issues to consider:

- Dietary laws and restrictions in various faith traditions
 - Historically – why? What was their purpose?
 - Hygiene? – most scholars agree not the reason.
 - Purity? – yes, in the eyes of God.
 - Exclusivity? – Yes, to set the Jews apart as a community.
 - Some scholars believe part of the purpose was to promote vegetarianism – by making it really burdensome to eat meat.
 - Eating vegan makes keeping culture no issue at all; no meat, no dairy. Eating dairy adds some complication, but not too difficult. Eating meat makes keeping kosher really difficult – complex set of rules.
 - Today – do they have any relevance?
 - Mindfulness; promote awareness of where our food came from, what went into it, etc.
 - Justice issues – remember those who don't have enough to eat.
 - Thankfulness.
- Organics vs. pesticides
- Genetically altered foods
- Vegetarian or meat-eating?
- Distribution of food -- is there enough?
- Nutrition -- whole grains, processed foods, etc.
- Sustainability -- impact of production and processing on the food chain
 - Feed lots, hog farms, etc. ---air & water pollution
 - Displacement of native cultures to grow food for US & Europe

- Agribusiness vs. small farming
- Transportation; grocery chains -- local production; farmers' markets
- Congregational issues
 - Meal sharing
 - Preparing food for bringing to shut-ins
 - Cooking classes
 - Buying together
 - Fair trade coffee & other items
 - Disposable plates, cups & utensils vs. dishwashing

Closing Circle

Singing (#21; 1st verse, in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

For the Beauty of the Earth,
 For the splendor of the skies,
 For the love which from our birth
 Over and around us lies,
 Source of all, to thee we raise,
 This our hymn of grateful praise.

For next time discussion (our last class) – Please come prepared with an idea to share with the group about things we could do as a congregation to think and behave more ecologically, to reduce consumption, to simplify life, etc.

Faith and Ecology

Session 6 - Where Do We Go From Here?

Chalice Lighting and Reading

Singing (#389 in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

Gathered here in the mystery of the hour.

Gathered here in one strong body.

Gathered here in the struggle and the power.

Spirit, draw near.

Questions for Discussion:

- How do we mobilize for action at the individual and congregational levels?
- What actions are most appropriate for us to take, in terms of feasibility; in terms of effectiveness?
- How can we best embody our character as a community of faith in our work to try to alleviate the effects of global climate change?

Individual Actions:

- What changes can we make in our own lives?
- What vision can I model in my own life?
- Where am I being wasteful, careless?
- How can I be more mindful of how I live?
- What specific actions can I take right now?

Congregational Actions:

- Articulating a congregational vision and mission.
- Assist with the Church solar project. How? What is needed?
- Assist in becoming a Green Sanctuary congregation.
- Join UU Ministry for Earth (formerly the Seventh Principle Project (as a congregation).
- Join and work with the Green Conservation Group.
- Education programs – What would you like to see? For children? For adults?
- Other ideas?

Closing Circle

Reflecting on what we have learned

Singing: (#123 in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

Spirit of Life, come unto me.

Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.

Blow in the wind, rise in the sea.

Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close; wings set me free.
Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.

Closing:

“Ask “What’s possible?” not “What’s wrong?” Keep Asking!
Notice what you care about.
Assume that many others share your dreams.
Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.
Talk to people you know.
Talk to people you don’t know.
Talk to people you never talk to.
Be intrigued by the differences you hear.
Expect to be surprised.
Treasure curiosity more than certainty.
Invite in everybody who cares to work on what’s possible.
Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.
Know that creative solutions come from new connections.
Remember, you don’t fear people whose story you know.
Real listening always brings people closer together.
Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.
Rely on human goodness. Stay together.”

Words from Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another* (San Francisco:
Berrett-Koehler, 2002)

Faith and Ecology

Possible extra session - Thinking about the Water That Sustains Life

Lighting the Chalice and Reading:

The Supreme good is like water, which nourishes all things

Without trying to.

It is content with the low places that people disdain.

Thus it is like the Tao.

~Words of Stephen Mitchell, New English Version of the Tao Te Ching

Opening song (#100, 1st verse, in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

I've got peace like a river,

I've got peace like a river,

I've got peace like a river,

In my soul.

Watching the Video: *Thirst* [for information on how to obtain a copy, contact Bullfrog Films, <http://www.bullfrogfilms.com/>].

Discussion:

1. **Privatization.** Is access to clean, healthy drinking water a basic human right? How does this compare with arguments about property rights of those owning access to water? With arguments about the efficiency of private enterprise? How does the film address these questions?
2. **Water Quality.** How can we assure access to clean drinking water? What steps can we take to ensure that we do not further pollute our oceans, rivers, lakes? Is current regulation adequate?
3. **Bottled Water.** Bottled water has become ubiquitous around the world (see the parts of the film on India and attempts by large corporations to gain control of aquifers for bottling). Should corporations be able to control water sources? Why or why not? What about pollution from discarded water bottles in landfills/ should suppliers be compelled to mitigate this problem?
4. **Congregational Steps.** What steps can we take as a congregation to improve our access to sources of clean water? To help assure that all people have access to clean water as a matter of right? To avoid using bottled water whenever possible?
5. **Other Issues.** What other issues occur to you from "Thirst?" what about the jobs of those who work in water supply and treatment? What about the interests of local consumers when a water supply is privatized?

Closing Circle:

Singing (#210 in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

Wade in the water,

Wade in the water, children,
Wade in the water,
God's gonna trouble the water.

See that band all dressed in red,
Looks like the children that Moses led.
God's gonna trouble the water.

V. Guided Meditations

A Guided Meditation on the Interdependent Web

The Web is a theological statement as well as an ecological one. In it we find a theology of relationship – of humans with one another; with the natural world; and with the Power of Healing and Transformation in the Universe, the Divine, what some call God.

We find God, spirit of life, power of healing and transformation in the “nodes” of the web – the places where the strands of the web intersect and we enter into relationship – with other humans, with the natural world.

Meditation on the Web:

Let us close our eyes – and imagine that we can see the strands that link us together as we gather here today in this group.

And that we can see the strands that link us with this congregation, with the people who care for us, with the natural world around us.

And lift up our gaze once again to include the region we are in – the hills to the east, Monterey Bay to the West, all the communities in this region, human ones, and networks of plants and animals, soil and water. And see how all these webs are joined together in many greater webs of existence.

Lift our gaze once again, to see the entirety of our District of the UUA --- from _____ in the East to _____ in the West; from _____ in the north to _____ in the South, and notice how each of these UU communities itself constitutes a web of relationships, and how these webs are joined together in turn.

Then lift our gaze to the entire west coast, the vast Pacific Ocean, the island chains, the Pacific Rim. The web is no respecter of human boundaries. We are all linked in vast networks. And we can begin to see what John Seed meant about our being “tiny ephemeral beings on the tree of life.” From this perspective, we can no longer see this place where we are located. At most, we have a general sense of where we are located on the Western rim of the North American continent.

And yet, we can also imagine all the thousands, millions, of strands linking us together. And we can begin to see that although we are tiny and ephemeral, that there is power in these arrangements of webs. When we join together in webs, in relationship with others, we tap into the power to transform, to change, the webs of relationships around us. We can begin to influence the shape and structure of the many webs of which we are a part.

And then, let’s lift our perspective again, so that we are looking at the entire solar system, against a background of stars and galaxies. And we can see the earth as a blue-green ball, spinning through space, covered in patches by white clouds. And we can see that Earth itself is no bigger than a tiny ephemeral blossom on the tree of life. Yet, the Earth itself is part of far larger networks of planets, stars and galaxies.

And let us lift our gaze one more time and see that our solar system is but a tiny part of this vast, unimaginable cosmos. The Earth is so tiny it is lost from our view, as is the sun and the other planets of our system. And we know that it exists, that we exist, as part of this vast network of networks. And we can see that even from this perspective we can empower ourselves, by coming together into networks of relationship, into interdependent webs, to transform the many universes that we inhabit.

And we as we return from this cosmic journey through millions of webs of existence, let us give thanks for the gift of life – and for the gift of relationship that empowers us to work together to shape, and to reshape our world.

Blessed Be! And Amen.

A Guided Meditation by Rev. Thea Nietfield

[Adapted from Wes Nisker, *Buddha's Nature: A Practical Guide to Discovering Your Place in the Cosmos* (Bantam Books, 2000).

The value of a guided meditation is that it can offer another way of learning... an imaginative, non-analytical approach. We will bring our attention to various parts of our bodies; you are invited to visualize the human skeleton, as you have seen in pictures or models or you may want to move the bones we're focusing on around a bit as you bring awareness to them.

Begin by bringing attention to the top of your head. Become aware of the rounded dome of the skull, its weight, hardness, and shape. Notice all the empty spaces, the eye sockets, and jaw and cavity of the mouth, the space beneath the ears, and the big opening in the back of the skull where the spine enters. Messages from the world enter here - through these openings close to the brain - and the spine transmits signals to the rest of the body.

Notice your mouth and jaws. Hinged jaws were a turning point in evolution, giving bony fish an advantage over worms. In the womb, we develop gill-like structures just beneath our face, and after satisfying the DNA of primitive fish, these develop into jaws, earbones and larynx.

Your skull has been developing into this shape for a half billion years, expanding to accommodate a growing brain. Visualize your skull, recalling some of the skulls you have seen - from museums, medical texts, Halloween, the Day of the Dead, the Grateful Dead; they are all reasonable facsimiles of the skull you are feeling inside your own face. Try to feel the entire skull as a single bone.

Next move your attention downward and let it rest in your throat area. Notice the air moving down your trachea, or wind-pipe. Make a sound and feel your vocal cords vibrating inside your larynx. Human speech has played a major role in our evolution. Some think the brain increased in size because of language rather than the other way around. Think of a couple of words to say and notice how your tongue and lips automatically form the shapes needed for the sounds of the words. Isn't that amazing?

Continue to move your mindful awareness downward, into the bones of your neck. Turn your head slightly to be aware of the flexibility and firmness of neck bones.

Downward into the spine...feel the central position, the strength of this great ridgepole holding you erect. Our spine and ribs were born in the ocean, as tubular-shaped marine creatures began to develop ridges that segmented their body, along with a flexible spinal rod called a notochord. Five hundred million years ago, these "chordates" gave rise to the first vertebrates, which were primitive fish. Later these fish evolved into amphibians, then reptiles and mammals....we still carry the design, head to toes.

Move awareness into your shoulders are through your arm bones. Shrug the shoulders and flex the elbows to experience the hinges, lever and fulcrum. These are the equivalent of fins, wings or forelegs, once used for locomotion...now evolved into human arms...sometimes used for hugging. The versatility of human shoulders and wrists are gifts from our primate ancestors who swung from one tree branch to another. In the transition from woodland to grass plain, the arms and hands were released from locomotion and became tools for carrying things and making other tools.

Move awareness into your hands with the incredible opposable thumb. We owe the five fingers on our hands not to novel evolutionary events a million years ago on the African savannahs, but rather as a holdover from the original complement of five digits on the forefoot of the earliest land vertebrates who evolved some 370 million years ago. Maybe those tetrapods were growing digits to hold on to land so that they wouldn't slip back into the sea...

Now move your awareness into your pelvic bone, the great pedestal of your body. This is the platform - a turning tabletop - upon which the entire top half of your body is resting. It is the place where we center and stabilize ourselves.

Next move awareness into the two branches of your legs. Move the parts of your legs a little and feel their size, solidity, flexibility and function. In evolution, it was these legs that enabled us to stand up and be counted. Some say the actual human story begins when our earliest ancestors switched from swinging from tree to tree to walking on the ground. We became more physically removed from the earth and perhaps more psychologically removed also.

Move awareness down through your ankles and toes. As you flex your toes, remember that your ancestors used to use such toes to hold onto branches and vines. Let your awareness sink into the bones of your feet. This is your base, your bottom line, your place to take a stand. This is where you and the earth most often meet.