

# Honoring Earth

## A Worship Resource



Prepared by  
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<http://uuministryforearth.org/>

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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](mailto: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 resource and additional materials are available on the UU Ministry for Earth website at <http://uuministryforearth.org/>. 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.

*NOTE: Some URLs in the 2007 edition are not accessible in 2013. The URLs that are not currently found are shaded in the text. Links to similar websites are provided.*

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# Forward

What am I? Who am I? Where am I? Why am I here? These questions are at the heart of religious life. In our Unitarian Universalist tradition we acknowledge that there are many sources that can inform the personal quest for answers to these questions. In our worship services, we often turn to the teachings of the world's religions and to philosophers and poets for our comfort, inspiration and understanding. *Honoring Earth* invites us to make integral to our worship the inspirations and the understandings we gain from acknowledging our deep connections with the natural world and with our living planet. The Unitarian Universalist Seventh Principle "affirms and promotes the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." Imagine what justice and healing for our world might come from more fully living according to this principle. Imagine how our spiritual lives might respond to nurturing a deeper religious connection with the wondrous story of our place in the unfolding universe? Should we not seek on every occasion to explore, renew, heal, and celebrate this awe-inspiring relationship? For inherent in the manifestations of "the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part" are nearly limitless opportunities to express our love and concern for the Earth and all living creatures in every form of worship in which we participate.

*Honoring Earth* is an attempt to blend our factual understanding of cosmology, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and botany with the contemplation, awe, and mystery that speak to our spiritual dimension. We hope that the voices of our elders and the gracious contributions of UU ministers, directors of religious education, Green Sanctuary committee members, lay leaders, and others whose words appear on the following pages will inspire you to bring Earth-honoring elements of worship into both your personal lives and, naturally and often, into the worship experiences within your congregations.

We of UU Ministry for Earth wish to thank all who have contributed to this first edition of *Honoring Earth* and invite you to participate as well. Additional contributions of material are most welcome and will be included in future editions and posted on our website: <http://www.uuministryforearth.org>. To submit materials for future editions, please send electronically, if possible, to [office@uuministryforearth.org](mailto:office@uuministryforearth.org) or mail to: UU Ministry for Earth, 1034 SW 13th Ave., Portland, OR 97205.

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You are welcome to use any portion of this resource for education or worship, but please respect and honor the contributing authors by giving full credit to them. In addition, we ask that you acknowledge UU Ministry for Earth when using these materials. We hope that as you and your congregation or fellowship enjoy and use this resource, you will support our work with your generous individual and congregational memberships. Only with you can UU Ministry for Earth continue to help Unitarian Universalists to embrace the moral imperative to live in covenant with Earth.

Claudia Kern, Editor

# Introduction

Rev. Katherine Jesch

In these challenging times, it is especially important to look to our spiritual lives for sustenance and hope as we struggle with how to respond to all the crises we face, small or large, local or global. Many of us look to our spiritual connection with nature and how that relationship nurtures and sustains us as we seek to heal a broken world. A healthy, Earth-based spiritual life is a way to be fully at home in our lives and on this earth. A strong spirit helps us to weather the storms of life.

Worship as spiritual practice is a central part of our congregational life. Our weekly worship services are the most common and consistent gathering place, offering both the space and time in our daily busy-ness to pause and consider those most profound religious questions that give meaning to our lives.

Worship is one of the four program elements of the Green Sanctuary Program, as developed by UU Ministry for Earth. As we struggle to create more sustainable patterns for our personal and congregational lives, our Sunday worship services are occasions for education and inspiration, motivation and support. They are opportunities to celebrate our collective will, and the progress we have made. And perhaps most of all, they offer moments for healing.

We need one or more “Earth Day-style” Sundays each year when we consider the earth, but we also need to make room in every service to honor our life support system. In any given week of the year, we can honor a turn on the wheel of the seasons, or acknowledge a victory for an ecosystem or life support element, or affirm the need for action in response to a new threat. In all cases, we want to hold up to our communities our desire to change—for the health of our children, for the beauty of the earth, for the peace we seek—and to accomplish this change peacefully.

There are many ways to bring an Earth consciousness into both regular worship and special celebrations. But first we must consider what worship is and why it is important in our congregational life. In 1983, the UUA Commission on Common Worship published “Leading Congregations in Worship: A Guide.” That guidance has now found its way onto the UUA website at Worship Web.

<http://www.uua.org/worship/theory/leadingcongregations/index.shtml>. In the Introduction, worship is described as a deeply human activity. We are reminded that, “though it is often defined as reverence given to a divine being or power, worship need not have supernatural implications. The origin of the word “worship” is in the Old English *weorthscippen*, meaning to ascribe worth to something, to shape things of worth. We worship, then, whenever we ascribe worth to some value, idea, object, person, experience, attitude, or activity—or whenever we give form or shape to that which we have already found to be of worth.”

“Worship is usually considered to be a formal and deliberate shaping, ordering, or recalling of the things of worth which we experience individually at various moments in our lives . . . This shaping is done in the context of **a community of persons** who share common values, ideas, and attitudes . . . The shaping process which is worship must have a social and historical dimension if it is to be complete.”

Over the centuries, worship has taken on or been assigned a number of different purposes. Several distinct styles of worship have evolved to meet these purposes, any and all of which can be focused explicitly or implicitly on honoring Earth.

**Sacramental or dramatic worship.** In this style, the worshiper is called to be part of the sacred event and to be transformed by it. Words and actions are believed to participate in the divine reality.

**Educational or interpretive worship.** The main purpose here is to express a particular idea or message. The goal is to move people, and through them, society -- to help create community, justice, equality, and to widen personal horizons. The appeal is to the intellect and the will rather than the senses.

**Celebratory worship.** Worship as celebration emphasizes the artistic. It attempts to reflect all of life, taking note of the realities already present in the worshiping community. Its purpose, however, is not to create community, inspire social responsibility, or teach a lesson, but is simply to reflect, to celebrate.

**Thematic worship.** This is a type of worship in which a particular idea or set of ideas is emphasized or clarified and applied to daily life. A single idea or theme is developed through readings, music, collective acts and a major presentation such as a sermon, panel, or sharing ceremony. This style may combine one or more of the first three styles.

**Liturgical worship.** Worship in this style usually follows a pattern that attempts to touch certain human needs. The service is performed as a "drama," a choreographed event with a blending of responses, litanies, and prayers, and often a sermon or presentation. The repeated elements become for the worshipers a common body of devotional material made familiar through frequent use.

High-quality worship engages people. It meets their needs to give praise, affirm common values, acknowledge inadequacies, experience something of the transcendent, reach toward the future in hope, and go forth in strength. Besides challenging them intellectually or ethically, it gives worshipers an opportunity to show gratitude, acknowledge errors and shortcomings, experience healing and forgiveness, and feel connected with the church community.

Of course, worship rarely is, and need not be exclusively any one of these styles. There are times when we want worship to be educational. There are times when we want it to be playful or artistic. And there are times when we want it to be truly transforming, even sacramental. Common worship can meet any or all of these needs.

Earth-honoring worship nourishes our spirit by strengthening our sense of connection – with each other and with Earth. None of us is isolated; feeling disconnected is usually recognized as a pathology to be healed. Worship, in its best forms, can be a tool for this healing. We recall the sustenance and comfort we received from camping overnight in the woods, or walking on a deserted beach, or resting at the edge of a meadow. We remember the spicy scent of cedar trees, the salt smell of ocean air, the rich musk of damp soil. We play again in our minds the symphony of wolves howling at the moon, or waves crashing on the beach songbird warbling in sunshine. And we are renewed and healed; we are stronger for the experience.



And when the subject of our worship is endangered, as Earth is so profoundly today, our worship can – and should – inspire us to action, to taking responsibility for the healing that must occur in the world we leave for our children’s children and all future generations.

We offer this collection of worship materials as a resource for designing Earth Honoring Worship experiences that will do all of this – honor and celebrate the interconnected web of life, nourish and sustain our spirits, and inspire us to go forth to heal this broken world – as we gather together in our communities of faith.

—Rev. Katherine Jesch, former Director of Environmental Ministry, UU Ministry for Earth



## Words for Opening & Lighting the Chalice

As surely as we belong to this universe  
we belong together.  
We join here to transcend the isolated self,  
to reconnect,  
to know ourselves to be at home,  
here on the earth, under the stars  
linked with each other.

*Rev. Margaret Keip*

This earthen chalice was born of clay and water,  
The flesh and blood of Gaia;  
Given form by the hand of the potter,  
set by the bonding fire of the kiln.  
As we touch the flame to her lips,  
joining fire and air,  
May her light remind us  
of earth, air, fire, and water,  
of plant and animal, human and mineral,  
that we and the Earth are one.

*Rev. Edwin Lane*

Hail Mother, who art the earth,  
Hallowed be thy soil, rocks and flora  
that nourish and support all life.  
Blessed be thy wind that gives us breath  
and thy waters that quench, bathe, and refresh all living things.  
Holy Earth -as one - we praise your majesty, grace, and wonder.  
*-Unknown*

We light this chalice with hopes for a bright future.  
May our children their children, all children  
Intermingle their laughter throughout the world.  
May they be as the rainbow  
Color and hope for the coming dawn.

*Reena Kondo*

## **I Believe in Nature**

*Florence Emmons*

We light this chalice to honor the orderly processes of the Universe, which hold the planets in their orbits and control the activities of microscopic cells.

To honor the pervading, impartial forces of nature through which destruction is made constructive;

To honor the ever-changing beauty of the natural world, which brings joy and inspiration to many people;

We believe in the healing and restorative power of nature without which all living things would be in great jeopardy;

We believe in the profound lessons which nature teaches; lessons of struggle and adaptability, tenacity and purpose, endurance and growth, patience, balance, and the inevitability of cause and effect;

We believe in the hope and faith which nature gives to the observant through predictable, compensatory certainties: light after dark, warmth after cold, peaceful calm after lashing storm, and always the miracle of the sun, the rain and the seed.

*Florence Emmons was baptized at St. Paul's Universalist Church (now the Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden, Connecticut) in 1912. She wrote this affirmation for an adult religious education class at the church in the 1970s. Since then, the text has been used in Sunday services and set to music. This reading first appeared in UU World XVII: 2 (March/April 2003): 18*

## Closing Words

**Creator God**, we are grateful for the beauty of the earth,  
for all flowering things,  
for the water that nourishes all this and all of us.  
Forgive us when we despoil your creation,  
and help us to be more fully awake to the gifts of this natural world  
and to be more careful stewards of these gifts.  
May we walk upon the earth in thankfulness all the days of our lives.  
Amen.

--Rev. Dr. Marilyn Sewell

### **“The True Reason the Forest is Called Primeval”**

Needles of heaven seek pinpricks through clouds of green.  
...filter into dusts of light  
...layer between laden boughs  
...suspend themselves in vibrant air  
Emerge, to dance with shadow on the carpet floor.  
You are a child of this;  
Step softly.

--Rev. Margaret Keip

**In the beginning, there was Love,**  
and Love created and thus became Creator.  
We give our humblest gratitude to the Creator  
    for giving us the gift of Life in Love  
    held so delicately in each and every breath.  
In a world  
    where the flapping of a butterfly's wings over Transylvania  
    may conjure up a storm in Gaithersburg,  
    no one can say our efforts will prove insignificant.  
Whatever the outcome,  
    we are called to act  
    by our history,  
    by our tradition,  
    by the times in which we find ourselves  
    to protect this gift of life that connects us all.  
May we respond in love.

Amen.

--Rev. Katherine Jesch

## **Benediction**

Go now and be blessed by the sun  
and be equally blessed by the rain that gives life to all it touches.

--Rev. Dr. Marilyn Sewell

**This is our hope:** that the children born today may still have, twenty years hence, a bit of green grass under their bare feet, a breath of clean air to breathe, a patch of blue water to sail upon, and a whale on the horizon to set them dreaming.

--Jacques Cousteau

**Stay together  
Learn the flowers  
Go light**

--Gary Snyder, <http://www.thenation.com> from *For the Children*



# Prayers and Meditations

It is in the stopping, in the paying attention, that we are able to most deeply sense our connections to Earth and Life. It is during these quiet, reflective times that we can allow the joyfulness of being living creatures in a living universe to arise. It is during these times that we can safely confront our deepest fears and concerns for our Earth and our future, and that we may renew our commitments to living in right relationship with all of existence.

## Prayers

### *Manitongquat's Prayer*

--Manitongquat (Medicine Story) is a medicine man and storyteller of the Wampanoag Nation. From the first Rainbow Gathering in 1971. (2001 Indigo Bridge Cooperative)

Hear, O Humankind, the prayer of my heart.

For are we not one, have we not one desire,  
To heal our Mother Earth and bind her wounds?  
And still to be free as the spotted Eagle climbing  
The laughing breath of our Father Sky,  
To hear again from dark forests and flashing rivers  
The varied ever-changing Song of Creation.

O Humankind, are we not all brothers and sisters,  
Are we not the grandchildren of the Great Mystery?  
Do we not all want to love and be loved,  
To work and to play,  
To sing and dance together?  
But we live with fear.  
Fear that is hate, fear that is mistrust, envy, greed, vanity,  
Fear that is ambition, competition, aggression,  
Fear that is loneliness, anger, bitterness, cruelty.... And yet, fear is only twisted love, love turned back on itself,  
Love that was denied, love that was rejected...  
And love....  
Love is life ~ creation, seed and leaf  
And blossom and fruit and seed,  
Love is growth and search and reach and touch and dance.  
Love is nurture and succor and feed and pleasure.  
Love is pleasuring ourselves, pleasuring each other.  
Love is life believing in itself.

And life....  
Life is the Sacred Mystery singing to itself,  
Dancing to its drum, telling stories, improvising, playing  
And we are all that Spirit,

Our stories tell but one cosmic story that we are love indeed,  
That perfect love in me seeks the love in you,

And if our eyes could ever meet without fear

We would recognize each other and rejoice,  
For love is life believing in itself.

O Humankind, we must stop fearing life, fearing each other,  
We must absolutely stop hating ourselves, resenting Creation...  
Life.

O Humankind, life is the only treasure.  
We are the custodians of it, it is our sacred trust.  
Life is wondrous, awesome and holy, a burning glory,  
And its price is simply this: Courage....  
We must be brave enough to love.

Hear my heart's prayer, O Humankind,  
Trust in love, don't be afraid, I love you as I love life.  
I love myself, please love me too,  
Love yourself, for perfect love, as a wise one said, casts out all fear.  
If we are to live there is no other choice,  
For love is life believing in itself.

Above all,  
Let us set the children free,  
Break the traps of fear that history has fashioned for them.  
Free to grow, to seek and question, to dance and sing,  
To be dreamers of tomorrow's rainbows. And if we but give them our trust  
They will guide us to a New Creation  
For love is life believing in itself.

Hear, O Humankind, the prayer of my heart.

## ***A Closing Prayer to Follow Joys and Concerns***

--Adapted by Rev. Katherine Jesch

In the spirit of community,  
in which we find strength and common purpose,  
we share our joys, our sorrows, our hopes and dreams.  
We have turned our minds and hearts  
toward one another in trust,  
giving love, seeking comfort,  
and celebrating together.  
We are part of the web of life  
that makes us one with all humanity,  
one with all the universe.  
In all the moments of our lives,  
for those loved ones and events  
spoken aloud here this morning,  
and for those we yet hold in the silence of our hearts,  
we are truly grateful  
for the love and support of this beloved community.

## ***Prayers for All Living Creatures***

--Albert Schweitzer

Hear our humble prayer, O God, for our friends the animals,  
especially for animals who are suffering,  
for any that are hunted or lost, or deserted or frightened or hungry,  
for all that must be put to death.

We entreat for them all thy mercy and pity  
and for those who deal with them we ask a heart of compassion  
and gentle hands and kindly words.

Make us, ourselves, to be true friends to animals  
and so to share the blessings of the merciful.

## ***Prayer of St. Basil***

**O God, enlarge in us the sense of communion with all living things,** our brothers and sisters the plants and animals.

You have given them the earth as their home in common with us.

We remember with shame how we have exercised our high dominion with ruthless cruelty.

The voice of the earth, meant to rise to you in song, has been a groan of pain.

Make us mindful that all your creatures live not just for us but for themselves and for You, that they may love the sweetness of life.

-- St. Basil

## ***A Jewish Prayer of Praise for God's Creation***

How wonderful, O Lord, are the works of your hands!

The heavens declare Your glory,  
the arch of sky displays Your handiwork.

In Your love You have given us the power  
to behold the beauty of Your world robed in all its splendor.

The sun and the stars, the valleys and hills,  
the rivers and lakes all disclose Your presence.

The roaring breakers of the sea tell of Your awesome might,  
the beasts of the field and the birds of the air bespeak your wondrous will.

In Your goodness You have made us able to hear the music of the world.

The voices of loved ones reveal to us that You are in our midst.

A divine voice sings through all creation.



## ***Prayer of Commitment, U.N. Environmental Sabbath Program***

**We join with the earth and with each other.**

To bring new life to the land

To restore the water

To refresh the air

We join with the earth and with each other.

To celebrate the seas

To rejoice in the sunlight

To sing the song of the stars

We join with the earth and with each other.

To recreate the human community

To promote justice and peace

To remember our children

We join with the earth and with each other.

We join together as many and diverse expressions of one loving mystery:  
for the healing of the earth and the renewal of all life.

## ***Taken from Black Elk's Prayer***

Black Elk, Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux, 1863-1950

Hey! Lean to hear my feeble voice.

You have said that I should make the tree to bloom.

With tears running, O Great Spirit, my Grandfather,

With running eyes I must say

The tree has never bloomed.

Here I stand, and the tree is withered.

Again, I recall the great vision you gave me.

It may be that some little root of the sacred tree still lives.

Nourish it then

That it may leaf

And bloom

And fill with singing birds!

Hear me, that the people may once again

Find the good road

And the shielding tree.



## ***An Ojibway Prayer***

--Art Solomon, Ojibway Elder

Grandfather,  
Look at our brokenness.  
We know that in all creation  
Only the human family  
Has stayed from  
the Sacred Way.  
We know that we are the ones  
Who are divided  
And we are the ones  
Who must come  
back together  
To walk in the  
Sacred Way.  
Grandfather,  
Sacred One,  
Teach us love,  
compassion and honor  
That we may heal  
The Earth  
And heal each other.

## ***A Prayer of Thanksgiving & Blessing***

Inspired by the Iroquois

We return thanks to our mother, the earth,  
which sustains us.  
We return thanks to the rivers and streams,  
which supply us with water.  
We return thanks to all herbs,  
which furnish medicines for the cure of our diseases.  
We return thanks to the corn, and to her sisters, the bean and squashes,  
which give us life.  
We return thank to the moon and stars,  
which have given to us their light when the sun was gone.  
We return thanks to the sun,  
that he has looked upon the earth with a beneficent eye.  
Lastly, we return thanks to the Great Spirit,  
in whom is embodied all goodness,  
and who directs all thing for the good of his children.

## Meditations

No matter the topic of a worship service, meditations can remind us that we share a common journey with one another and with the entire universe - stardust forming and reforming into life and consciousness.

### Meditation on Stones

--Rev. Margaret Keip

*(A beautiful reason for yielding to the temptation to gather beautiful, polished stones on beaches, lakeshores, and along streambeds!)*

You are holding in your hand a sea-washed stone, a very small rock. As is true of most people, as well, its beauty grows more evident as you gaze at it more deeply. A stone that appears indistinguishable from a billion others, becomes individual with acquaintance, be it a pocket rock, a boulder, or an island. Stones appear to be utterly inert, and eternally durable.—And thus to be the very opposite of us. Yet the molecules that compose them are in constant activity; and stones themselves are undergoing continual change—at a far slower pace than are we, but non-stop nonetheless, as they are buffeted by forces of nature, or hollowed smooth by human hands and feet.

People climb rocks, throw them, play with them, build with them, kill with them. We read the history of the Earth in their strata, and the story of life in the fossils they preserve. We sculpt with stone. We collect stones, and polish them. We wear them as gems on our fingers. We treasure, and sometimes revere them.

Deeper truths may lie hidden in our "stony" behavior. Shooting stars are stone; it is thought that they may have first brought life to our planet.—And this is only the very beginning of Life's story here on earth. When rock weathers, wears away, disintegrates, and decomposes, it becomes the soil in which things grow.

This happens not only to rock. It happens also to *people*. And even to *ideas*. Rocks and people and ideas weather, and disintegrate, and become fertile soil for Life that is to follow. May you seek a nesting place for your stone somewhere . . . a place where it will be safe from injuring anything moving, a new home where it will fit again in the world, as each of us do.

### Becoming A Friend Of Creation: Quaker Queries For Meditation

The Quakers have a tradition of putting "queries" to those gathered at their meetings. A query does not require an answer, but it does inspire one to meditate on a topic and perhaps to follow up with action. The following queries are adapted from "Becoming a Friend of Creation" by Lisa Gould. It is suggested that each query be followed by moments of silence.

Am I walking gently on Earth? Do I live simply, mindful of how my life affects Earth and her resources?

Do I honor the life of all living things, the order of nature, the wildness of wilderness, the riches of the created world?

Do I take opportunities to foster a cooperative relationship with the natural world?

What am I doing to teach children and adults and members of our larger community to cherish each strand of the intricate web of life?

What action am I taking to reverse the destruction of Earth's ecosystems and promote healing of Earth?

Do I accept that there is no "away" to which to throw unwanted items and therefore try to find the best way to recycle everything I no longer need?

Do I choose recreations that strengthen my physical, mental and spiritual life and avoid those which may harm others or me?

Do I support national and international organizations that work to protect the environment, prevent overpopulation, and address political and economic problems that force the poor of the world to destroy the environment in order to survive?

Do I recognize and affirm the wisdom of indigenous cultures?

Am I teaching children to walk gently on Earth?

Do I consider the right of all species to survive and the need to maintain genetic diversity?

### **Who Am I?**

*Adapted from "Who Am I?" by Connie Barlow, ([www.TheGreatStory.org](http://www.TheGreatStory.org))*

"Who am I in a school of a thousand students?" inquired the youth.  
"Who are you in a galaxy of a hundred billion stars?" responded the sage.

\* \* \*

"Who am I in a world of six thousand million people?" inquired the youth.  
"Who are you in a cosmos of a hundred billion galaxies?"

\* \* \*

"Who am I whose ancestors sailed away from their homeland?" asked the youth.  
"Who are you whose ancestors crawled out of the sea?" replied the sage.

\* \* \*

"Who am I whose ancestors learned to till the soil?" asked the youth.  
"Who are you whose ancestors learned to breathe the air?"

\* \* \*

"Who am I in a body made of mortal flesh?" implored the youth.  
"Who are you as flesh made of immortal stardust?" offered the sage.

\* \* \*

"Who am I with a mind aching for answers?" lamented the youth.  
"Who are you \_\_\_\_\_?" Alternative endings :  
as Universe delighting in questions?" [by Connie Barlow]  
as Universe with questions and answers hidden within you? [by Mary Coelho]  
as thought before mind? [by Mustafaa AbdulHaq AbdAllah]

# Drum, Dance, Chant and Song

Just as lifting our many voices together during worship can form one song; so rhythm and dance can offer us other forms of expression to rejoice in and reconnect us with the larger community of life. UUs are also discovering how drums, shofars, and simply clapping hands can enhance our worship experience. For Earth-Honoring songs, Unitarian Universalists have many resources including Jim Scott's "Earth and Spirit Songbook" and our UU Hymnal "Singing the Living Tradition" which has many songs with ecological themes and Earth imagery. Consult the topical indices in the hymnal under the topics of animals, beauty, earth, ecology, the elements, evolution, the interdependent web, nature and countryside, pagan, and seasons and cycles.

## Earth Jam

The last two Earth Day services we have ended with what we call an "Earth Jam". Several of our members are big drummers, and they establish a beat and others (many others, but it's OK just to watch, too) join in with various percussion and other "instruments," voices, clapping, knee slapping, etc.

Champlain Valley  
Unitarian Universalist Society  
Middlebury, Vermont

## Music Resources

*Earth and Spirit Songbook*, Jim Scott, 2003. Published by the UU Ministry for Earth with support from the Fund for Unitarian Universalism. Available directly from Jim at Jim Scott, PO Box 4025, Shrewsbury, MA 01545. (508) 755.0995, <http://www.jimscottsongs.com>, Jimscott2u@aol.com. Jim is a UU composer and musician, with many recordings, songbooks and choral music. He is available for performances and worship services.

*Better Things to Do* and other recordings and songbooks by environmental troubadour, Bill Oliver, also known as "Mr. Habitat." These songs are wonderful for children. <http://www.mrhabitat.net>

*The Earth Am I*, Ken Langer, UU Director Music and Arts. Music for voice or unison choir and piano combines texts derived from a Navaho chant, and a Wiccan blessing of four elements. Sheet music from Yelton Rhodes Music, Los Angeles, CA, <http://yrmusic.com/v2/catalog/listing.php?yrlD=YR5626>

*Songs for Earthlings: A Green Earth Spirituality Songbook*, compiled by Julie Forest Middleton. A wide variety of songs, written for single line melody and chord symbols. 1998, Emerald Earth Publishing, PO Box 4326, Philadelphia, PA 19118, 222-333-3929, <http://www.emeraldearth.net/>

*Circle of Song: Songs, Chants, and Dances for Ritual and Celebration*. Compiled by Kate Marks, 1995. This book and companion CD include over 300 sacred songs and chants from many spiritual traditions and global sources and instructions for 40 dances. Full Circle Press, PO Box 428, Amherst, MA, 01004. <http://www.circleofsong.com>. 413-548-9884, kmarks@circleofsong.com. Kate is available for workshops and performances.

## Circle of Song: Songs, Chants, and Dances for Ritual and Celebration

Editors Note: The following is adapted from the introduction to “Circle of Song: Songs, Chants, and Dances for Ritual and Celebration,” Kate Marks (1995, Full Circle Press) with the kind permission of the author. For more information, see Music Resources on previous page

If you can walk  
You can dance  
If you can talk  
You can sing  
--Saying from Zimbabwe

Sacred music and dance are powerful tools that have been used by cultures throughout the ages to awaken consciousness, call in power, heal the body and spirit and enhance the celebration of important occasions. For the ancients, dance and music were considered not just for entertainment; but also as forms of active prayer and worship, as ways of communing with the gods and goddesses, and as means of re-connecting with the cycles of nature and with all life.

### ***Chanting***

Sound, especially the human voice is a powerful catalyst for healing and transformation. As we sound and sing, we harmonize our being, lift our spirits and dissolve our pain.

Unlike a song, a chant usually consists of only a few words and a simple melody that can be readily learned and easily repeated. ....As we chant the words and melody repetitively, we give voice to our feelings, deepen our devotion, and call forth what we want into our lives....A chant accumulates power with each repetition. It helps us to become one-pointed in our concentration; to quiet and empty our active thinking minds and connect deeply with the core of our being.

Many sacred phrases in chants are affirmations. They invoke a particular quality we want to affirm or call into our lives, such as ‘Air I am, Fire I am’. Some of the choruses of our popular songs have become mantras. For example, the well-known ‘We Shall Overcome’ or the familiar Beatles ‘Let it be’ repeated over and over are forms of mantra. Saying and singing them out loud gives them more power--especially when we repeat them over and over. Through chants and songs we plant positive thoughts and ideas, which are then quickly made emotional through music.

Chanting is active vocal prayer. As we chant, we sharpen our focus and intention and deepen our devotion. For example, many Native American chants begin with ‘Hey’. As we say ‘Hey’ we call the divine forces and say ‘I want your attention.’ Calling also gives us a way to work with affirmations--naming and claiming what we want. Not only are we affirming that ‘I am----’, we actively invoke and call that quality or thing.

### ***Musical Accompaniment for Chants or to Use Alone***

Keep the accompaniment simple, the simpler the better. A strong drumbeat or rattle shake that accentuates the natural rhythm of the chant or mantra works best; or play simple guitar or piano chords. Add other simple, easy to use instruments such as percussion and bells. Let the power of the chant or song be foremost. Chants are often more powerful when they are sung unaccompanied.

## **The Drone**

Another suggestion is to accompany the chant with a simple drone sound. The drone is done by repetitively playing or singing one long sustained note, a series of sustained notes or an open chord. This helps us to calm and center our minds, to become one--pointed as we explore one note in depth. Drone music is found in cultures the world over.

## **Drumming**

Drumming is one of the most ancient, powerful ways to accompany chants, dances and ritual. The drum is round; it is a feminine form, which awakens our instinctual earthy nature as well as ancient images and symbols. The drum is used to carry and sustain the energy, to keep the inner pulse; it echoes the heartbeat of Mother Earth and of all life.

Ideally, have one person drum for you or use a taped version of the drumming. (See Circle of Song for resources) The drummer needs to be able to keep a steady even beat and be sensitive to the energy of the group process. She/he needs to know how to listen and follow the group pulse, in order to support what is happening, rather than becoming a distraction. This is not the place for fancy drum rhythms, improvisation, and solo acts. If the basic heartbeat stops, the energy will drop immediately. This may be what is called for at certain times. At other times it may be appropriate to gradually speed up the tempo to raise the energy, or to slow it down to ground the energy.

Larger group drums, known as Mother drums, are often used by communities and dance circles. These drums usually sit on a stand and are played by up to eight persons. The following is an example of a

### **A Drumming Ceremony**

- Gather around a group drum and/or sit in a circle with your individual drums and other percussion instruments.
- Select a drum leader; someone who can hold a steady beat which will remain constant throughout. (If there is a group drum, the leader should use this.)
- Decide how long you want to drum. Your ceremony can last a short time or go on for hours, even days. Always have at least two people holding the beat at all times, so that others can rest at intervals.
- Before beginning, the leader says a prayer of dedication for the drumming ceremony--to Mother Earth, World Peace, or for the healing of a person, the group, or a particular issue. An offering of tobacco or cornmeal is made to the drum. Then the leader begins the heartbeat.
- After the heartbeat is strong and even, others can join in with their individual drums and percussion instruments as they feel the rhythm. Counter rhythms can be played as long as the heartbeat is kept central. Generally, the mother drum keeps a steady beat with each beat being of equal length. The drummer(s) can also imitate the actual heartbeat using a short and long pattern: short--long--pause, short--long--pause.
- It is important for everybody to keep their focus and intention clear, to listen deeply, staying sensitive and attuned to each other. Imagine the heartbeat coming from deep in the earth, vibrating with the universal rhythm of life, as well as your own heartbeat.
- Add voices, chants, dances, and other instruments in an organic flowing process.
- If the rhythm changes, let everyone listen and return to the single beat of the Heart drum until the energies/sounds harmonize.
- To end the ceremony, the leader comes into the center of the circle and signals to the group. This can be arranged at the beginning, perhaps counting the last four beats out loud. The final beat is struck strongly, with everyone together.

- End in silence, absorbing the vibrations and integrating your experience. Share verbally around the circle if you wish. Hold hands, and say appropriate closing prayers.

### **Rattles**

Rattles, like the drum, are powerful ritual tools. They are usually made of dried gourds with seeds (pebbles, beans or small crystals) placed inside for the sound. When the rattle is shaken, the seeds are brought to life. The gourds are attached to a stick and decorated with one's personal symbols of power. The rattling sound is thought to open up the doorway into the spirit world, to call our spirit guides, allies and guardians to us. Rattles are also used to heighten our intention, to focus and direct energy. You can rattle to create sacred space or to send healing energy into a sick person's body. When you shake the rattle up and down, you call in active, masculine energy; when you shake it side to side you invoke receptive, more feminine, energy.

### ***How To Work with Chants***

- Try to get everyone to participate, especially those who are inhibited and feel that they cannot sing or dance. This will help unify and attune the group.
- Know the song well enough yourself so you are comfortable teaching it. As you show confidence in your voice, you will draw in others and build enthusiasm.
- Sing the melody several times with the group until it becomes familiar. Then add the words, extra verses and harmony.
- Make sure the group understands the meaning of the words. Repeat the words several times, especially if there are more than four lines. Print them out if possible.
- Encourage everyone to sing from his or her heart and feel the essence of what they are singing. Experiment with evoking different moods-- slow, sad, fast, happy or melancholy. Try changing the beat, the pitch and the dynamics; repeat the chant for a while in a whisper, or silently (on the breath).
- At times, you may want just the women to sing, or just the men.
- Many of the chants can be sung as rounds. Rounds are a good way to introduce the concept of harmony and holding your part.
- After the sound and music have stopped, tune in to the silence, the underlying meditative state that is present at all times.

### **The Power of Dance**

Dance has been used throughout the ages by all cultures for healing, meditation and celebration. Movement is as natural to our lives as breathing. Like chanting, movement helps us to express our inner spirit through outer form, to ground and express physically our intentions and inspirations. All peoples of the world have traditions of sacred/ folk dances. Some dances are done in circles on the earth; others in temples and churches. The movements may reflect nature or imitate animals; they are usually simple and repetitive. There are three common dance forms used by groups: the circle, the chain/snake dance, and the spiral dance.

### ***The Sacred Circle Dance***

The symbol of the sacred circle is universal and has been used in rituals and ceremonies throughout time. Ancient stone circles, carvings and other archeological evidence have been found in the caves of our earliest ancestors. The circle is a powerful symbol of unity and wholeness connecting us with the cycles of life. The center of the circle is like the center of the universe. As we move around the circle, we learn to develop balance, and to find the relationship between our inner and outer lives



In these dances, participants move around a circle, generally side-stepping, and linking hands. When circle members face inward, the group energy is contained and a charge is built up easily. When they face outward, the group energy is sent out to others and to the planet for healing. The direction of the movement is important. The clockwise direction is solar and connects us with active, masculine yang energy. The counterclockwise direction is lunar and connects us with receptive, feminine yin energy. The solar direction helps to build a concentration of energy and draw in positive forces; the lunar direction diffuses and releases energy.

### ***Chain/Line/Snake Dance***

The line/snake dance is a variation of the circle. Dancers begin in a circle, but then one person (the leader) lets go of the hand of one of her/his neighbors so that the circle becomes a line, chain or snake. The chain/snake of dancers can double or triple or more around so that people begin to pass each other face-to-face, making eye contact in their respective lines. The lines can weave in various patterns such as making concentric circles, forming a spiral, weaving in and out of each other; making bridges with partners while others go under them. The chain/snake can wind around the room, and separate into several snakes. All can face in one direction like a train as each dancer puts her or his hands on the shoulders or waists of the person in front of them. The snake can move fast and make many curves, creating a whip-like effect; or move more slowly, in a more focused way. You can also experiment with gradually building up power, speed and intensity, then returning to a slower pace.

### ***The Sacred Spiral Dance***

The spiral pattern, inherent in the circle, is a very old, sacred symbol of initiation and personal power. It has been found on historic sites throughout the world. (One of the most famous, which extends over several miles, is in Nazca, Peru.) The spiral differs from the circle in that it never closes, but keeps expanding outward, forming ever-widening concentric circles. The spiral movement can go high up into the outer atmosphere or deep down into the earth, or both, spinning clockwise or counterclockwise. It has the potential to shift us from one dimension of reality to another, into limitless time and space, deep into the core of our being. The center of the spiral is the quiet stillpoint, the 'eye' at the center of the cyclone, where we experience the primal source of all possibilities.

To create a spiral dance, follow the instructions for the chain/snake dance with all participants standing in a circle, holding hands.

- The leader lets go of the hand of one of their neighbors and leads the group in a slow chain dance, following a spiral pattern toward a center point.
  - The leader then stands at the center, raising his/her arms skyward to create a focal point of energy.
- It's important when you have ended any of the dances to ground yourself well: lean over, touch your hands to the earth or stand in a balanced way feeling roots growing from your feet, connecting you deep into the earth.

"The land waits for those who can discern its rhythms." --Vine Deloria

### ***The Elm Dance***

Around the planet, as people gather to work together for the healing of our world, a simple, beautiful practice is spreading. To celebrate their commitment to life and solidarity with activists the world over, they join hands in a circle dance called the Elm Dance. Set to the haunting strains of a Latvian song, the Elm Dance took form in Germany in the 1980s, and in the early 1990s moved eastward to the areas poisoned by the Chernobyl disaster. There, and especially in Novozybkov, the most contaminated of inhabited cities, the dance became an expression of the will to live. When Joanna Macy was with the

people of Novozybkov in 1992, she made them a promise: to tell their story wherever she went. In keeping that promise, she shared the Elm Dance. Then, in a way that no one could have imagined, the dance began to spread beyond all reckoning, with a momentum of its own. The Elm Dance gives activists and lovers of life the world over a tangible way to feel their bone-deep commitment and their solidarity with each other across the miles. For a complete story see Joanna Macy's book, *Widening Circle*, 2000, New Society Pub.

Order a CD with music for the dance from: <http://www.joannamacy.net/html/elmdance.html> or <http://www.timberheadmusic.com/detail.html?id=64> or contact Venita Robertson, [veneen15@yahoo.com](mailto:veneen15@yahoo.com).

### **Instructions for the Dance**

Circle up with plenty of room to move, holding hands. If the numbers are too great to form a single circle, make concentric circles with about one large step of distance between them.

It does not matter when in the music you begin the dance, except to start on a beat. The dance consists of four beats of movement, alternating with four beats of standing still. When standing still, sway and imagine that you can feel the energy from the heart of the Earth spiraling up through the floor into your body. When the energy reaches the heart chakra, send it out for the healing of the elms and all other beings. This is an act of intention, and Anastasia Geng who created the dance from the Latvian song, said the purpose of the dance is for building strong intention.

The circle moves counter clock-wise (to the right). Always begin with the right foot. Start by taking four steps backward (to the right). After four beats of standing still (swaying), the next four steps are facing forward, still moving counter clock-wise. Then, after the next four beats of standing still, move four steps toward the center of the circle, raising your linked arms high; remember to hold still, swaying for four beats. Then move four steps back from the center and continue in this fashion until the music breaks midway. In the silence before the music resumes, the leader reminds the dancers that throughout the second half of the dance they can call out by name those parts of our world – beings, places, institutions – for which they desire healing.

Dancing is surely the most basic and relevant of all forms of expression. Nothing else can so effectively give outward form to an inner experience. Poetry and music exist in time. Painting and architecture are a part of space, but only the dance lives at once in both space and time. In it the creator and the thing created, the artist and the expression, are one. Each participant is completely in the other. There could be no better metaphor for an understanding of the...cosmos. We begin to realize that our universe is in a sense brought into being by the participation of those involved in it. It is a dance, for participation is its organizing principle. This is the important new concept of quantum mechanics. It takes the place in our understanding of the old notion of observation, of watching without getting involved. Quantum theory says it can't be done. That spectators can sit in their rigid row as long as they like, but there will never be a performance unless at least one of them takes part. And conversely, that it needs only one participant, because that one is the essence of all people and the quintessence of the cosmos.

---Lyll Watson, *Gifts of Unknown Things*

## **New Words to Traditional Songs**

### ***Sing Out for Creation***

Adapted from "Never Turning Back" by Pat Humphries

New lyrics by Andrea Ayvasian

We're gonna sing out for creation  
Never turning back, never turning back

We're gonna pray for our green planet . . .

We're gonna love this Earth our Mother . . .

We're gonna care for all God's creatures . . .

### ***Been in the Storm So Long***

Words and Music: Traditional

New Words by Fred Small

Copyright 2001 Pine Barrens Music (BMI)

Been in the storm so long (3x)  
Give me a little time to pray

So much oil been spilled (3x)  
Give me a little time to pray

So much coal been burned . . .

So many species lost . . .

So many children sick . . .

So much left to save . . .

No time left to lose . . .

Been in the storm so long . . .

## ***Wade in the Water***

Words and Music: Traditional  
New words by Fred Small  
Copyright 2001 Pine Barrens Music (BMI)

Chorus:

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

God built this beautiful world to last  
God's gonna trouble the water  
Gotta cool it down 'cause it's heating up fast  
God's gonna trouble the water

Chorus

Nowhere to run nowhere to hide

No way to escape the rising tide

Chorus

This old earth is our only home

Gotta live together or die alone

Chorus

When our children are grown what will we say

"We took your planet and we threw it away"

Chorus

If we listen to the warning and heed the signs

We can put out the fire while there's still time

Chorus

## **Noah's Cargo**

Music: "Jacob's Ladder" (traditional)

Words: Fred Small

Copyright 2001 Pine Barrens Music (BMI)

We are saving Noah's cargo (3x)

Children of the Earth

Every creature has its purpose . . .

Wolves and whales and owls and otters . .

Send the dove to find safe harbor . . .

In the rainbow see God's promise . . .

# Readings

## We Are Part of the Earth

*Editors Note: The eloquence of this piece inspires us with language that echoes our own Unitarian Universalist Seventh Principle. While attributed by many to Chief Seattle, its exact origins are unknown.*

We are part of the earth and it is part of us.  
The perfumed flowers are our sisters;  
the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers.  
The rocky crests, the juices of the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and humans---  
all belong to the same family.

So when the Great Chief in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land, he asks much of us.  
If we decide to accept, I will make one condition:  
The white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brother.  
I am a savage and do not understand any other way.

I have seen a thousand rotting buffalos on the prairie, left by the white man who shot them from a passing train.  
I am a savage and I do not understand how the smoking iron horse can be more important than the buffalo that we kill only to stay alone.

What are humans without the beasts?  
If the beasts were gone, humans would die from a great loneliness of spirit.  
For whatever happens to the beasts soon happens to humans.

All things are connected.  
This we know.  
The earth does not belong to humans; humans belong to the earth.

This we know.  
All things are connected like the blood which unites one family.

All things are connected.  
Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth.

Humans did not weave the web of life; they are merely a strand in it.  
Whatever people do to the web, they do to themselves.

## **The Four Elements**

*From Writing from the Center by Scott Russell Sanders*

The old theory of the four elements never really told us what the universe is made of, but rather how it moves, the way and feel of things. Earth is stubborn, conservative, and slow, with a long memory.

Water is elusive and humble, seeking the low places. Air is a trickster, fickle and shifty. Fire is fierce, quick, greedy, and bold. Over the centuries, these four characters have played leading roles in stories told by countless peoples.

So Earth is the dry land that God separated from the watery beginnings. It is the mud brought up from the bottom of the primal sea by muskrat or loon, to offer solid ground where creatures with legs might walk. It is the dust from which we come and the dust to which we return.

Water is the formless potential out of which creation emerged. It is the ocean of unconsciousness enveloping the islands of consciousness. Water bathes us at birth and again at death, and in between it washes away sin. It is by turns the elixir of life or the renewing rain or the devastating flood.

Air is the wind that blows where it wills. It is the voice sounding in the depths of matter, the word made flesh. It is breath, which the Romans called spiritus, a divine thread drawn through every living creature.

And Fire is the transformer, cooking meat, frightening beasts, warming huts, forging tools, melting, shaping. It is cleansing and punishing, flaming up from the sacred bush and lashing out from the furnaces of hell. Fire is a power given by the gods or stolen from them for the benefit of a bare forked animal. It is cosmic energy, lighting the stars, lurking in the atom, smoldering in every cell.

. . . When you sit beside a lake -- dirt or stone beneath you and waves lapping at your feet and wind blowing in your face and the sun beating down -- you are still keeping company with the old quartet.

## **The Island Within**

*From The Island Within by Richard Nelson*

I've often thought of the forest as a living cathedral, but this might diminish what it truly is. If I have understood Koyukon teachings, the forest is not merely an expression or representation of sacredness, nor a place to invoke the sacred; the forest is sacredness itself. Nature is not merely created by God; nature is God. Whoever moves within the forest can partake directly of sacredness, experience sacredness with his entire body, breathe sacredness and contain it within himself, drink the sacred water as a living communion, bury his feet in sacredness, open his eyes and witness the burning beauty of sacredness. And when he cuts a tree from the forest, he participates in a sacred interchange that brings separate lives together.

The dark boughs reach out above me and encircle me like arms. I feel the assurance of being recognized, as if something powerful and protective is aware of my presence, looks in another direction but always has me in the corner of its eye. I am cautious and self-protective here, as anywhere, yet I believe that a covenant of mutual regard and responsibility binds me together with the forest. We share in a common nurturing. Each of us serves as an amulet to protect the other from inordinate harm. I am never alone in this wild forest, this forest of elders, this forest of eyes.

## Water Dance

*Rev. Katherine Jesch*

Water. Chaos.  
Always moving. Always going toward.  
It nourishes. It sings and dance.  
    It reshapes, rearranges.  
It destroys.  
    It cries out in rage!

Water has many moods, is ever changing.  
Nothing stands in its way; stops it from where it is going.

It is deep, quiet, seemingly still.  
Or it is a raging current,  
    full of foam and spray.  
It can be rich with life,  
    or black and full of stench.  
It can nourish and renew -- a gentle spring rain,  
Or it will ravage everything in its path --  
    like floods on the coast after the hurricane.

But it's always the same.      Always H2O.  
    Many faces, same element.  
Which face am I today?

The ground is flat.  
I'm spreading out.      Confused.  
    Don't know which way to go.  
Nothing catches me, contains me, channels me.  
Boundaries are comforting.  
    Sometimes I spill over the edge,  
    but always slide back in to continue my journey.  
Now I've reached the delta.  
    Rich with opportunity, choices.  
Seems not to matter which path to choose.

But wait a minute...  
    Do not be afraid to carve a new path.  
    What difference will it make?  
We all reach the sea in the end.





## There Is Religion in Everything Around Us

*John Ruskin*

There is religion in everything around us, a calm and holy religion in the unbreathing things in Nature. It is a meek and blessed influence, stealing in, as it were, unaware upon the heart. It comes quickly, and without excitement; It has no terror, no gloom; It does not rouse up the passions; It is untrammelled by creeds . . . It is written on the arched sky; It looks out from every star; It is on the sailing cloud and in the invisible wind; It is among the hills and valleys of the earth where the shrubless mountain-top pierces the thin atmosphere of eternal winter, or where the mighty forest fluctuates before the strong wind, with its dark waves of green foliage. It is spread out like a legible language upon the broad face of an unsleeping ocean; It is the poetry of Nature; It is that which uplifts the spirit within us . . . and which opens to our imagination a world of spiritual beauty and holiness.

## Deeply Woven Roots

*This excerpt by Gary Gunderson draws wisdom from the image and the reality of the forest to teach us about right relations with the earth. He uses the metaphor of a tree to describe our roles and relationships in a healthy community in his book, Deeply Woven Roots.*

It is hard not to look up in awe into the high reaches of a deep and healthy forest. But the true story is in the dirt, the roots. And what is forest loam but fallen trees? Everywhere you look in a natural forest you see trees on their way to loam, and soil on its way to the sky. I think of a congregation and its surrounding community as a forest, an image that leads us into the future in two ways. First, we can see ourselves as one of the trees, taking comfort in the complex richness of our enduring connections. Second, we can see ourselves as foresters, with the humble patience of stewards who measure their contribution in terms of decades, nurturing and defending a living process.

Although a forest may span miles, any one tree has to grow where it happened to sprout, hoping to bear the fruit it can. Storms and fires sweep aside the weak. Some are more resilient than others; some keep growing even after they are knocked down. But the big difference is whom they grow next to, whose roots tangle with their own. A forest's resilience reflects its diversity. Any one tree relies not just on its own roots, but on an interwoven fabric of roots. And while it is a good thing to put down roots, grow into the wind, and rise high into the sky, it is also good to know that, even in our falling, even as our individual memories slip behind, we will continue to be a part of the whole.

## The Image of a Tree as Religious Icon

*Rev. Katherine Jesch*

The image of a tree is a religious icon. Whether it's a single tree with roots intertwining below the ground and leafy branches reaching for the sky or whole forest carpeting the landscape as far as your eye can see, a tree shows us about connections, about the interdependence of all existence, about the essence of our seventh principle.

We can take comfort in the complex richness of these connections.

Individual trees germinate from tiny seeds, grow to great height, scatter seeds across the mountain, and finally die and decay on the forest floor.

Together as the forest, trees share in the task of nurturing and sheltering the plants and creatures of the mountain, including each other.

The forest also exists in relation to its mountain. Soil develops from the material produced by the trees, and other plants and creatures contribute as well. In turn, this soil becomes part of the mountain that supports and nurtures the forest. Without the mountain, the forest would have no place to stand, no food to nurture its growth. Without the forest, the soil would dry up and wash down the face of the mountain in a storm.

The forest and the mountain need each other, and are changed by each other.

## Let Us Plant Dates

*A date tree takes eighty years to bear fruit; therefore to plant a date tree is an act of hope and faith. What is hope? As Brazilian theologian Rubem Alves puts it:*

"It is the presentiment that imagination is more real and reality less real than it looks. It is the hunch that the overwhelming brutality of facts that oppress and repress are not the last word. It is the suspicion that reality is more complex than realism wants us to believe; that the frontiers of the possible are not determined by the limits of the actual, and that in a miraculous and unexpected way, life is preparing the creative events which will open the way to freedom and resurrection.

"Let us plant dates, even though we who plant them will never eat them...We must live by the love of what we will never see. This is the secret discipline. It is the refusal to let our creative act be dissolved away in immediate sense experience, and is a stubborn commitment to the future of our grandchildren. Such disciplined love is what has given prophets, revolutionaries, and saints the courage to die for the future they envisaged. They make their own bodies the seed of the highest hopes.

## From the Poetry of Gwen Frostic

*With kind permission of the publishers and thanks to the Westside UU Church in Fort Worth, TX who brought this poet to our attention.*

### From "To Those Who See"

Within the circularity of it all - - -  
The cosmic riddle of  
Life - - and death - -  
and life again

Each swan is always a swan - - -  
With all its beauty and grace

And - - - - the blue jay remains a jay - -

No turtle would try to induce  
A frog – to live its way  
Perhaps . . . . .  
There-in - - -  
Lies the secret  
Of peaceful coexistence . . . . .

### From "Wingborne"

A tree reaches up toward the sky . . .  
    With graceful limbs and intricate twigs  
        . . . . or . . . with branches that are  
            massive – knotty - - - and gnarled -  
in pattern of the trees that bore its seed . . .  
    Aeons shall pass - - -  
        as the patterns repeats - - - -

        this day - - - -  
            this tree - - - - -  
                is a tree unique . . . . .

All the stars on a clear still night - - - -

        All the leaves of a single tree - - - -  
            The many ideas that one may have - - - -

Over and over

        The basic concept repeats - - - - -

        Yet - - - -

            Each star - - - -  
                Each leaf - - - -  
                    And idea - - - -

Is unique . . .

Each life is precious  
    Unto itself –

From the tiniest insect  
    To the greatest tree..  
Vigorously it must protect  
Its right to be - -  
    - - and to become - - -  
Upon this one obsession  
    Rests - - - -  
    The continuance of  
The universe. . .

## Deep Ecology Platform

*-Arne Naess and George Sessions –*

- 1) The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth; intrinsic value; inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
- 2) Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
- 3) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
- 4) Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
- 5) The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
- 6) Policies must therefore be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
- 7) The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
- 8) Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.

## From “Tintern Abbey”

*William Wordsworth*

A lover of the meadows and the woods,  
And mountains; and of all that we behold  
From this green earth; of all the mighty world  
Of eye, and ear, - both what they half create,  
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of the sense  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being

## Isaiah 24:4-5

The earth dries up and withers,  
the world languishes and withers,  
the heavens languish together with the earth.  
The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants,  
for they have transgressed laws,  
violated the statutes,  
broken the everlasting covenant.

## The History of the Universe in 200 Words or Less

*From A Brief History of Time by Eric Schulman*

Quantum fluctuation. Inflation. Expansion. Strong nuclear interaction. Particle-antiparticle annihilation. Deuterium and helium production. Density perturbations. Recombination. Blackbody radiation. Local contraction. Cluster formation. Reionization. Violent relaxation. Virialization. Biased galaxy formation? Turbulent fragmentation. Contraction. Ionization. Compression. Opaque hydrogen. Massive star formation. Deuterium ignition. Hydrogen fusion. Hydrogen depletion. Core contraction. Envelope expansion. Helium fusion. Carbon, oxygen, and silicon fusion. Iron production. Implosion. Supernova explosion. Metals injection. Star formation. Supernova explosions. Star formation. Condensation. Planetesimal accretion. Planetary differentiation. Crust solidification. Volatile gas expulsion. Water condensation. Water dissociation. Ozone production. Ultraviolet absorption. Photosynthetic unicellular organisms. Oxidation. Mutation. Natural selection and evolution. Respiration. Cell differentiation. Sexual reproduction. Fossilization. Land exploration. Dinosaur extinction. Mammal expansion. Glaciation. Homo sapiens manifestation. Animal domestication. Food surplus production. Civilization! Innovation. Exploration. Religion. Warring nations. Empire creation and destruction. Exploration. Colonization. Taxation without representation. Revolution. Constitution. Election. Expansion. Industrialization. Rebellion. Emancipation Proclamation. Invention. Mass production. Urbanization. Immigration. World conflagration. League of Nations. Suffrage extension. Depression. World conflagration. Fission explosions. United Nations. Space exploration. Assassinations. Lunar excursions. Resignation. Computerization. World Trade Organization. Terrorism. Internet expansion. Reunification. Dissolution. World-Wide Web creation. Composition. Extrapolation.

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*A Briefer History of Time: From the Big Bang to the Big Mac®* (pdf) can be found (May 2013) at <http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze3fs8i/bhtes/ABrieferHistoryofTime.pdf>

## Among the Stars

*From "The Ecology of Magic: A Personal Introduction to the Inquiry" in Spell of the Sensuous by David Abrams.*

"Late one evening I stepped out of my little hut in the rice paddies of eastern Bali and found myself falling through space. Over my head the black sky was rippling with stars, densely clustered in some regions, almost blocking out the darkness between them, and more loosely scattered in other areas, pulsing and beckoning to each other. Behind them all streamed the great river of light with its several tributaries. Yet the Milky Way churned beneath me as well, for my hut was set in the middle of a large patchwork of rice paddies, separated from each other by narrow two-foot-high dikes, and these paddies were all filled with

water. The surface of these pools, by day, reflected perfectly the blue sky, a reflection broken only the thin, bright green tips of new rice. But by night the stars themselves glimmered from the surface of the paddies, and the river of light whirled through the darkness underfoot as well as above; there seemed no ground in front of my feet, only the abyss of star-studded space falling away forever.

"I was no longer simply beneath the night sky, but also above it—the immediate impression was of weightlessness. I might have been able to reorient myself, to regain some sense of ground and gravity, were it not for a fact that confounded my senses entirely: between the constellations below and the constellations above drifted countless fireflies, their lights flickering like the stars, some drifting up to join the clusters of the stars overhead, others, like graceful meteors, slipping down from above to joins the constellations underfoot, and all these paths of light upward and downward were mirrored, as well, in the still surface of the paddies. I felt myself at times falling through space, at other moments floating and drifting. I simply could not dispel the profound vertigo and giddiness; the paths of the fireflies, and their reflections in the water's surface, held me in a sustained trance. Even after I crawled back to my hut and shut the door on this whirling world, I felt that now the little room in which I lay was itself floating free of the earth."

## **How Lightly Might Earth Bear Man Forever**

*From This is the American Earth, by Nancy Newhall*

Shall we not learn from life its laws, dynamics, balances? Learn to base our needs not on death, destruction, waste, but on renewal? In wisdom and in gentleness learn to walk again with Eden's angels?

Learn at last to shape a civilization in harmony with the earth? . . . What, to continue their renewal, do air, water, life require of Man?

-- Only that below the snows and glaciers of peaks, the alpine meadows and trees at timberline on precarious slopes face storms and meltings undisturbed, and here no mouse, nor eagle, no wolf nor antelope, snake nor butterfly, be hindered from his errand.

-- Only that on lower spines and ridges forests stand sentinel in the rains and Man take from them only their abundance.

-- Only that lakes lie cool and pure, and rivers brim their banks yearlong running clear and stainless from spring to estuary.

-- Only that grasslands wave deep, even under late summer suns, and field and orchard be so cared for that a thousand years shall but increase their richness.

-- Only that Man use water wisely, to help life and be helped by it.

-- Only that in cities air and light be clear and enough leaves remain to shadow a living land.

-- Only that in each rise of land, each fall of water, each form of life, Man sense its character, its function in the whole, love it, and learn its ways, and when we turn it to our use, plan with inspired skills to fit to it our habitations and our needs, to enhance -- not to obliterate -- its beauty.

How little, from the resources unrenowned by Man, cost the things of greatest value -- wild beauty, peace, health and love, music and all testaments of spirit! How simple our basic needs -- a little food, sun, air, water, shelter, warmth and sleep!

How lightly might this earth bear Man forever!

## Wild Healing

*Excerpts from a chap book "Wild Healing," by Rev. Thea Nietfeld. To order the complete work, please contact the author at PO Box 162, Peggs, OK, 74452 or [uuct@sbcglobal.net](mailto:uuct@sbcglobal.net)*

There are wounds that other people can't help heal:  
Physical, emotional, spiritual.  
Sometimes we need to go into the wild to heal.

Thoreau wrote: "Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations." ("The Village" in Walden)

To put yourself into a wild place and let it touch you begins healing.  
A wild place is spacious, sensual, surprising.  
Everything is here – earth, wind, fire water:  
wild space, wild mind, wild connections.  
These support the yearning for wholeness that is the yearning for life.  
Wildness is not snuggly comfort.  
Comfort is helpful for rest,  
but comfort does not heal.  
Healing has to do with dis-comfort  
and the strains of expansion.

Taking in wildness renews what has atrophied or been paralyzed.  
Life's adventure calls us to give and receive the energy we sometimes call love.  
We need wild healing when the senses have shut down and growth's movement is blocked.  
Wildness expands, attention opens horizons,  
and if we are receptive, engages the flow of ever-circling energy.  
The healing time is wild, unstructured, unfocused, seemingly aimless;  
healing places are essential for healing time.

I woke with anxiety about the surgery scheduled for the next day.  
I needed something to remind me who I was...  
I needed to do something to help me get through the day.

As I walked in Sparrowhawk Primitive Area,  
What came to mind was the hymn - "Wake now my Senses and hear the earth call. Feel the deep power of being in all. Keep with the web of creation your vow, giving, receiving as love shows us how."

I sang this to myself over and over until I knew it and I had internalized it and I remembered who I was. By evening, I was ready for surgery:  
I knew that I was part of all that is – that I am called to hear the earth and to be conscious of my

place in all life.  
I knew that my vow to the web of creation is to be  
the best I can – live the best I can with my  
uniquenesses...with whatever the situations in  
Front of me offer as opportunities for giving and  
receiving love.

The song had helped me remember who I was;  
I was strengthened and inspired to face what the next  
day would bring.

## **Connecting Wildness to Wildness**

*From Wild Healing, by Rev. Thea Neitfeld*

There is a Cherokee story about a young boy who  
Came to live with the bears. He came to look like a Bear.  
When times were hard in the village he invited his  
Family and others to come into the mountains with  
Him to live with the bears.

People from other villages tried to dissuade the  
villagers from taking this drastic step, but still they  
started toward the mountains resolutely. They had  
come to believe that choosing life was the same as  
choosing to become bears.

This story speaks about choosing wildness:  
Choosing to survive by being transformed into the  
Wildness that is our nature;  
Connecting wildness to wildness.

## **We Are In This Together**

*From The Breathing Cathedral by Martha Heyneman*

A crow stands on the yellow median line of a grey highway. He stands on a bloody rag of smeared meat and tattered fur that was once a rabbit, holding it down with his claws, tugging at it with his beak. When a shred of meat tears loose, his head jerks back, and he looks at me.

He looks back along the highway stretching without a curve behind us, then he swivels his head and looks in the other direction, along the highway stretching without a curve ahead of us. The string of meat swings in his beak like a pendulum. The western desert is featureless, the sky a white glare. The gleaming, purple-black crow on the yellow line and the smear of brown and red he stands upon are the only colors anywhere.

With another jerk of the crow's head, the shred of meat disappears down his throat. A rabbit is turning into a crow. As the energy that once animated the rabbit slowly infuses into his living flesh, the crow keeps gazing at me with his round black eye, as if to ask me whether I understand.

I turn and look down the highway behind me, the way the crow was looking before, in the direction from which I have come. The sun is rising on the far horizon. It looks enormous, quivering and sweating, its molten gold spreading out over the rim of the earth like a pair of arms. The yellow median line leads directly into—or issues directly from—its heart.



Then I turn and look in the other direction. Where the highway meets the horizon there, the yellow line is broken into rippling, dancing fragments that ride the rising waves of heat like salamanders of old—spirits that live in the flames—ascend, writhing, from the earth, break up, disappear, reform, and vanish once more.

When I face the crow, I can see in both directions at once. I look at him again and feel, unaccountably, the energy in my own body slowly changing, like water into nectar, into some unknown new substance that has the quality at the same time of understanding and of love.

*We are all in this together.*

Those are the first words that come to me, but they are not just words. They carry a feeling of kinship—no, it is something more than kinship; it is continuity, and it is something more intimate than a feeling; it is a sensation. The sensation of the entrance of this energy that tastes like love is as immediate as the flow of honey over the tongue. Either kind of energy—the kind that is entering the crow through his beak or the kind that is entering me through my eyes and (so it feels) through my skin—has come from the sun. It has come from the heart of the sun. We are all in this together, interwoven with one another and woven, as if by golden threads, into a single space-time fabric by the love of the sun.

That is how a part of our total endowment of faculties—feeling and sensation together, feeling arising from immediate sensation—perceives the situation. Now let the part of the mind that figures out how things work join the chorus—but not drown the other voices out, as it has for four hundred years.

In the sun's core, its "nuclear furnace," four protons (hydrogen nuclei) combine in a series of steps to make one atom of helium, with a loss of 0.7 percent of the proton mass, which is converted to energy in accordance with Einstein's equation  $E=mc^2$ . This energy, in the form of photons, wanders 50 million years finding its way from the sun's heart to its photosphere, then speeds in eight minutes from there to the earth. To get into the rabbit, and from there into the crow, it has to go another long journey, first landing on a leaf or a blade of grass, where a molecule of chlorophyll persuades it to raise electrons to a high energy level and store them in high-energy chemical bonds.

What this tastes like to you and me and the rabbit is sweetness: in a silent, invisible sacred dance performed in the sanctuary of a leaf cell, tasteless, odorless water and air have been transformed into sugar.

That is transubstantiation. Divine energy enters into virgin matter to become our food: God with us—God in us, on the tongue, down the throat, in the belly, infusing into our flesh like wine.



## **Preamble to the Earth Charter**

For the complete text of the Earth Charter visit <http://www.earthcharter.org/>

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

### **Earth, Our Home**

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

### **The Global Situation**

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. Communities are being undermined. The benefits of development are not shared equitably and the gap between rich and poor is widening. Injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent conflict are widespread and the cause of great suffering. An unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems. The foundations of global security are threatened. These trends are perilous—but not inevitable.

### **The Challenges Ahead**

The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living. We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more. We have the knowledge and technology to provide for all and to reduce our impacts on the environment. The emergence of a global civil society is creating new opportunities to build a democratic and humane world. Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

### **Universal Responsibility**

To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

We urgently need a shared vision of basic values to provide an ethical foundation for the emerging world community. Therefore, together in hope we affirm the following interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed.

## **UUA General Assembly Ecological Resolutions, 1961-2012**

### **General Environmental Resolutions**

Resolution on "Earth, Air, Water, and Fire" (1997)  
Resolution on the "Environment" (1969)  
Resolution on the "Environment" (1971)  
Resolution on "Natural Resources" (1966)  
Resolution on "Protecting the Biosphere" (1989)  
"Seventh Principal of the UU Principals and Purposes Statement"  
Resolution on "Responsible Consumption is Our Moral Imperative"(2001)  
Resolution on "Endorsement of the Earth Charter" (2002)  
Resolution on "Threat of Global Warming/Climate Change" (2006)  
Business Resolution on "The Green Revolution in Religion" (2010)

### **Energy Issues**

Resolution on "Alternative Sources and Conservation of Energy" (1981)  
Resolution on "Safer Alternatives to the Alaska Pipeline" (1973)  
Resolution on "Energy" (1977)  
Resolution on "Nuclear Power" (1976)  
Resolution on "Safer Sources of Energy" (1992)  
Resolution on "Solar Heating" (1979)  
Action of Immediate Witness "Extend the Tax Credit for Wind and Solar Power" (2008)  
Action of Immediate Witness 2009 "In Support of America's Red Rock Wilderness Act" (2009)  
Action of Immediate Witness 2010 "Clean Up the Clean Energy Bill" (2010)

### **Environmental Justice**

Resolution on "Carcinogens in Air and Water" (1976)  
Resolution on "Environmental Justice" (1994)  
Resolution on "Toxic Substances and Hazardous Waste" (1984)  
Resolution on "Toxic Threats to Children" (1997)  
Action of Immediate Witness 2006 "End Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining"  
Action of Immediate Witness 2010 "Gulf Coast Environmental and Economic Justice" (2010)  
Statement of Conscience "Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice" (2011)

### **Policy Issues**

Resolution on "Problems of Environmental Policy" (1977)  
Resolutions on "United Nations and Earth Day Celebrations" (1994)

### **Population**

Resolution on "Choices Affecting Population" (1990)  
Resolution on "Population and Development" (1996)  
Resolution on "Population and the Quality of Life" (1975)  
Resolution on "Population Stabilization" (1973)  
Resolution on "Survival and Population Control" (1970)  
Resolution on "World Hunger and Population Control" (1966)  
Resolution on "Population" (1962)

To see the text of any of the above resolutions, search for the topic on <http://www.uua.org/statements/#index> Prior to 1996, General Assembly passed Resolutions. After 1996, the process was revised and the resolutions were known as Statements of Conscience.

# Sermons

## Earth: Aspiring to a New Relationship

Rev. Bruce Davis

April 24, 2004

Four years ago, when I was just getting started on this path to ministry, I went to the woods for a long weekend with a UU minister I was getting to know. Over the years Jon has been both friend and mentor, and I would not be where I am now without his support. We retreated together to a cabin in the Olympic rainforest on Lake Quinault, as Thoreau in his day retreated to his cabin at Walden.

I am remembering a walk we took one morning on a forest path. A winding trail led up a stream that had carved grottos lined with lady fern. Old growth Douglas fir, western red cedar, and Sitka spruce surrounded us. So tall and massive were these ancient trees, their canopy releasing now and again shafts of sunlight to the forest floor, we felt as if we were in a great natural cathedral. One massive spruce on the lakeshore was so huge that it would take twenty of us, hand in hand, if we wanted to circle it 'round. At a boggy place we spotted an owl on top of a silver snag, watching us watching it.

The next week, in a moment of reverie between seminary classes, I reflected on that walk. No doubt Jon was becoming a close friend. But I noticed that I also had a feeling of warmth for the sacred woods we had enjoyed together. It was as if I felt something like friendship for those ancient trees and green grottos, and for the owl that kept an eye on our progress. When I got home after school that day a small package was waiting at the door. Jon had sent a slim volume of poems, written by the Indian mystical poet, Rabindrinath Tagore. I opened to the middle of the book and was caught by a poem, only four words long: "These trees are prayers."

Many of us in the Pacific Northwest count moments of natural beauty like this as key aspects of our spirituality. But, unfortunately, sacred moments are not our only experiences in nature.

The day after our hike, Jon and I drove from Lake Quinault down to the ocean beach, about twenty miles away, to watch the waves and the listen to the mewing of the gulls. What we found as we drove west were great expanses where the old-growth forest had been replaced with seedling trees, and fields where burning slash piles attested to recent clear-cut logging. Walking on the beach, we could not help but notice the plastic bags, plastic bottles, and chunks of Styrofoam mixed in with the driftwood: the jetsam of our consumer culture.

In moments of epiphany in Nature we really *get* that we are one with our earth. Our perception shifts, and we begin to see the beings around us in an intimate and sacred way. "These trees are prayers," the poet says, and in our hearts we know it's true. But such moments are all too rare—the exception rather than the rule. More often humans see the world around them in terms of its uses. How many board feet can we get from this hundred-acre plot? How many fish sticks can we make from ten tons of rockfish? And, whether lumber or fish, what price will we get for our labors?

Ecological theologian Sallie McFague comments on the tension between these two ways of knowing our world. (*Super, Natural Christians*, 1997, p. 37). Our intention towards use and exploitation of earth and her resources objectifies what we see. If we are thinking in terms of two-by-fours and shingles, we know the tree as a *subject* knows an *object*. During those moments of epiphany when we really do feel the essence of the natural world, expressing its being in myriad ways, then we as *subjects* know the world also as *subjects*. What have been the *objects* of our knowing shift, if only for a moment, into *subjects*?

When this shift happens in my perception of another person—when I get the *subject* that you really are, not the *uses* I may put you to or the *roles* you may play in my life—then I know you are my friend. McFague says that saving earth from our exploitation will depend on more of us, more of the time, aspiring to a relationship like friendship with the natural world.

She describes the shift in perception this way:

One day while hiking, I recall coming across a bi-footed, tri-colored violet, a rare and extraordinarily beautiful flower. It was all alone by the side of the trail.... I was transfixed by its beauty, its specialness, its fragility, and by the sense of privilege I felt to be looking at it. It was seeing it as a subject; that is, I was relating to it with a recognition of its own intrinsic value quite apart from me. It was not simply an object to me. Rather, it had its own very special being.

We walk heavily on earth, we first-worlders, especially we Americans. Our footprints leave deep marks in the fragile balance of the planet. You may have seen the Sierra Club's book, *Material World*, in which statistically average families from all over the world are photographed in front of their dwelling with all their possessions. As you might imagine, the average American family needed a wide-angle lens to get all their stuff in. The world average for material consumption is only a third of the US average.

There's a website that can give you a way to calculate how heavily you and your family are walking on earth. Just do a search on "ecological footprint." But the website starts right out with a caution.

*WARNING: The results your answers produce may disturb you. In a few reported cases, the users' mental well-being was affected and some serious thinking was induced.*

When I calculated my own footprint I realized that it takes 4.2 acres of agricultural land to feed me for a year. Although I come in at about 85% of the American average, I would need to reduce that to about 33% of the American average if I want my individual consumption to be consistent with sustainability. The decisions are clear. Less meat in my diet. A fuel-efficient car that I use less. A smaller home. The website is set up in a way that allows me to monitor improvements I might make in the months or years ahead.

As Denise Levertov asserts in our responsive reading (*Singing the Living Tradition* #648), we are beginners in this work of aligning our lifestyle to what earth can sustain. We don't begin at the end. We start by asking ourselves, what can I do next? What must I do next? The answer will be different for each of us. Modest beginning can lead to dramatic transformations.

It's not just the total consumption by each person that's problematic here. Over-consumption results in unintended toxicities, as when the carbon emissions of our cars deplete the protective layer of ozone in our atmosphere. And by over-harvesting naturally occurring earth gifts, like the fish in the sea or the mature forests, we disturb the balances that earth has taken eons to achieve.

From earth's vantage point, it is our behaviors in the aggregate that matter most. How are we doing here in Oregon? Another invaluable web resource is called Northwest Environmental Watch, found at [northwestwatch.org](http://northwestwatch.org). The idea here is that it's possible to identify key indicators of environmental sustainability and monitor them over time, noting where we have improved as a community, where we still have work to do, and where we're actually worsening in our environmental performance.

Here are a couple of examples. In the last decade there's been a decrease in suburban sprawl in Oregon, probably based on our growth management laws. Clear-cut logging has decreased by more than half in the last decade, and yet we are still clear-cutting an Oregon acre every five minutes—a sign that we're still not seeing the forest for the trees. Oregon uses more highway fuel and non-industrial electricity per

person than Californians or New Yorkers, nearing the rates of Texans. Although vehicle use is down per person, the popularity of pick-ups and SUV's to Oregonians in the last ten years has dramatically increased gasoline consumption. Good data like this help us to come up with specific strategies for specific problems regionally.

National and world responses to earth harms had some real momentum for a while. As early as 1972 the Stockholm Conference of the United Nations recognized the impasse between human demands and earth resources. By 1982 a Charter for Nature of the UN was passed, and in 1992 the United Nations held the Conference on Environment and Development. Recently the Kyoto Accords on world carbon emissions were ratified in Japan, albeit in a diluted form.

Yet, we've seen discouraging reversals of important ecological positions, especially in the last few years. Our own government withdrew from the Kyoto process entirely—simply walked away from the dialog—to the disappointment of people all over the world. Oil exploration in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge is on the table again, even though the area's long-term value as a wilderness far exceeds the value of the oil that we might take from it. This refuge is described as “the most complete, pristine, and undisturbed ecosystem on earth. Here coastal lagoons, barrier islands, arctic tundra, foothills, mountains and boreal forests provide a combination of habitats, climate, and geography unmatched by any other northern conservation area—conditions that support the refuge's diverse community of life.”

Environmental theologian Matthew Fox (*Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, 1988) suggests that the momentum of the ecology movement has indeed slowed. Though the direct cause may be reversals where there had once been gains, Fox says we can only rebuild that momentum by coming to a new relationship with the planet. We must envision a healthy earth and we must imagine and live out a new kind of earth covenant if we are to uphold earth's rights to health and wholeness. We must treat earth as worthy of our caring attention, as we might our parent or our child.

How can we take steps to strengthen our spirit-bond with nature? The answer, I think, is the same with any deep relationship. It takes practice. If our bond with earth is a spiritual relationship, and I believe it is, then developing that bond may become an increasingly important part of our spiritual practice.

Each of us must find our own way in this, but here are a few practices to consider.

- We must preserve pristine natural settings, and retreat to them often enough to keep our relationship with earth strong. The relational quality that we bring to such places makes them the more sacred to us. We must, like Thoreau, become apprentices to nature's beauty and wildness. One night in canoes, we paddled the clear water of Willapa Bay, north of the Columbia River on the Washington coast. The phosphorescence shined so brightly in the saltwater that you could see the tip of your paddle two feet under the water. At dawn a great blue heron glided by, just two feet off our bow, unperturbed. As if she knew we belonged there, too. We can find moments of connection like this only if we have wild places to visit.
- *Tom Brown's Field Guide to Nature Observation and Tracking* offers some practices. I use them when I am wanting to facilitate that spirit connection with a wild place.
  1. Clear your mind.
  2. Let go of time.
  3. Slow down.
  4. Sit down.
  5. Let go of worries.
  6. Be quiet.
  7. Experience without analyzing and labeling.

8. Look for the uniqueness in the commonplace.
9. Listen to your heart.
10. Let go of inhibitions and prejudices.
11. Immerse yourself:

- Practices of earth relationship, as important as they are, are our play, not our work. A church group that goes hiking every month builds a deeper connection to earth while enjoying their outing. A gardener is not only a grower of vegetables, but is also growing her love of the soil and her affinity to earth's cycles. By building daily *practices* of loving earth, each in our own ways, we have a greater chance to drop habitual patterns that over-use and abuse earth

Humanity's relationship with the planet must change or dire and irreversible consequences will result. We keep hearing this. But fear and guilt are poor motivators. Another close friend and teacher of mine became so overwhelmed by feelings of environmental doom that he lost his optimism and withdrew from the issue entirely for many years. Making a difference depends on our ability to affirm ourselves and our planet. To bring hope and action together.

The spiritual message is this. Life itself is calling us to join in the struggle to save earth, to envision how it would be to live as siblings with beast and flower—closely and lovingly related. The Spirit of Life we sense deep within ourselves recognizes Spirit of Life in the natural world in which we live, if we allow ourselves to be open to it. Our connection with the natural world is itself natural. Drawn by the ineffable beauty of creation, we will find charm in sacred places and affinity to each sacred being. By love are we bound to care for them, for they are our kin. May it be so. Amen.



## Earth or "the earth" - What's in a Name?

Rev. Michael Dowd

1991, [www.thegreatstory.org](http://www.thegreatstory.org)

The observation that "language structures reality" has been made by linguists and psychologists as well as anthropologists and cultural historians for several decades. Our experience of the world—what we see or don't see, what is understood as ultimately real—is shaped by the language we use. Those of us who have only one word for "white precipitation in winter" (i.e., "snow") experience this phenomenon differently from those who have many names for it, depending upon its nature and context, such as the Inuit (Eskimos) of Alaska. Our language both reveals our worldview and reinforces certain attitudes toward life, as feminist writers have repeatedly shown. Centuries of common use notwithstanding, for many of us the word "man," used to refer to our species as a whole, is not experienced as inclusive of fully half of humanity.

Because language structures reality, how we refer to "the third planet out from the Sun" makes a world of difference, literally, regarding our perception and experience of it. Each of the other planets of our solar system has a proper name: Mercury, Venus, Mars, and so on. So does Earth. We do not hear people talking about "the jupiter," "the mars," or "the saturn." Why, then, do we speak of "the earth"?

Using the definite article "the" in front of an uncapitalized "earth" has its roots in an inadequate and now potentially ecocidal worldview. It subtly reinforces the perception that we are separate from and fundamentally different than the planet. But this is not really the case. From a purely scientific perspective, we humans are not so much separate beings on Earth as we are a mode of being, or an expression, of Earth. We did not come into this world, we grew out from it. Said another way, the planet is not our surroundings, it's our source. Earth is the larger body of which we are an organic, but by no means indispensable, part. It is our larger Self. As physicist Brian Swimme is fond of saying, "Four billion years ago, planet Earth was molten rock; now it sings opera."

To refer to the literal ground of our being, the source and substance of our life, as "the earth" is to objectify it. Such objectification encourages us to continue seeing "the earth" merely as a resource for human consumption. On the other hand, by using the planet's proper name, "Earth," we honor its integrity as a creative, self-organizing system. (Some scientists and others refer to the planet as "Gaia," the name of the ancient Greek goddess who symbolized Mother Earth, for the same reason.) It is important to note here that this is far more than a question of semantics; it is a question of honor—which may be one of the most important questions before us as we move into the next millennium. As geologist Thomas Berry insists,

"The world we live in is an honorable world. To refuse this deepest instinct of our being, to deny honor where honor is due, to withdraw reverence from divine manifestation, is to place ourselves on a head-on collision course with the ultimate forces of the universe. This question of honor must be dealt with before any other question that is before us. We miss both the intrinsic nature and the order of magnitude of the issue if we place our response to the present crisis of our planet on any other basis. It is not ultimately a political or economic or scientific or psychological issue. It is ultimately a question of honor."

Following Berry, I would submit that only the sense of the violated honor of Earth and the need to restore this honor can evoke the understanding as well as the energy needed to carry out the renewal of the planet in any effective manner. It may even be the only hope that our great-grandchildren and many other species have of being spared a literal, toxic hell.



So what's in a name? Much! Of course, changing our language will not bring humanity into a mutually enhancing relationship with the larger community of life all by itself. But if changing both our worldview and our relationship to Nature is as important as many of us sense that it is, then changing our language may be a significant step in the right direction. As we drop the definite article "the" from our speech, and as we capitalize "Earth" both in our minds and in print, I believe future generations of Earth-life cheer us on with gratitude.

## **REPENT!!! Excerpts from a Message for Advent**

**Rev. David Borglum**

*(Note from the author: The environmental crisis that we face is serious, and there are no quick or easy solutions; that's one reason why the issue is often ignored. However, denying or ignoring what's happening limits our capacity to think clearly and respond powerfully. In the sermon excerpt that follows, I raise issues and then seek to be pastoral and offer hope.*

*Humor can help us in dealing with large problems. You might ask why Hallmark cards has never glommed onto John the Baptist, who is a central figure of the Advent season. John was extraordinarily eccentric—Mark and Matthew describe his diet and clothes—and, of course, so are all of us. And John obviously needed courses on active listening skills, facilitative group leadership, and the social graces if he was going to be a successful minister.)*

Not only we as individuals, but also we as a nation and we as a human community urgently need to repent, to change directions.

In many ways, I feel like John the Baptist, saying, "We're going the wrong direction. We can't continue on the path that we're going."

We are called to repent of three interrelated trends that dominate our nation and our world:

Economically, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, both in our country and in the world. Nearly one quarter of the human population lives on less than a dollar a day while the number of millionaires and billionaires grows. Today, the average CEO in the U.S. makes 475 times more than the average blue-collar worker.

Second, although the Cold War is over, military expenditures remain high. Our country's federal budget for fiscal year 2001 calls for \$325 billion in military (23% of the total expenditures) for current military expenses, 40% of the entire world's military expenses.

Third, our environment is being destroyed.

In *The State of the World 2000*, Lester Brown highlights seven environmental challenges of the new century:

1. Global Warming: Plants, fish, birds, and insects are migrating northward, the Arctic icecap is melting, sea levels are rising. We are experiencing more floods, droughts, and weather-related disasters like El Ninos than ever. The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, a group of more than 2,000 scientists from 100 countries reporting to the United Nations, say the stabilization of the world's climate will require worldwide cuts of 60 to 70% of current carbon emissions. And our country, the greatest emitter of greenhouse gases, is immobilized on the issue.

2. Human population is now over 6 billion and continuing to grow. "Our numbers continue to expand, but Earth's natural resources do not."
3. Water tables are falling. Powerful diesel and electric pumps are extracting underground water at rates that exceed the natural recharge from rainfall. Over the next 25 years, the number of people facing chronic or severe water shortages could increase from 505 million to more than 3 billion, according to a recent report released this week by Population Action International.
4. Grain land area per person has fallen in half since 1950, and will continue to decline as a result of population growth, urbanization, industrialization, massive topsoil loss and other forms of land degradation.
5. Fisheries are collapsing as a result of overfishing.
6. Forests are being overwhelmed by human demands. We are extinguishing the rainforests, the most luxuriant life system of the entire planet, at the rate of almost two acres each second of each day.
7. Thousands of plant and animal species are becoming extinct every year. It's estimated that human activity has caused the extinction of 20% of all plant and animal species. Currently 11% of the world's birds, 25% of the world's mammal species, and 34% of all fish species are vulnerable or in immediate danger of extinction as a result of habitat destruction, habitat alterations from rising temperatures, pollution, or unsustainable killing for human economic ends.

Now take a few deep breaths. (Pause.) How are you feeling? (*Author's note: in my church, I'll allow people to respond to that question.*) If you even partially allowed what I've just said to sink in, you're likely feeling overwhelmed, profoundly sad, ashamed, frightened, angry, and/or hopeless.

Instead of pushing feelings of pain for the world away, I encourage you to open to them and to celebrate them, for they are expressions of your compassion, which means "to suffer with" other beings and our world.

And this Christ like compassion is the source of our power, the power to think clearly, act decisively, and to transform seeming crucifixion into resurrection.

Joanna Macy, a deep ecologist and spiritual warrior who for decades has been leading "Despair and Empowerment" workshops for activists, writes:

*"Just as grief work is a process by which bereaved persons unblock their numbed energies by acknowledging and grieving the loss of a loved one, so do we all need to unblock our feelings about our threatened planet. We are not closed off from the world, but rather are integral components of it, like cells in a larger body. When part of that body is traumatized--in the sufferings of fellow beings, in the pillage of our planet, and even in the violation of future generations, we sense that trauma too."* (Macy, "Working Through Environmental Despair" in *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, edited by Theodore Roszak, Mary Gomes, and Allen Kanner)

And while this is a time of great destruction, it also is a time of great hope. People are waking up, by the thousands, by the millions. The hearts of all sorts of people are opening. Joanna Macy describes the ecological revolution that is now occurring as "The Great Turning."

The Great Turning is the shift from an Industrial Growth Society to a Life-Sustaining Society. (Can you imagine getting daily reports on the sustainability of human actions and not on stock market prices??) Or in the language of geologist Thomas Berry, the Great Turning is the shift from the Technozoic Era of increased exploitation of Earth as a resource simply for the benefit of humans, to the coming of the Ecozoic Era which is characterized by a new mode of human-Earth relations, one where the well-being of the entire Earth community is the primary concern.

“The Great Turning” is modern language for repentance on a national and global scale. And this repentance is taking several interrelated forms:

1) First and primary is a SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION and a new way of seeing ourselves. We’re not only, we’re not primarily, individuals; we are connected to and interdependent with everything else. The Body of Christ is the gifts of the earth-- wheat and grapes, nurtured into fruition through holy and mysterious forces such as the sun’s fire, precious water, the air in which plants and animals exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide in symbiotic balance, and God’s holy earth. The Christ invites us to cultivate and deepen our sense of communion. Communing with the Earth, which is being so abused, will bring up pain. But as the Vietnamese poet, Zen master, and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh says, the most important thing we can do for the Earth is to feel Her pain.

Worship is a radically subversive activity, for we are offering praise and give our allegiance to the Holy One and not to success, consumerism, or power. Our prayers, not only for individuals but also for the Earth, are powerful beyond our wildest imaginings.

Often this inner transformation is expressed in outer ways as well:

2) Through LIFESTYLE CHANGES we learn to live simply, consume less, reduce, reuse, recycle, buy recycled, and live lightly on the planet.

3) DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVES includes developing renewable energy and improving energy efficiency, developing an alternative analysis of the political economy, worker coops, and organic farming.

4) HOLDING ACTIONS are legal and political actions that seek to slow down the rate of destruction. Voting with conscience, writing or phoning an elected official, financially supporting those involved in forms of prophetic witness that we are not ready or able to make ourselves are examples. It’s giving form and expression to an inner voice that cries out, “No, no more, you can’t hurt our precious and holy planet.”

It seems like the problems are so immense and there’s so little that we can do. But perhaps there’s one small step that we can take out of love for future generations and for the Earth, the holy Body of Christ. And as thousands and millions of people take one small step in love, our world is transformed.

While sometimes I feel like John the Baptist, I don’t like him. I understand Hallmark’s lack of appreciation for him.

“Repentance” is such a willful term.

And willpower alone can’t transform us or conquer the addictions that often rule us.

And frankly, who here doesn’t do things that are harmful to themselves or to others? We’re all addicted, not only personally, but also culturally. Our society is addicted to the myth of individual success, unending economic and industrial growth and technological speed.

Now simply telling an addict, "Stop drinking!" probably won't be very effective. Overcoming an addiction requires grace as well as will power.

I'm not sure that John understood this.

John said, "Repent, and you'll be forgiven." But the One that John was preparing a way for, the One who is coming anew into our midst says, "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." In other words, "You are forgiven. So repent of your self-destructive behavior."

Regardless of how tangled our individual lives have been, regardless of how blind the human race is, the Christ is coming

with a strength greater than all our crazed addictions,

with a presence that remains with us in our failures,

with a mighty and eternal love that empowers us to change our ways in repentance.

"Maranatha." Come, Lord Jesus. Come. Amen.



## **The Environment and War**

**Allan J. Lindrup**

*Chair, Green Sanctuary Group, Beverly Unitarian Church of Chicago, IL*

As we celebrate Earth Day we are celebrating the environment of our planet Earth and giving attention to the 7<sup>th</sup> Unitarian Universalist Principle: *Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.* But this is also a time when we feel the winds of war, so attention should also be paid to our 6<sup>th</sup> Unitarian Universalist Principle, which I might short handedly describe as: *The goal of world community with peace and justice.* So, I will speak about the relationship of the environment to war, both wars between states and civil wars. I wish to acknowledge at this time those individuals whose work has provided the fodder for this sermon on the relationship of war and the environment. They are: Thomas Homer-Dixon, Michael Renner, and my partner, Anne Holcomb, a former Meadville/Lombard seminarian.

Both environmental greed and environmental scarcity are a cause of war. The former usually involve non-renewable resources, such as oil, and are generally referred to as resource wars. I will talk about such wars first, and then address wars based on environmental scarcity, which are on the increase.

Resource wars have been common since the beginning of the state system. For instance, in WWII, Japan sought to secure oil, minerals and other resources in China and Southeast Asia; and the 1991 Gulf War was, from both sides, at least partly motivated by the desire for the control of more oil or for security for Middle Eastern oil suppliers. Of the wars fought in the 20th century, twelve conflicts involved a fight over resources. Access to oil or minerals was at issue in ten of those conflicts, while five conflicts involved renewable resources.

About a quarter of the roughly 50 wars and armed conflicts active in 2001 had a strong resource dimension—in the sense that legal or illegal resource exploitation helped trigger or exacerbate violent conflict. The human toll of these resource-related conflicts is horrendous. Rough estimates suggest that since 1990 more than 5 million people were killed in such conflicts, while close to 6 million fled to neighboring countries, and anywhere from 11 to 15 million were displaced within the borders of their home countries. But some people—warlords, corrupt governments, and unscrupulous corporate leaders—benefited from the pillage, taking in billions of dollars. Since the late 1990s, awareness has grown rapidly of the close links among illegal resource extraction, arms trafficking, violent conflict, human rights violations and environmental destruction.

In many developing countries, the economic benefits of mining and logging operations accrue to a small business or government elite along with foreign investors. But in case after case, an array of burdens – ranging from the expropriation of land, disruption of traditional ways of life, environmental devastation, and social maladies – are shouldered by the local population.

Typically, these communities are neither consulted nor informed in advance about resource extraction projects. This has led to violent conflict in places like Nigeria's Niger Delta, Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, and several provinces in Indonesia. Some of these conflicts involve small-scale skirmishes, roadblocks, acts of sabotage, and major human rights violations by state security forces and rebel groups. A number of these conflicts, however, have evolved into secessionist struggles, a form of Civil War.

In contrast to the struggles arising out of context of contested resource wealth, there are also a host of other conflicts that emerge from situations of resource scarcity, which are exacerbated by the social and economic repercussions of environmental degradation. Research during the 1990s has contributed a growing number of case studies of local and regional disputes that revolve around the degradation of arable land, depletion of water for irrigation and human consumption, decimation of forests, and issues of access to other scarce environmental resources.

Within the next 50 years, our planet's human population will probably pass nine billion, and global economic output may increase several fold. Largely as a result of these changes, scarcities of renewable resources will increase sharply. The total area of high-quality agricultural land will drop, as will the extent of forests and the number of species they sustain. Coming generations will also see the widespread depletion and degradation of aquifers, rivers, and other water resources; the decline of many fisheries; and perhaps significant climate change.

Environmental scarcities are already contributing to violent conflict in many parts of the developing world. These conflicts are probably the early signs of an upsurge of violence in the coming decades, conflicts that will be induced or aggravated by scarcity. Poor societies will be particularly affected, since they are

less able to buffer themselves from environmental scarcities and the social crises they cause. Scarcity can sharply increase demands on key institutions, such as the state, while it simultaneously reduces their capacity to meet those demands. These pressures increase the chance that the state will either fragment or become more authoritarian, either of which may result in Civil War.

Decreasing supplies of environmental resources, such as clean water and good agricultural land, is likely to provoke scarcity conflicts between states. Large population movements caused by environmental stress will induce 'group identity' conflicts, especially ethnic clashes. And third, severe environmental scarcity will simultaneously increase economic deprivation and disrupt key institutions, which in turn will cause deprivation conflicts such as civil strife and insurgency.

There are three main sources of a scarcity of a renewable resource. The first is a human-induced decline in the quantity and quality of a renewable resource, a decline that occurs faster than it is renewed by natural processes. The second, population growth, reduces the resource's per-capita availability, by dividing it among more and more people. And third, there is unequal resource distribution, which concentrates a resource in the hands of a few people and subjects the rest to greater scarcity.

We should also recognize that resource scarcity is, in part, subjective. It is determined not just by absolute physical limits, but also by cultural and personal preferences, beliefs and norms.

The three sources of environmental scarcity often interact, and two patterns of interaction are particularly common: 'resource capture' and 'ecological marginalization'. First, a fall in the quality and quantity of renewable resources can combine with population growth to encourage powerful groups within a society to shift resource distribution in their favor. This can produce dire environmental scarcity for poorer and weaker groups in that society. This is 'resource capture'. Second, unequal resource access can combine with population growth to cause migrations to regions that are ecologically fragile, such as steep upland slopes, areas at risk of deforestation, and tropical rain forests. High population densities in these areas, combined with lack of knowledge and capital to protect local resources, cause severe environmental damage and chronic poverty. This is 'ecological marginalization'. Haiti is a good example of where decreased renewable resources plus population growth have combined to increase poverty, population migration, social strife and violent conflict.

*In conclusion, environmental scarcity causes violent conflict. This conflict tends to be persistent, diffuse and sub-national. Its frequency will probably jump sharply in the next decades as scarcities rapidly worsen in many parts of the world. Human efforts to protect the environment, particularly in developing countries, could have the added benefit of helping prevent wars and other violent conflicts. This is clearly an interconnected web.*

## The Living Water

Rev. Dr. Marilyn Sewell

May 7, 2000

You remember the story of *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway's little mythical novel. This morning I'm going to tell you quite a different story—it could be called *The Young Woman and the Sea*. It happened a long time ago, and it tells how this woman who was ignorant of the sea, of its power and of its meaning, came to know more than she had known. That woman was me.

It started out innocently enough. I was living in New Orleans at the time, and I had begun dating the young doctor whom I subsequently married. This, in fact, was just our second date, and he had asked me to go sailing on Lake Pontchartrain, a huge body of salt water leading to the Gulf of Mexico. Having grown up in North Louisiana, I had never been in a sailboat before, but nevertheless I should have been a little suspicious when we arrived at the lake and I could see no boat. He told me that the boat was in three canvas bags in the rear of his Volkswagen squareback. I did not question, though. Who was I to say?

We arrived at the lake, and he took the pieces out of the canvas bags and assembled the boat, which took the better part of an hour. Then we hopped in and started our journey. I thought the waves were shockingly high that day, and the boat seemed, well, precarious—but how was I to know? My part was just to bring the picnic lunch—fried chicken and steamed artichokes, as I remember. I wanted to impress him with my womanly skills. We did fine for a few minutes, but then as we attempted to sail under the causeway, the mast of our boat got stuck. My guy, who had up until this time appeared very self-contained and in charge, became agitated—I could tell because he handed me a paddle and when I started to speak, commanded, "Row, just row." He was rowing with all his might, his face growing tight and red.

The little craft began rocking wildly as we tried to extricate ourselves. The lunch was the first to go—it somehow jumped out of the boat and was headed for a watery grave before I could grab it. Bummer, I thought. I spent a lot of time making that lunch. But it gets worse. A minute or so later, I see a billfold floating in the water, and I say, as gently as possible, "Frank, is that your billfold?" He says to me, "Be quiet and keep rowing!" He was the captain—after all, he had served four years in the Navy—how could I not obey? A moment later, though, he slaps his back pocket and says, "Oh, my gosh, that was my billfold! And I just got paid!" At this point he does something that, even in my untutored state, I knew was unwise—he jumps overboard and begins diving for his billfold. Now we're not talking about placid pond water here, we're talking about ocean waves. The billfold sinks quickly, and he turns and tries to swim back to the boat, which has become unstuck from the causeway and is sailing itself rapidly to the center of the lake. He realizes that he can't swim as fast as the boat can sail, and so he turns and swims for the causeway.

This is an unnerving moment for me. I'm thinking, "I'm going to have to watch him drown." I am thinking, "Too bad. All that medical training, for nothing." Bummer. But he does not drown. He goes down three times but finally makes it to a ladder on one of the huge columns holding up the causeway. In the meantime, I am sailing—or that is to say, the boat is sailing—further out to sea, and the waves become larger and larger. I think to myself, "Let the sail down and the boat won't go so fast." And I figure out how to do that. But I'm standing up and the boat is wobbling, and as I sit I have another unnerving thought, "You have to stay in this boat or you're dead." I have no life jacket, no flares, nothing. Just the boat and the paddles. I begin to realize that my guy is not entirely competent at this sailing thing. Turns out that

you don't actually learn to *sail* in the Navy, that the ships use other power sources these days. How was I to know?

By this time, the sun is beginning to go down. I see people driving by on the causeway, and I wave my paddle at them. Surely they will see me. They do, and they wave back, friendly as can be. I wave and wave, and they wave and wave. The sun is still going down. Finally, just as night falls, I see a light coming out of the darkness, coming over the waves, moving back and forth, a light searching for me. It's the U.S. Coast Guard! I'm saved! They put my boat on their boat and head back to the Coast Guard station, where I am reunited with my guy. He has his feet in hot water and is wrapped in blankets. I am ecstatic! He is grouchy and uncommunicative. A few weeks later, I make chocolate chip cookies and take them to the guys at the Coast Guard station as a way of saying thanks. Frank thinks this gesture is unnecessary. "After all," he says, "here they are stationed in New Orleans, but I, I spent four years on an icebreaker in Antarctica." "Bummer," I say.

That day I learned about the power of the ocean, and I began to contemplate its meaning. I have walked the beach by day, heard the roaring of the sea at night. I have swum in the warm Gulf waters, I have gone snorkeling on coral reefs and have seen the beauty of some of the sea creatures. I've come to respect and love the sea. Power and mystery. Her tides move with the sun and the moon, and we are literally connected with our universe through the ocean. The ocean is where life began. Aquatic life millions of years ago crawled from the sea to the land, amphibian ancestors of all of us land creatures.

Water is the source of life, and water nourishes all living things. We can do without sex, books, movies, music, even food, for quite a long while—these are luxuries compared to water. But water—go waterless for a mere 72 hours, and you're dead. Water is the *sine qua non* of human existence. Of all of existence. Water is life.

And yet we so often take water for granted. That's because it's so accessible to us. We turn the faucet. We flush the toilet. We water our lawns. Even in the desert, we water our lawns. We irrigate our crops—once again even in the desert. But this is not so for all places in the world. I remember seeing a picture of a man from Ethiopia getting off a plane in the U.S. In his hand he carried not a laptop, but a small bucket. In his land, a bucket was a person's most treasured possession, for it was what allowed you to carry a scarce commodity—water—with you.

Marq de Villiers tells the story of visiting a family in a village in Kenya. Manya, the senior woman of the household invited him to stay and pressed upon him gifts of food she could not afford. In return, he picked up one of the four yellow plastic drums piled in front of the hut and offered to help her fetch water. The family laughed politely. They were thinking: white people, *mzungu*, are so inept. Fetching water was women's work. Later that evening Manya and her daughters came swaying down the trail, singing one of their working songs, each with a 15-liter pail of water balanced on her head. That's close to 15 quarts. At the meal that followed de Villiers declined the water. The well was an old one and had originally been used by 50 families. Now 200 families drew from it. The water was muddy and smelled unclean. In much of Africa, it is normal for people to walk a mile or two or even 5 miles for water. In more arid areas, people walk even greater distances, and sometimes all they find at the end is a slimy pond. More than 90 per cent of Africans still dig for their water, and waterborne diseases like typhoid, dysentery, and cholera are common. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reports that 40,000 children worldwide are dying daily from hunger or disease caused by lack of water or from contaminated water.

The trouble with water is that we can't make any more of it—there is the same amount of water now that there was in prehistoric times. We are, however, making more and more people, and those people are



utterly dependent upon water for their livelihoods, their food, and their industry. We consume it, poison it, and waste it, indifferent to the consequences: too many people, too little water, water in the wrong places and in the wrong amounts. Only 1 per cent of the Earth's water is available for daily use: 97 per cent is in the sea; 2 per cent is frozen in icebergs and glaciers. Of the 1 per cent of usable water, about 98 per cent of that is used for industrial purposes, and only about 2 per cent for nutrition and health.

The chair of the World Water Commission stated bluntly that "the wars of the twenty-first century will be fought over water." Former UN secretary general Boutros Boutros-Ghali said something similar. No one country can really "own" water, since hardly any of the world's major rivers are contained within the borders of one state. Egypt has more than once threatened to go to war over diversions of the Nile. Iraq, Syria, and Turkey have each mobilized troops in defense of water rights on the Euphrates and Tigris. Water is in crisis in China, in Southeast Asia, in many parts of Africa. Even in Europe there are shortages. In Southwest America we have solved our immediate crisis by "stealing" the Colorado River from Mexico, much of it to irrigate the deserts of Arizona and California, and a good deal to fill swimming pools in Los Angeles and to fill the fountains of Las Vegas.

How have we in the United States cared for this most precious of resources? The good news is that since Cleveland's Cuyahoga River burned in 1969, spurring passage of the Clean Water Act, roughly 60 per cent of America's rivers, lakes, and coastlines have become fishable and swim able. The bad news is that the remaining 40 per cent are not, including our own Willamette. The Environmental Protection Agency found that 1.5 billion pounds of chemicals—many dangerous to children—1.5 billion pounds of chemicals, including arsenic and lead, were released into lakes and streams and along coasts from 1990 to 1994. This massive legal dumping represents only a fraction of the problem—many polluting operations—sewage plants, utilities, mines—are not even required to report their discharges.

In seeing water simply as a resource, as a means to an end, however noble or ignoble that end may be, we have lost touch with the sacredness of water. Water cleans, heals, transforms. Every ancient culture revered water. In Sumerian the word *mar* meant sea, but it was also the word for womb; *a* was the word for water, and it also mean sperm, conception, generation. The Hebraic language includes the concept of *Mem*, deciphered as mother, life, womb, or sea. "Everything was water," say Hindu texts, and in Tantric manuscripts water is *prana*, the vital breath that brings life. In most known religious traditions, water is taken to be the first significant element, that which precedes all form and supports all of creation. Creation myths from Hindu tradition, from European folklore, from North American Indian tribes are remarkably similar. From the Hebrew scripture, the book of Genesis opens: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

As water gives life, it also carries within it the possibility of death, as I learned so dramatically in my little sailing trip. If you live near water, you will learn to respect it. You will learn how the landscape changes when the river begins to recede in time of drought. You'll know how a flash flood in the creek can carry off a sheep—or a child. You'll learn to be wary of ocean waves as they toss logs like matchsticks up upon the shore. Water is life-giving and is life-threatening. We underestimate its power at our peril.

Through the ages, people have seen water as having healing powers. Water cults have been universal, cross-culturally, and in Celtic Europe they were particularly common, until the Christian church suppressed these practices. But it's hard to stamp out archetypal forms, so the lure of sacred water was acknowledged and pagan practices metamorphosed into Christian shrines. People still make pilgrimages to wells and pools to heal physical and emotional problems. Lourdes alone is visited by six million people a year. In Ireland, a country with hundreds of small springs and wells, it is not unusual to come across pieces of ribbon tied to plants and to discover a tiny spring, known locally for some specific healing

powers. I myself have a little blue bottle of healing water given to me by one of my research assistants—it is from the fountain of Our Lady of the Angels in Cartago, Costa Rica. Do I believe this water has healing powers? I don't know, but I acknowledge that the mystery pulls at me. I can't just put it in the pancake mix.

Water is transformational, and baptism is a universal symbol of purification and regeneration. Even people who are not interested in the institutional church often want their children baptized or christened. It's as if the parents continue to believe on some deep level that the blessing of the water will bring some protection to the child. At our church, we have child dedication services, and during the ceremony, I touch a rose into water and then touch the forehead of the child, acknowledging that water makes all the fertile earth bear fruit and by analogy, asking that the child be blessed and have a fruitful life.

Because of the essential nature, the foundational nature of water, it has become a symbol of our collective unconscious. Why is it that we can sit and muse by the side of a river for hours, watching the current flow in graceful patterns, or why is it we hear in the ocean's roar the voice of civilizations past? Why is it that we are comforted by these sights and sounds? I remember when I lived in Berkeley, I would walk up Euclid Ave. until I came to a particularly splendid view of the bay. As I gazed and gave myself in wonder to the scene, I felt my fearful heart go quiet, and I knew strangely enough that I could die without fear if I could just remember this water and just know that I am a part of this creation and a part of all creation.

David Duncan tells the story of his visit to Camas, Washington, to see a confluence, or a joining of rivers. This is where Lackamas Creek and the Washougal meet the Columbia. In India such a place is a sacred site, and David wanted to experience this confluence in Camas, hoping for some sense of the sacred. Trouble is, where these rivers met, the Crown Z paper mill met them all. This is how David tells it: "My friend Jared and I parked in the Crown Z visitors' lot, ignored the No Trespassing and High Voltage and Danger signs, passed through a hole in a cyclone fence, detoured round a gigantic mill building, crossed disused railroad tracks and bulldozed fields, reaching the Washougal at last. The river bank was made of hard packed clay, bare rock, spilled oil, logging cable, pop, beer, and booze bottles, a flood-crushed car, appliance parts, slabs of broken concrete with rebar sticking out of them, and huge reject mill-parts. We found a rusted sprocket the size of a merry-go-round and sat on it.

"Yet it was still beautiful at the confluence. We could see east to the Cascade foothills, west clear to the Coast Range. There is a majesty to the lower Columbia, something awesome if not holy. But when I tried to incorporate the third waterway into the picture, things broke down: Lackamas Creek, a genuine little river, entered the uphill side of the Crown Zellerbach mill. The mill waste that shot from the flume at our feet bore no resemblance to water—it looked like hot pancake batter, gushing forth in a quantity vast and foul. It was a steaming, poisonous killing joke that shot across the river's mouth in a yellow-gray scythe and coated the Columbia's north shore with what looked like dead human skin for miles.

"And then, over the gushing, a strange double splash. The first half of the splash was a bright Coho salmon. The second half was its echo, bouncing hard off the mill wall. 'Look!' Jared whispered as a second bright Coho leapt high in the evening light and then fell back into the river. Then another one leapt, and another, all amazingly high, all in the same place—a point in mid river, just upstream from the scythe of mill waste.

"These unlikely creatures had been born way up this mountain river, had grown strong in it, then had left it for the Pacific; yet some impression of their birthplace, some memory of scent touched them years later in that vastness, brought them schooling in off the Columbia's mouth, forced them to run the gauntlet of

nets, hooks, and predators, and enter again the waters of their home. Then came the twist—the scythe of mill waste.

“Salmon are not stupid. They know when to spook, and when to wait quietly; when to leap, when to hide, when to fight for their lives. As these Coho entered their confluence, they must have tried everything—must have hesitated, sought another channel, circled back out into the Columbia, come round again and again, waiting for the pain of the thing to die. But like all indigenous species, including in the end our own, salmon have no choice: their great speed and long journeys create an illusion of freedom, but to live, they must finally become as much a part of their river as its water and its stones. So in the end, they entered. With eyes that can't close and breath that can't be held they darted straight into this confounding of the vast, the pure, and the insane. And the slashing leaps that now shattered the river's surface were each the coho word for their cold, primordial rage against whatever it was that maimed them—and their equally cold, primordial joy at having reached the waters of their home. After each leap my breath would catch as the splash resounded, impossibly loud, against the walls of the mill. When I finally turned to look at Jared, he didn't even notice me. And in his eyes, which were brimming, I saw nothing but that same cold anger, and that same wild joy. He was raging and exulting with the Coho as if they were our people, ours the unclosing eyes the scythe betrayed and blinded, ours the bright bodies leaping and falling back into the home waters—falling just to burst them apart; just to force them to receive, even now, our gleaming silver sides.” (1)

We are not creatures apart; we are at one with the salmon, with the river, with the sky and the clouds and the earth and the ocean. Knowing this kinship will be our salvation. Understanding the sacredness of this relationship will be what preserves the earth for our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren and their children to come. Water is our health and our life. It carries the memory of past life and the seeds of all future life. It is the mediator between life and death.

We profane our water at our own great risk. If we see it as holy stuff, we will cherish it and protect it. We would never desecrate it with filth and poison. We know we thirst. Let water heal and inspire us. Seeing a fountain, we touch the coolness of the spray and feel our spirits rise. Soaking in a warm bath, we let our tired bodies relax and rest. Hiking by a rushing stream, we know that far above us the snow is melting on the mountain. Walking by the sea, we are a part of all life that has ever been and all life that will be. In all humility, even as we just lift a glass of water to our lips, we say with our hearts, thank you. Thank you, Source of our Being, Giver of Life. So be it. Amen.

(1) “Northwest Passage,” by David James Duncan. Collected in *Head/Waters*, ed. Linny Stovall, Hillsboro, OR: Blue Heron Publishing, Inc., 1994. This book is a collection of essays with some connection to water. I have taken liberties with the text, to shorten it for use in this sermon.)

## Tree of Life Sermon

Leslie Pohl-Kosbau

January, 2004

Childhood in the Church sanctuary was sitting on those prickly pew cushions in 1955. It was there that I spent time gazing at the Tree of Life tapestry hanging above the choir loft at the First Unitarian Church. It gleamed in ivory satin and linen, with the image of a tree in threads that now rests only in my memory. Ten years later the tapestry was consumed in a 1965 fire, which destroyed most of the Sanctuary. Determined to rise like a phoenix, the congregation banded together to rebuild. A new Tree of Life tapestry was commissioned and woven by Laurie Herrick. The new Tree of Life was created in orange earth tones, shaped in a geometric pattern. It was placed in on the wall above the pulpit, and hangs in the same place today at the Portland First Unitarian Church.

The new blue “Hymns for the Celebration of Life”, imprinted with the Tree of Life filled the newly built pews. Out of them we sang, “The Earth is Home” and “O Life that Maketh all Things New”. Hope was kindled, and Unitarian Universalism was alive.

Thirty-five years later, I look for a trace of the Tree of Life, a symbol that confirmed to me that Unitarian Universalists understood their connection to nature, and that I belonged to a faith with a tradition that included the thoughts and work of Emerson and Thoreau, as well as Channing and Ballou. Certainly the chalice, a symbol of seeking truth and justice, reflects the human-to- human need. But what of a connection to the world around us? Unitarian Universalists are very careful to limit the use of symbolism and iconography. Many of us come to this faith seeking new forms of worship.

Nature appears in the Principles and Purposes, and the Sources of Unitarian Universalism. The Sixth source of the covenant of our living tradition is: “the spiritual teaching of earth-centered traditions, which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythm of nature.”

We also define our present day natural systems through the findings of science in physics, botany, biology, and chemistry, among other disciplines. An example is The Tree of Life Web project, a worldwide collaborative Internet effort produced by biologists providing information about “the diversity of organisms on Earth, their history, and characteristics”. But symbols and the mystical endure. In the current search for life on Mars with its quest for scientific evidence, the NASA project’s rover carries the name, Spirit.

But let’s look at the tree as a symbol. In many cultures of the world the tree is seen as cosmic, connecting heaven and earth, soil and atmosphere. The tree is the agent and focal point. Trees have long been used as a symbol for rebirth. Much as a snake sheds its skin, the tree sheds its bark to grow. Its sap, like blood, sustains life.

It is the Norse tree Yggdrasil (steed of Odin), a symbol of the heaven to earth connection that is considered to be eternal. Its roots are watered and fed by three goddesses, while serpent beasts feed on the leaves. Massive roots reach down to the water, rock, and frost while at the opposite end the trunk rises to the heavens. Holy is this tree that Odin hangs on for nine days and nights in the quest for wisdom.

The familiar May Pole has symbolized the tree, stripped of its leaves to characterize its life in winter. In an act of rebirth and everlasting life, it is re-clothed with decorative bands and flowers, giving humans the opportunity to celebrate its re-creation. In another tradition a pole is made from the sacred cottonwood tree, which becomes the center of the Sioux peoples ceremonial sun dance. In the American Southwest

the corn plant or reed is the focal symbol on which the human life journey is represented in the sacred pollen path.

As I learn more about world tree images and symbols, the connection of nature to human existence becomes clearer. People have made this connection for thousands of years in many different cultures. The tree of life is a metaphor for the path to enlightenment. Could this symbol connect Unitarian Universalists in our spiritual quest?

Jewish and Christian teachings from the Book of Genesis tell of two trees: a Tree of Knowledge, which is the tree of good and evil, and the Tree of Life, the tree of immortality. Why is it that the first tree's fruit gets Adam and Eve kicked out of the Garden of Eden, and they don't get to touch the Tree of life, which remains untouched and guarded? We know what we lack, but not what will help.

The Jewish Kabala tradition uses a Shephirotic Tree of Life with ten spheres and twenty-two paths that explain the Creation. These symbols describing the human relationships to the cosmic genesis, also parallel and relate to Babylonian, Egyptian and Sumerian ancient Trees of Life. Later, the Christians use a Tree of Life in the Biblical Revelations and in the Gnostic Gospels.

Could the Tree of Life, in its eclectic form, be a symbol to embolden the Unitarian Universalist Seventh Principle? Could the tree illustrate the "respect of the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part?"

Are we much like ancient people, in that we need something graceful and poetic to remind us of the connection between belief, fact-finding, and social justice in the physical world? I like to think of the journey, the growth in understanding and doing, in the shape of a sacred tree. This tree shows a connection and relationship of all beings. In this Unitarian Universalist tree, one of the branches holds our Green Sanctuary. This project takes form in congregations that want to make an environmental difference in their religious faith and congregational home.

It is a disturbing fact that we, the people in the United States are contributing to the annual loss of 50,000 species, and creating 23 tons per person of garbage for landfills each year. I have composted and recycled at home for thirty years, but have a harder time doing this at work. I am reminded by an employee about simple recycling blunders that I would never do at home. It is so easy to say, that there isn't enough time, or it is too hard to do. It takes a conscious effort to change the rhythms of habit.

Dozens of Unitarian Universalist Churches are making changes by using the Green Sanctuary Handbook and programs of the Seventh Principle Project. Fourteen congregations have worked for several years to earn Green Sanctuary certification. The beauty of it is that volunteers are stepping up to make these changes. Weather-stripping, insulating, recycling, and light bulb replacement are a few of the efforts that can be made to cut energy costs. At First Unitarian Church between 5,000-7,000 KWH have been saved per month because incandescent lights were replaced with fluorescent bulbs. Congregations have become members of Oregon Interfaith Power and Light not only to support alternative energy creation, but also to achieve collective savings in green power.

Green building is part of our Green Sanctuary Program. David Orr, professor at Oberlin College, and Seventh Principle General Assembly speaker in Cleveland, Ohio reminded us in 2001 that Green building uses certified wood, non-toxic materials, recycled products and efficient, energy saving utilities. It uses Nature as a standard by practicing "bio-mimicry". Green building finds eloquent solutions, predicated on a sense of place, and with a commitment to create no ugliness. It calls for decision making "as if Earth matters".

Unitarian Universalist environmental action is not new, but the most recent environmental UUA Statement of Conscience was the 2001 Responsible Consumption Statement, which is listed under Economic Justice at the UUA. Environmental concerns cross social justice borders, and involve us all.

Here are some steps to take to involve the whole congregation in a successful Green Sanctuary:

Make building improvements to save energy and to reflect environmental values  
Conserve energy and use recycled, non-toxic products

Then move on to: creating programs for children, youth and adults that inspire and cultivate a sense of wonder. Remember Rachel Carson? It was her influence, the support of religious education teachers, and my parents that led me to a life's work in Nature and Community Gardens.

Scientists use the tree as a symbol to explain species relationships. Human culture creates stories about the Tree of Life. Both offer a rich contribution to the study and description of our Earth. Let's bring this into worship in story and song, as Jim Scott has done in creating the new "Earth and Spirit Songbook". What stories do our children have to tell? The creative energy and action in every person can help save a forest, rebuild a park, or start a community garden. Organize an alternative gift market or stop junk mail campaign. Partner with other Unitarian Universalist congregations in the local council, the district, or with the Seventh Principle Project. Support environmental statements of social conscience and witness.

Unitarian Universalists have joined Jews, Muslims, and Christians who are working on environmental projects such as climate change and food security. There is much to be learned and celebrated.

Success is in the development of our leaders. We must support and cultivate healthy environmental leadership. Green Sanctuary principles will be effective when members of congregational committees and boards know and feel a compelling need for being a Green Sanctuary. They can make fully informed decisions and choose a prominent place to display the well-earned Green Sanctuary certificate.

Let us bring back the Tree of Life to its place as a symbol of Unitarian Universalist relationship with the web of life, with nature and human nature. The Tree of Life in Buddhism is the Bodhi tree, a symbol of the Great Awakener. Buddha centered himself with the tree, amidst turmoil and chaos, to achieve understanding and enlightenment. We must be awake, and act. Earth matters.

What legacy will we leave for the seven generations to come? Will the Unitarian Universalist Tree of Life be there, and will the respect for the interdependent web of all existence be realized? For the beauty of the Earth, for the splendor of the skies, roots hold me close, wings set me free, Spirit of Life, Come to me, come to me. May it be so.

# Earth Spirituality is a Many Splendored Thing

Steve Maier

April 14, 2002

## Reading

The following reading is from Ron Engel. [ J. Ronald Engel, "Earth Spirituality is a Many Splendored Thing!" (The Journal of Liberal Religion, an online theological journal published by Meadville Lombard Theological School, [www.meadville.edu/jlr.htm](http://www.meadville.edu/jlr.htm), Spring 2000)]. You may remember his name from last fall. He is the UU theologian I spoke about who had such an important role in the drafting of the Earth Charter language. He is also the inspiration for this service and for a series of services and events happening here over the coming weeks. In the 1960's, living in an ethnically diverse urban neighborhood in Chicago, Ron began to develop his theories on the relationships between spirit and the environment. He writes of his early efforts to work with others to transform this neighborhood into a healthy and thriving metropolitan regional community:

"Each one of the eight forms of engagement that we are [discussing] was alive there, thirty years ago, casting its radiance over our lives. It meant everything to us, for example, that we personally lived as members of this neighborhood, citizens of this little urban bioregion that we took this whole community as our parish, and called our community organization, the "Neighborhood Commons." Even in this biologically impoverished landscape, the natural ecosystem was important to us, and I vividly recall the day we took a group of young people for a canoe trip along the north branch of the Chicago River to help get a better sense of our turf. I also recall the day [my wife] and I discovered a neighbor from Eastern Europe picking the grape leaves off the vine in our yard, the roosters that used to crow in the morning, the food co-op we sponsored, and the great community potlucks we shared. [I discovered] that these strangers loved gardens, and a trip out of the city, as much as I did! (Never since that time have I had tolerance for the claim that "the environment" is only a "white" person's or elitist issue.) Our ministry was about embracing bodies, especially the bodies of children, and in the parlance of the civil rights movement, putting our bodies "on the line." I could go on at some length about the resurgence of the "community arts" in our neighborhood, and the efforts at stewardship and sustainable cocreativity through a community development corporation that rehabilitated and built low-income housing and which continues to prosper to this day."

## Sermon

"How are we to live under the conditions of life as they are given to us here and now on this planet?" Ron Engel says this is the central religious question of human life. It seems pretty simple: "how are we to live under the conditions of life as they are given to us here and now on this planet?"

Ron Engel made a number of choices in the Chicago neighborhood where he lives. We have all made similar choices. We live here in Vermont, near both people and wild places. We make decisions about what we do—how and where we work and play, what causes we support, and what things we buy—all based on some set of criteria. These criteria, I would like to suggest, include impulses from our bodies that tell us when something feels right or wrong, or good or bad. Such impulses are what I have come to think of as the human spirit.

Today, I would like to talk about the human spirit—where it comes from and what nurtures it...pretty presumptuous of me, don't you think? If someone had suggested to me a year ago that I would be

standing here today with something interesting and important to say about the human spirit,....well, let's just say a lot has happened in the past 12 months.

Last spring, I began a quest. Of course, I didn't realize I was beginning a quest. It all began with a fairly simple question. What was the Unitarian Universalist Association, or more generally, what were UUs doing about environmental issues and causes? At first, my research was rather discouraging. For example, on the UUA web site, you can find an alphabetical listing of all the programs and services of the UUA. But when you look under "E", the listing proceeds from "endowment fund resources" to "estate planning"—no listing for "environment." None either for "ecology" or other similar words.

Before long, however, my research started paying off. One path led me to the origins of the Seventh Principle, the UU's environmental principle—"respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part"—I wrote an article about this for the most recent CVUUS newsletter. Another path led me to the "Reverence for Life" ideas, which I spoke about here in February—that profound adoring awed respect for all Life on Earth.

A third path led me to Ron Engel. My first encounter with Ron's work came when I found an article of his on the Internet, the title of which I have stolen for this sermon—"Earth Spirituality is a Many Splendored Thing." This article, and a few other things I've read over the past year, has profoundly affected my ideas about the human spirit.

Engel's basic idea is that the human spirit flourishes when it engages with the natural world. He says "Human beings have evolved a plurality of ways of engaging spirit, nature, and one another so as to enable their mutual flourishing." The word "evolved" suggests that these ways or paths are innate, part of and emerging from the long process of human evolution. "Mutual flourishing," means that all of these things together (spirit, nature, and humans) are required for the flourishing.

Engel outlines eight different, though interrelated, ways that humans engage with nature and, in so doing, enable the mutual flourishing of humans and the natural world. He says "we need to be critically faithful to each of these ways, separately, and in interplay with each other, if we are to set our species on a just, sustainable, and spiritually fulfilling path of planetary evolution."

The eight are:

- Wilderness encounters
- Bioregional participation
- Embracing the body
- Respect for the rights of individual beings
- Compassion for the sufferings of life
- Tending the garden
- Stewardship
- Artistic co-creation

I have included in today's Order of Service a description of these 8 ways or modes of engagement with the natural world. It helps, I think, to be able to read these descriptions several times. So, I'd like to suggest that you take this paper home with you and, over the next several weeks, think about these eight ways in the context of your own lives.

Here on Sunday mornings through May 12th, we are going to be examining many of these forms of engagement. For example, next week we will look at artistic co-creation in the context of a fun intergenerational service honoring Earth Day (bring your imagination and your instruments!). Steve Trombulak will examine wilderness encounters and stewardship on May 5th. And on May 12th, for



Mother's Day, we will celebrate embracing the body and tending the garden and their connections with women and mothers.

Today, though, I want to look at some of Engel's general ideas, to demonstrate why they seem so important to me.

Not so very long ago, I would have looked at this list of 8 and said, well, that's nice, but why do I need to concern myself with such ideas? I was doing my part. I had a career in environmental protection, gave money to environmental causes, voted Democratic, and, most important of all, I lived in Vermont! I liked to garden and exercise and go for a hike every once and awhile. Did I really need to look at these things more deeply?

According to Engel and other spiritual ecology writers, the ways in which we interact with the natural world reflect our most fundamental human characteristics and feed our innermost needs. Most of us know at least the rudiments of the science of evolution. Life on Earth began in the sea billions of years ago and over time, more complex creatures evolved, crawled out of the sea, and here we are today.

But as we look more closely at things like human consciousness and spirit, things are not so easy to understand. Where does that thing I refer to as my "gut feeling" come from? Why do certain things make me laugh or cry or feel good or not so good about myself? Do you have the same kinds of feelings as I do? Do we all? Are these things simply learned behaviors or is there something intrinsic to human beings that enable us to think and feel in the ways that we do?

Well, Engel believes there is something intrinsic; that there is something in our genetic code, inherited through the ages from the incredible process of evolution that defines and enables what we now refer to as the human spirit. And, here's the important part, having evolved from nature, this spirit requires a continuing connection with the natural world to be nurtured, to feel at home and right with the world.

This may or may not resonate with all of you. For some of us, something special happens, physically and emotionally, when we are out in nature, working in the garden, taking care of our bodies, or creating works of art. Others, though, may be less sure of such fundamental connections between spirit and nature. If you find yourself even just a little intrigued by these ideas, however, I would invite you to consider the different possible impacts our individual and collective choices may make over the coming decades.

Engel, and many other writers, lament the loss of the ability, in our modern world, for people to engage with the natural world in one or more of these 8 ways. Engel writes: We all feel these losses, I believe, even if we are often too embarrassed or inarticulate to say so, and spend most of our energies at cross-purposes with ourselves perpetuating the very processes that destroy the things we love. I believe most people truly yearn to participate in these paths of earthly salvation, and many are eager to find ways to embody them more richly, more justly, than the conditions of the past have allowed.

So, at a personal level, we may feel lost or disconnected if we don't make the time and space to engage with nature on a regular basis. On a societal level, we have routinely made decisions that have reduced the abilities of people to connect with nature. We have used up land and natural resources for human commerce; we have increasingly made job and life-style demands on people that have taken them away from the natural world. Large inequities in income and in life's opportunities result in unequal access to the nature.

Even larger questions loom. At a talk two weeks ago at Middlebury College, environmental author Bill McKibben spoke about genetic engineering and its possible consequences for the future. He touched all

the bases you might expect, including the fear of unintended impacts on fragile ecosystems and all of life. But then he came to the point he really wanted to make. He is concerned that we are headed into the realm of changing what it means to be a human being on this planet. If, through genetic engineering, we can extend human life by several times or even indefinitely, what will that mean for our species and how we look at ourselves and the world around us?

All of which brought me back to Engel's central religious question—"how are we to live under the conditions of life as they are given to us here and now on this planet?" The wonderful, but, frankly also scary thing, is that each one of us must answer this question.

We can help each other out along the way (and this is a journey), but ultimately the choices are ours alone to make. I would like to share with you some of the choices that I have made for how I want to live:

I want to see the light of the setting sun over the Adirondacks, and stand in awe of the sun and moon and stars and our place in the universe.

I want to work in my garden this afternoon, watch the bursting forsythia, and know (amidst wonder) that those peas I just planted will actually come up.

I want to go for a run and feel the exhilaration of breath, strength, and sweat, all the while marveling at the healing scar down the front of my belly.

I want to leave to my children and their children, and all children, a good life on a healthy planet Earth.

I want to be part of a community of people, a congregation, and a religious movement that encourages understanding of the basic connections between spirit and nature, and that supports one another in our quests to make a difference in the world.

I want all these things for all people.

I want all people to have a profound adoring awed respect for all Life on Earth.

And, what I believe is that human spirits are uplifted whenever we make choices that work in these directions and, ultimately, that's what makes life worth living.

### **Closing Words**

Over the next several weeks, I would ask that each of us take stock of those moments when you feel really good about yourself, when your spirit has been uplifted, and consider whether you have made a connection with nature in some way. Let me know what you find out.

## **The Comforting Whirlwind: God and the Environmental Crisis Sermon**

**Bill McKibben**

Delivered at the First Religious Society, Unitarian-Universalist, Carlisle, Massachusetts, March 18, 2001

Well good morning you all. I begin with a couple of apologies, it seems that every time I get a good cold that's the week I am scheduled to talk three or four times in the course of the week. I said earlier this week when I was talking some place that if we were a wiser and more sensitive race we probably would take a sore throat as a sign from God that this was not the day that we were supposed to speak. But you're here and I'm here and I will talk. I also have to tell you my apologies in advance that I'm not a preacher and I'm not a theologian. At best I'm a Methodist Sunday School teacher from a little rural church out in the woods, and I don't know about your Sunday School teachers but Methodist Sunday School teachers are not particularly well trained. The main qualification for the job is the ability on Christmas Eve to turn tea towels into Palestinian headdresses for shepherds. If you can do that then you can teach Sunday school in our church. Nonetheless, I feel called upon to talk to you a little bit about some of these questions about the environment, which it seems to me, are at the root and at the bottom of the interesting, powerful, profound, spiritual questions of our time.

I wrote a book some years ago that Dawn referred to, called *The Age of Missing Information*. Strange book. I went out and found what was the largest cable television system in the whole world, which at the time was in Fairfax, Virginia and had 100 channels. I got people in Fairfax that taped for me everything that came across these 100 channels. I took it home to the Adirondacks and viewed all the 4 country music channels, the infomercials—you haven't lived until you've watched 48 straight hours of home shopping. The book, which I actually quite like, which is not true of all my books, was filled with all kinds of interesting insights about different things: about history and about community, and how it is that we have developed into some of the things we've developed into, but distilled down to its essence, boiled down to the way my neighbors yesterday were all busily boiling sap down into syrup, boiled down like that, the message that comes through that television all the time every day and it comes through most of the other instruments of our consumer society is simple. It's that "you're the most important thing on earth. You're the absolute center of the universe, you're the heaviest object and everything is going to orbit around you."

If you had to pick one message that was most effective for building a huge, strong economy that would probably be it. It's worked incredible wonders. We have consumed and thus produced and raised our standard of living in ways that no one in any previous time or place could even have imagined. We created here what passes in physical terms for a utopia, where we don't have to work particularly with great physical difficulty, where we live in comfort and convenience and security. But if you wanted to create a message that was profoundly troubling from a spiritual point of view and one that made progress on issues of great importance, especially issues of the environment, particularly difficult ones, you couldn't pick a better one than "You're the most important thing on earth. You're the center of the planet." This is an old question, where we stand in relation to everything else.

Now the reason I read a bit from Job to you today is because it seems to me that that is the question that animates Job. All of you know the book of Job as well as I do, so forgive me for just running over it briefly. Job, prosperous, rich man, good man, always does his bit for the community and everyone else, treats his family well, greatly prosperous, one day wakes up and finds himself seemingly cursed by God. His cattle start dying of hoof and mouth disease, his children die, his property is taken from him, he ends up living in a dung heap at the edge of town covered with oozing sores. As one would in such a situation, he begins to question why this has happened to him. His friends come and visit, representing the Orthodoxy of the day, and they tell him it must be because he has sinned even though he does not really remember

particularly sinning. He must have done something and now God is punishing him. This is the standard operating procedure of that day, the standard operating belief.

Job, surprisingly, won't take that for an answer. He keeps saying, "But I didn't do anything that bad. I know I didn't. There must be some other explanation," and he demands, which is a fairly audacious thing to do, he demands an interview with God. He wants God to come justify himself to Job. He demands this in increasingly belligerent language through this long book and finally God appears. God appears speaking in a voice from a whirlwind, from a tornado and it's, I gave you some little flavor of it before, it's an amazing diatribe God embarks on. Job has stirred up a hornet's nest. God is in a sarcastic mood and keeps asking him "Well, where were you when I laid this whole thing out? Do you know how to stop the waves from breaking? Do you know where they should go? Do you know where I keep the hail and the snow? Do you hunt game for the lioness?" On and on and on down the whole list. It's a beautiful piece of writing. It's the first piece of nature writing, at least in the western tradition, probably the most beautiful and biologically accurate and sexy and crunchy and just an amazing piece of writing.

On the one hand its message is clear, I think, that Job, and by any extension the rest of us, are not at the absolute center of God's universe. That we're one small part of a large creation, and in some sense, through the straw man of Job, cut down to size in the course of this exercise. But that's not the only message, the other message is that this world of which we are a part is incredibly beautiful, full of meaning and sweetness and beauty. Do you show the hawk how to fly stretching his wings to the wind? Do you teach the vulture to soar and build his nest in the clouds? He makes his home on the mountain top. On the unapproachable crag he sits and scans for prey. From far off his eyes can spot it, his little ones drink its blood. The unburied are his. These things, that are in some sense most vile to us, are clearly dear to God. This world is not always as we see it through our own particular lenses of justice and rightness. Then God asked Job, "has God's accuser resigned? Has he swallowed his tongue?" Job simply says, "I am speechless. What can I answer? I put my hand on my mouth. I have said too much already. Now I will speak no more." Which seems like a good answer in this situation.

And that has been one of the profound ways in which human beings have understood the relationship with the world from before that time and from that time forward—that there is some force larger than us, perceived in the operations of the physical universe around us. That's one of the ways that we have managed to remind ourselves to keep our hubris within at least some bounds. In our time that answer is changing. That answer is disappearing. Human beings are putting themselves not only at the center in the sort of ways that we always have—in our pride and in our appetite—but also increasingly in the absolute chemical reality of the planet on which we live.

Let's take the example of climate change. Right about the industrial revolution human beings began burning large amounts of coal, gas, and oil, carbon-based fuels. Those saurians we were just singing about having decomposed a long time ago are now being pumped up to the ground and burned. One effect is obviously the kind of pollution we are used to—smog over cities etc.—that's a minor effect. The major effect is that when you burn those fossil fuels, you release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. A colorless, odorless, non-poisonous gas the concentration of which in this room is higher than it will ever be outdoors, but a gas which by its molecular composition traps heat close to the atmosphere, that would otherwise radiate back out to space. The atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> was about 275 parts per million before the industrial revolution. It is now about 385 parts per million and it will be above 500 parts per million long before the middle of this century unless we do very dramatic things in the next few years to dramatically curtail our use of fossil fuels. If we don't, we have now been warned by scientists whose data has grown ever stronger and more robust exactly what to expect.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 1,500 climatologists from around the world spent the last five years in an endless series of research and analysis on this problem. They reported in their gathering at Shanghai in January when they released their final 5-year assessment, that in this century we can expect to see the global average temperature increase about 4 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit. That would take it to levels higher than it's ever been in human history, indeed than it's ever been long before human history—the worst case scenario this century, just in this one century. If everything tops out at the upper end of the parameter we could see temperature increases as high as 11 degrees Fahrenheit as global average temperature. The planet would go from about 59 degrees at present to about 70 degrees. Any of those changes are completely unacceptable, we know that they are unacceptable because we've already increased the temperature about 1 degree Fahrenheit and we've begun to see what happens when you do that. For instance, one of the things that happens is that the world gets a lot stormier, a lot wetter. That's because warm air, in the fashion that God designed this planet, warm air holds more vapor than cold air. So to increase the temperature you get a lot more evaporation in arid places and you get a lot more drought. That water vapor gets up in the clouds it has to come down someplace, so in places where it's wet you get a lot more precipitation, a lot more deluge, a lot more flood. Severe storms that drop more than two inches of rain in a 24-hour period have increased about 20 percent across this continent against the baseline. That's a very large increase in a basic physical phenomenon.

Consider what is happening to the cryosphere, to the frozen parts of the planet. Every glacier system in the world is now in rapid retreat, and remember this is just with a one degree rise in global average temperature. Many of you saw the story on the front page of the New York Times a few weeks ago indicating that by 2015 the snows of Kilimanjaro will have completely melted, that will be a rock top. Glacier National Park will have no glaciers by about 2030. The ice cap over the Arctic has thinned 40 percent in the last 40 years. We have tremendous data on that because we ran nuclear submarines underneath it for a long time and we know how thick the ice has been and it's now almost half melted away. Those are unbelievably large changes in very fundamental elements of this planet in a very, very short time. They come with real consequences.

Forgive me for using harsh language for a few minutes, but I'm going to. I have been working on these issues for 10 or 12 years and have reached the point where I am unwilling to pussyfoot around them too much longer. These things are happening in large measure because of us. We in this country burn 25 percent of the world's fossil fuel, create 25 percent of the world's carbon dioxide. It is we; it is the affluent lifestyles that we lead that overwhelmingly contribute to this problem. And to call it a problem is to understate what it really is. Which is a crime. Crime against the poorest and most marginalized people on this planet. We've never figured out, though God knows we've tried, a more effective way to destroy their lives. I spent much of last summer in Bangladesh, a wonderful country, vibrant, green, alive, feeds itself even though there are 130 million people in an area the size of Wisconsin. Amazing place. The biggest problem is that it is low to the Bay of Bengal, it's a river delta. The Ganges and the Brahmaputra come pouring out of the Himalayas, cascading down through the mountains, and they flatten out when they reach Bangladesh and broaden out. The country is half water; it's as much water as soil when you fly over it. That's one of the reasons it's so fertile. Every year they flood out and lay this little beautiful layer of silt, and things pop out of the ground. Trees as big around as that white pine there might be 2 or 3 or 4 years old in Bangladesh. You can just watch things grow, it's amazing.

But let's say you raise the level of the Bay of Bengal just a few inches, and that's what we're doing because thermal water, forget all the melting glaciers, warm simply because thermal expansion takes up more space than colder water does. So we're going to raise, by every forecast, the level of the sea at least a foot in the next fifty years. If you raise that, then those waters cascading under the Himalayas have no place to go and they just back up and go out all over Bangladesh. That's what happened in 1998.

The water was a little higher than usual in the Bay of Bengal and a lot of water was coming down out of the mountains and for about 90 days, about a quarter of the year, two-thirds of the country of Bangladesh was in thigh deep water or worse. That's just how people lived. They are incredibly adaptable and resourceful and did a heck of a lot better living in thigh deep water than we would have done. But they can't do that year after year after year. Can't plant the rice crop. They weren't food self-sufficient that year.

And Bangladesh is just one on the list of a hundred places that will be similarly traumatized in this century to come unless we do really significant things. It's a crime against the rest of creation, against all the other interesting corners of God's brain, against the lion and the antelope and the vulture and you can just go on down the list. Think about coral reefs. I'm sure some of you have taken vacations in the tropics and dived on coral reefs. Enchanting beyond belief. An ecosystem almost impossible to imagine in its jewel-like beauty and it's sort of gentleness that you could sort of be in there and hardly troubling the rest of the fish that are swimming near by. Coral reefs, probably by current forecasts, will disappear as an ecosystem by about 2050. As you raise the temperature of the ocean it kills the small animals that create the coral that create the reefs, they're bleached, they die. Once those corals begin to die all the fish populations that they support die off and so on up the chain. The coral reef researchers issued a kind of manifesto at their meeting in November urging people please to take into account what was going on, lest in 50 years our only record of this world beneath the waves will be the films and pictures and things that we've made of them.

In the high Arctic the polar bear—this incredible incarnation of the other, fiercest of our brethren, uninterested in us, not scared of us—the polar bears in large parts of the Canadian north are about 20 percent skinnier than they were 10 years ago. They lost all this weight in the last decade. Because as you melt the pack ice it becomes incredibly difficult to hunt seals and that is what polar bears do for a living. No pack ice, no hunting, no polar bears.

Its crime against the future, against everyone who is going to come after us. No one has ever figured out a better way to permanently alter and degrade the world around us than this. To strip mine the future. If we could imagine how we would feel about people who would have done that to us several generations ago, if it had happened then, then we can imagine how people will one day consider us in this regard, unless again, we do something soon. At the moment we are not doing anything about it. Though our scientific system has done a tremendous job alerting us to the dimensions of this problem, our political system, our cultural system so far has yet to respond in any meaningful way. The reason that it hasn't responded goes back to this question at which we began. As long as we consider ourselves to be enviably at the center of everything and our immediate comfort and gratification the most important of all tasks, it is extremely unlikely that our leadership will rise to the occasion and demand of us any real change.

Al Gore, who knows about these issues better than any politician who ever lived, when he was running for president last year and the price of gasoline began to go up, immediately called for the opening of the strategic petroleum reserve to flood the market with more oil and hence drive down the price of gasoline. You can't blame him for doing it. He understood that he was going to lose the election if he didn't do that. If the price of gasoline got out of control we would not stand for it because we had come to believe that dollar a gallon gasoline was some kind of constitutional right in this country.

George Bush last week announced that he was not going to regulate carbon dioxide in any way, that in essence he was going to kill off the Kyoto Treaty, the one attempt internationally to deal with these questions. The reason he said he was doing it was because his analysis had indicated that taking any steps would drive up the price of electricity and that would hurt American consumers. Well, he is correct.

It is going to cost some money to transition from coal and oil and gas to a renewable energy future. It is going to cost some money and he doesn't think we're going to stand for it. He might well be right and that may be the calculation he's making.

So that's where you and I are right now. How do we get off this dime? How do we learn to stop putting ourselves at the center of everything and help our neighbors, our culture, our country understand the same thing, so that we might rise to the obvious challenge that is put before us in our time - the challenge that is just as square faced as the civil rights challenge was a generation ago or the challenge of fascism a generation before that.

I don't have any easy answers for you; in fact, I should probably just stop here now having alarmed you enough. Let me suggest, at the risk of getting in trouble, that there are a few beginning symbolic but powerful things we could start to do. One of them you've already heard about today. This issue of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is coming before us today as a country. It's been presented as a kind of wilderness development versus oil drilling and it's true it would harm that wilderness to drill in it. But the single problem is what's underneath that. Well, what's underneath that is a big pool of oil and if we bring that oil out and burn it what happens? We release a lot more of that carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. We heat the planet a little bit more. We do a little bit more to contribute to making the Arctic Wildlife Refuge no longer a place of permafrost and caribou but a place of muskeg swamp where no caribou will tread.

And so there are people here I think who will feel moved not only to sign that petition but also to come to Washington in May and to witness there and perhaps to get arrested there. I had the great pleasure of getting arrested in Washington last year with a wonderful woman named Granny D. whom you may have heard about. This 90-year old woman walked across the country for campaign finance reform. We held up a banner in the rotunda of the Capital that said "STOP GLOBAL WARMING. STOP CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS FROM GLOBAL WARMERS." Turns out you're not supposed to try to communicate that directly with one's representatives, and so we went off to the pokey for a while and she turned to me and said "you know, I'm 91 and I've never been arrested. I should have started long ago." I felt good—like I'd had a 50-year head start on her now and had to live up to her.

Just to try to bring this as close to home as possible, and probably uncomfortably close. It's not just actions in Alaska. Its actions all around us that are important. Symbols all around us. Symbols like the huge houses that more and more we are building and do not need. Symbols like, and here's one that I think we can act on quickly, symbols like the sport utility vehicles, SUVs, that have increasingly taken over this part of the world. Now I grew up in Lexington and I was amazed when I'd come back to visit in recent years. I live up in the Adirondacks, where it actually is sort of icy and we have bad roads and all of this, but no one has any money, so they just drive cars or maybe pickups. I was amazed to come back to Lexington a few years ago to see my folks and just went down to the Stop & Shop to get a few groceries. It looked as if the 8th armored infantry had come to Lexington on maneuvers. The only logical conclusion you could possibly have drawn is that Lexington had suddenly been riven by three or four raging rivers one had to cross in order to get groceries. It was the only way that you could perceive what was going on. If you drive a normal car and then you go out and trade it in and get a big SUV and you drive them both the same average distance for a year, in that one year the differential in the amount of energy you use, hence the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> you put in the atmosphere, is the equivalent of opening your refrigerator door and leaving it open for six years.

That's what we're talking about in realistic terms and in symbolic terms. What we're talking about is the endless, gullible elevation of necessary levels of comfort and status and everything else at the complete expense of all around us. It's going to take us a long time to learn how to climb down a little bit from the

heights on which we have put ourselves. We've been at this work for a very long time. All the witness of our religious gurus from Buddha to Christ to Francis to Thoreau notwithstanding, we've done a good job of paying all that lip service and going on about our ways.

Now the signals from the physical world, from God's creation, tell us that we have definitively gone too far and it is time to turn around in some new direction. We will need each other's encouragement and help in doing that. That is why it is so good to see all of you here. In a community like this one, our religious communities are deeply important, almost the only institutions left in our society that posit some goal other than accumulation for our existence here on this planet. Take good care of each other, but don't just take good care of each other—push each other a little bit too. This work has to be done fast and it has to be done lovingly, and it has to be done not only with an eye on the temperature around us, but with an eye on the temperature inside of us—on our understanding of who we really are, not who we've been told we are over and over and over again by all the images that flow through the cable or through the billboard or any of the other places that we increasingly have come to find our identity.

There I end. Thank you much.

## **Reverence for Life**

**Steven Maier**

February 3, 2002

This past summer, shortly after returning from a sabbatical year away from home, I was rummaging around in the basement of our house. It was dark and shadowy, like most basements, and I was examining various cans of paint on a shelf to see what we had. Hmmm, Cameo White, Atrium White, Cobalt Blue.... If it had been a movie, the music would have started, for little did I know that a huge spider was also hanging out with the paint cans.... and I mean big; bigger by a lot than anything I had ever seen, except maybe on TV. In an instant, I had jumped back 5 feet and was choking on my Adam's apple. Now, oooooohhhh, spiders really get to me—must have been some horror movie I saw as kid. In times gone by, I would have reached for the closest weapon and swung, perhaps many times.

But on this day, I hesitated, and after my heart rate re-entered the safe zone, I considered the options. I could kill it, but it was big enough to create some confusion about how this might be accomplished. I could leave it alone, but again, it was big enough so that I would not have been able to continue with my day knowing of its presence in my basement. Finally, I decided I would try to move it to a new home.... outside. A large jar and piece of wood did the trick and I was soon showing the spider its new surroundings under a tree in my yard.

A short while after this incident, I found myself wondering about what had just happened. Why had I hesitated? I had had some sort of feelings for the spider. Why should it have to die? It was just doing what spiders do (apparently very well!). The problem was that it was doing it in my house. Now, I don't know how well the spider liked its new home or whose dinner she became, but I felt good about how I had handled the situation.

This story illustrates what I have come to believe is a fundamental ethic – Reverence for Life. Webster's defines "ethic" as "a set of moral principles and values." These are the things we live by, that define our conscience or our character. What's fascinating about ethics, though, is that they are largely



unenforceable. Some become laws (Thou shalt not kill), but many others we adhere to simply because we come to believe they are the right things to do.

In our reading today, UU Minister Richard Gilbert asks a series of questions,

Why do we continue to work for justice even when we are at times so discouraged? .  
Why do we seek peace when no one pressures or rewards us, and it would be much more satisfying to go and cultivate our gardens or otherwise indulge ourselves?  
Why do we involve ourselves in community service and social action when no one seems to care and we often fail?  
And why have people done these things for centuries?

“No external power is forcing us to meet these obligations,” he says; “we are truly on our own, moved not by the ‘cudgel’ (in Boris Pasternak’s words) but an inward music: the irresistible power of unarmed truth, the powerful attraction of its example.”

Gilbert talks of an inward music and the power of truth. But I find myself wondering, where does all this come from? How much of it is ingrained as part of our genetic makeup and how much do we learn? Is it nature or is it nurture? This has been the stuff of philosophers and theologians (and preachers I suppose) for ages. Increasingly over the past 300 years, it has also become the realm of scientists. It is a complex and difficult area of study and I don’t pretend to have conclusive answers. But what I can do is tell you what rings true for me; what I have come to believe. In this sense, what I will be saying today is more a statement of my own spiritual beliefs than of someone’s concept of objective truth; of my own philosophy of life and not the history of philosophy.

Now this is an interesting and delicate challenge because I know that what I have come to believe is based on what I see as truth in the world around me – things like the principles of ecology and the devastating impacts of human violence on other humans and on all other life on Earth. And I would like to share this view of the world with you. This is partly because that’s what we Unitarian Universalists do. We promote and honor the “free and responsible search for truth and meaning,” our 4th Principle. But, truth be told, I’m also standing here today under the seemingly logical assumption that what rings true for me might also ring true for you. Put another way, I hope my words today will help you see things differently or perhaps more clearly, even if only a little bit. If so, then maybe it can help each of you in your individual searches for truth and meaning.

I had an important “AHA” moment last spring while reading Gilbert’s book, *The Prophetic Imperative, Social Gospel in Theory and Practice*, (2nd Edition, Skinner House Books, 2000). This is a wonderful book, one, by the way, that would be great for an adult discussion group. Its main thesis is that spirituality and social action are inseparable. In a forward to the book, former UUA President John Buehrens refers to Richard Gilbert as “a practitioner of the faith he advocates: publicly engaged religious leadership.”

Well into the book, Gilbert makes the case for coming up with universal principles in defining ethics; in his case a “religious social ethic.” Almost too matter-of-factly, he identifies the concept of “Reverence for Life” as the “ordering” or universal principle for a liberal religious social ethic. He says “reverence for life gives rise to a moral imperative for love in personal relationships, justice in social relationships, and trusteeship in our relationship with our environment.”

Wow, I thought, when I first read this sentence. This means that if we had “Reverence for Life,” if this was a part of our ethic (that is, a part of what we collectively come to believe is the right thing to do), then we would feel compelled to seek “love in personal relationships, justice in social relationships, and trusteeship in our relationship with our environment.” That just about covers it, don’t you think? Well, I’d

like to come back to these three ideas and suggest one important modification, but first I want to explore the concept of Reverence for Life.

I think most of us are familiar with the word “reverence.” It is used in many of our religious traditions to describe how one feels about God or Buddha or Yahweh or the Great Spirit. With Reverence, there is a great respect for the god-figure, but just as importantly, a profound depth of feeling in the believer. I love the collection of four words that Webster’s strings together to define “Reverence” -- “profound adoring awed respect.”

In this case, though, the reverence is for “Life,” and not a god-like figure. Life, in all its forms and manifestations, becomes the object of a profound adoring awed respect. Like my friend the spider, with a Reverence for Life ethic, all forms of life have an intrinsic value. They have a right to do what they do and we humans have an obligation to respect those rights. True believers of a Reverence for Life go even further, it seems to me. Their respect comes to include awe and adoration, and Life, with a capital “L,” becomes sacred.

Where does this idea come from, Reverence for Life? Albert Schweitzer is generally credited with coining the phrase and the ideas behind it. Schweitzer, who lived from 1875 to 1965, was a musician, minister, theologian, and university professor, all by the age of 29. In his early 30s, he became a medical doctor and devoted the rest of his life to serving the medical needs of the people of Africa. In his later life, he was a well-known critic of nuclear arms and nuclear energy and, in 1953, won the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 1915, Schweitzer came upon the insight, "Reverence for Life," as a universal principle of ethics. Schweitzer wrote of what he believed to be the fundamental fact of human awareness. He said, “I am life that wants to live in the midst of other life that wants to live.” From this universal “will to live” evidenced in all living beings, Schweitzer postulated that ethical humans would feel compelled to approach all life with the same reverence they have for their own lives. From such a point of view, he said, “ ‘good’ means to maintain life, to further life, to bring developing life to its highest value. ‘Evil’ means to destroy life, to hurt life, to keep life from developing.” Such a simple description of good and evil makes for a basic and universal principle of ethics.

Whew, now that’s a mindful; sort of like a mouthful, but of ideas and not food. It’s how I often feel when reading or thinking about ethics or theology. I would now like to show you why I find this both so fascinating and so important.

It’s fascinating because it’s a perfect sound bite – 3 words to remember to get you out of any ethical fix. As Schweitzer says in the words at the top of today’s Order of Service, "Reverence for Life contains all the components of ethics: love, kindness, sympathy, empathy, peacefulness, power to forgive." Wouldn’t it indeed be fascinating if Reverence for Life were all we needed to know to have appropriate ethical responses to all the things that happen to us and the world around us?

But fascinating wouldn’t be enough if it didn’t work; if it didn’t ring true or make sense. It’s here that I’d like to bring Richard Gilbert back in, for he helps me to put this all together. Remember, he says that Reverence for Life gives rise to three things: love in personal relationships, justice in social relationships, and trusteeship in our relationship with our environment. Let’s look at each one.

Personal relationships – it is true in my experience that having reverence for the life of another leads to successful, meaningful relationships. Reverence implies an acceptance of the inherent worth and dignity of others, our 1st UU principle. It enables love, compassion, understanding, caring; and it disables actions that hurt or violate others. If my relationship with another person, as a matter of my ethics, starts from a place of reverence, it is sure to lead to good things.

Similarly, if we look at social relationships, the relationships between groups of people in society, reverence is a wonderful place to start. It commands that we empathize, that we work to understand and then rectify the sources of injustice among classes and races of peoples. It commands peace among nations, for Reverence for Life does not permit unnecessary killing or indiscriminate violence. And it allows for forgiveness, for when we revere others, we can begin to see what they need in order to live full and meaningful lives, even if they themselves have done bad things.

Finally, Gilbert says that Reverence for Life leads to trusteeship in our relationship with the environment. Here's where I would like to modify Gilbert somewhat, for while trusteeship is a good and necessary thing, I don't believe it is a sufficient ethical principle for our relationship with the environment. Trusteeship suggests ownership and control and I believe that the proper relationship between humans and the environment requires more humility, more of a sense of "profound adoring awed respect," to go back to our definition of reverence. So, true reverence for the environment would mean a deep understanding of ecology – the interconnectedness of all life. To put in UU terms, it would mean a commitment to the inherent worth and dignity of all life, not just human life.

So, for me, Reverence for Life is a worthy ethical principle. It gives me a guide to moral decisions and actions. But that, in and of itself, is also not enough. An ethic that works is a good thing, don't get me wrong, but I don't believe it would have lasting or universal value if that were all it did. For an ethic to be truly successful, it must also reach deeply into our souls. It must touch us in ways that change how we feel about ourselves and our place in the world.

What I have come to know about myself is that when I live my life according to this ethic and (this is important) when I even just try to make life decisions based on a Reverence for Life, my life has more meaning. I feel more fulfilled, like I'm doing the right things. And not just the right things for society or for Earth, for as important as those are, ultimately what I need to know is that it's right for me personally.

When this happens, I touch my spirit and what a powerful thing that is! I feel good and I feel right with the world. I feel transformed and can see clearly what I need to do.

Funny thing, though. These feelings only last for hours, or if I'm lucky, days at a time. There is so much in the world around us to knock us down to size, to minimize what we do and who we are. I am becoming more and more aware, however, that these connections with spirit are fundamentally important for all of us. When we stop long enough to recognize an inner ethic (like Reverence for Life) and listen to that calm, small voice within us, amazing things can happen.

Blessed Be.

### **Closing Words**

May we all be filled with a profound adoring awed respect for Life and, in so doing, may we come to know our spirits and change the world.

# The Body of God

**Rev. Anne Marie Alderman**

I was sitting in my office the other day. It was a Tuesday or a Thursday evening. I know it was had to be one of those, because it is on those nights that the Tai Chi Society rents this worship space of ours. During those late afternoons people I don't know walk by my office window.

So, I am sitting there and a woman walks up to the very large oak tree that grows through the deck just outside of my office. She walks over to that tree and she embraces it like you would a family member or a long lost friend.

I am watching. I'm thinking...I have heard of people doing that. I like trees. I've even admired the few activists in recent years that have planted themselves in trees for months out west trying to keep old growth forests from being cut down. Her embrace seemed so...almost romantic. I felt a little voyeuristic just sitting there watching her.

I thought, "OK, a tree hugger."

But after reflecting on her embrace of the tree, I realized it didn't serve me to discount what I had witnessed. There was something intriguing, maybe even quite profound in her simple act. It appeared to me to be an act of worship. Certainly, it seemed fitting that that embrace occurred in this sacred space of ours.

After all, I had been thinking about worship that afternoon and what it might mean for us as Unitarian Universalists. I have been wanting to explore with you a particular model of God, a way of understanding God, of using god language that might inform our worship, our common spiritual practice. This model I have in mind could help all of us recognize and embrace the sacred.

"Worship" is what we do that honors what holds ultimate meaning and purpose for us. Worship can be said to be our embrace of what it is we understand to have ultimate worth. I suspect that we don't talk much about it because worship implies an acknowledgement of God. As many of you might have observed God and god-talk are somewhat taboo around here!

I have been reading a book that was published ten years ago, entitled, "The Body of God: an Ecological Theology," by Sallie McFague. Well known for her work on metaphors, in this book she offers a lens for perceiving God that might be useful for addressing the ecological crisis from a religious perspective. I think she also offers us a way to re-claim god-talk that will help us worship.

Her theme is that if we are able to understand that all being, all of creation, the entire universe has equal worth, that worth could elicit a new embrace of the universe, a new understanding of being at home in the world, a new ethic of what the house rules are in our home/the world. It might be useful for us to perceive all manner of life forms as the embodiment of God. This way of perceiving God would re-figure our place in the world in relation to other life in the world. We would understand we are not the masters of other life but bodies among bodies all comprising the body of God.

Her theme relies on what science calls "the common creation story". It is a story of the common beginning and history of all living beings. We are related to all that is because our common beginning and our common history. Included is the evolutionary story, detailing the infinite differentiations, the highly complex networks of interrelationships and interdependencies. We are all radically and profoundly related to each other.

What McFague is talking about is much more than tree hugging, but let's go back to that for a minute...

For many of us simple tree hugging, a simple embrace of a non-human relative, may seem to fall far short of what our UU faith demands. We tend to skip over the simple parts of expressing connection with all that is, and favor sustained liberal activism. In fact sustained liberal activism has become for many of us our primary act of worship. There is no doubt we have an activist heritage. Certainly, activism is a good thing and integral to what we are.

Yet, it troubles me when activism is held out as the only, or the primary form of our spiritual practice/our worship. That narrows all that we can and should be. And if we as a faith community are only activists, how are we different from a justice coalition or The Sierra Club? Perhaps a case can be made that these and other activist organizations do a better job than us with their more focused activities.

Then there are those among us who believe that our primary mode of worship is not activism but the result of our efforts for freedom and justice. Thus, our primary act of worship becomes our unfettered ability to exercise free inquiry, to be rational, to be seekers of truth. Tree hugging falls far short of a UU faith that promotes the exercise of reason and critical inquiry. Yet if our worship is primarily about sharpening our rational abilities, I dare say the intellect is far better nurtured in the academy or the graduate school than here.

Even our best efforts to care for each other, to create the covenantal community, to be bound to each other by standards of loving behavior, can be carried too far. Trying to be the perfect family can become an end in and of itself that isolates us, setting us apart from the non-human world. In these efforts we tend to leave out concern for all the other living bodies around us. We probably aren't the best at providing individual or group therapy any way. Like activism, like seeking truth with refined intelligence, creating good human relationships with each other may be better done in a setting other than within the congregation.

What gives us distinction; makes us a church, a religious faith, if it is not our activism, our seeking after truth, or our caring for each other? It is all these things, but perhaps it is also our worship, our simple recognition, our simple embrace of the holy/the sacred. Shouldn't we be expert at recognizing the sacred when we see it, feel it, sense it? Shouldn't we be expert at the simple embrace of the sacred, at embracing this wonderful life, this world, our bodies and the bodies of all forms of life that are all around us?

The historical answer, of course, to the question of what distinguishes a church for a faith community from a social activist organization, an academy, group therapy, is the worship of God. Reverence, devotion, a sense of the sacred takes infinite varieties of form, yet is the ingredient of worship, an intentional honoring of what we hold sacred that distinguishes a religious community from those groups gathered solely for purposes of social reform, or intellectual stimulation or movement toward more personal or group wholeness.

We have, in the past fifty years or so, known many reasons to move away from, to outright reject an understanding of worship that includes a god or godconcept that was uncomfortable, exclusive, unworkable and ultimately unbelievable. If the God we have previously known is no longer worthy of our devotion or reverence, can we do without God? For many years I have thought the answer was a resounding yes. We have each other. We have the beauty of the earth. We have work to do. Yet, I am beginning to wonder if a new model of God could do us some good. Without a working model of God that is believable, I fear we are without focus as a faith community. Without worship can we even be called a faith? I think there is a void. What is missing we try to fill with activism, with intellectualizing, with

attention to self-awareness and right relationship. I dare say, that what is missing can only be filled with an embrace, with worship, with a simple act of faith.

A new and different sense of the sacred/for God, that “works” for us, other than the ones we may have left behind, may have value for us. Many of us have moved away from imposed religious authority, moved away from proscribed creeds and doctrines, from the abuses of god-concepts that didn’t work, that didn’t ring true, that didn’t bring justice and love. How is it that we will continue our journey as people of liberal religious faith, people who value goodness and the community of each other, who value this world and look for practical ways to be of help? .... Whatever our future journey as UU’s will be, I suspect it will include a re-claiming of God.

McFague takes as her starting point the current ecological crisis. She suggests that changing how we have talked about God, imagined God, will give us a clue about how to understand how we might better embrace the universe. She suggests; that “the goal is not utopia, but sustainability and livability...not the kingdom of God, but a decent life in community for all life-forms and the ecosystem on which we rely.” (p. 68)

We don’t need convincing that we are a part of the interdependent web of all existence. We acknowledge that. We know that our lives are connected to all other beings. We know that the flutter of a butterfly’s wings in the Amazon can affect the weather in Kansas City. We know our relationships with each other and with all of creation are deep and complex. We acknowledge that the western “fix-it” mentality will not work when it comes to the ecological crisis and other manifestations of evil. Post modern science suggests that perceiving the universe as a machine has not worked for sustainability or livability. The universe is better thought of as an organism. We probably don’t need convincing that the common creation story is a workable metaphor for our time. Enlightened scientists and theologians alike are hopeful that all human beings can know and subscribe to this common story, moving past perceiving God as Lord over a kingdom with particular human groups as his primary servants commissioned to carry forth his will. Most of us are convinced that that model no longer works. We know we are one form of life amidst many others. We understand our original unity and our immense diversity and we know that our mission as a church is to work to increase this understanding.

Yet, we have not yet recognized or adopted the implications of this understanding for our worship, for our embrace of the miracle of life in all its splendid forms. I think that is our primary “job”, as a religious community...to be also expert at embracing the miracle of all life and that that is worship.

When I was a child I learned to think of my body as the temple of God. By the time I had grown into adulthood ...I believed this teaching was a function of institutional religion trying to control immoral behavior. I rejected the teaching. I pursued gluttony and pleasure and the thrill of wanton consumption until my body seemed more of a thing, separate and apart from my intellect, my emotion, and my soul. Recently, a desire to integrate my more mature beliefs with my consumption practices has been awakened. And, I have returned to a simple embrace of my own body including a recognition of the “house rules”, ethics for consumption that promote the sustainability and livability of all life. My body needs what all bodies need...not perfection, or glory, just simple nutrition and exercise and to be accepted and recognized with an embrace.

Sometimes we let our religious practice become too complicated, too much work, too much thinking. What we may need in these days is just simple recognition and embrace of what is sacred.

When awe and wonder about the miracle of life appears, may you worship with a simple act of embracing that which life, body to body.

# Wake Now, My Senses: The Religious Imperative for Earth Stewardship

Rev. Fred Small

September 22, 2002

One of my favorite cartoonists is Roz Chast, whose squiggly nerdish people manage to be simultaneously weird and charming—just like most people in real life. Probably my favorite of all Chast cartoons bears the caption, "The Ecologically Minded Meets the Pathologically Frugal" It pictures a woman hanging rinsed Saran Wrap on her clothesline to dry and be reused. "I've been doing this for years!" she says brightly.

Now I'm pretty ecologically minded, and according to my wife I have been known to exhibit pathological frugality. I think the reason I find the cartoon achingly funny is that it shows the sublime lengths to which good-hearted people will go to make a positive difference in the world, and the ridiculous futility of individual action taken to its logical extreme.

Certainly the world needs all the help it can get.

The weather is going haywire, with global climate change the most likely culprit. Freak storms, floods, wildfires, freezes, heat waves, and drought leave thousands homeless and hungry. The city of New Orleans, where our brave Patriots will do battle this evening, is itself battling termite infestation for want of a killing frost. In fifty years there will no glaciers in Glacier National Park, and the fabled snows of Kilimanjaro will be fable, not fact. Many wildlife biologists believe that polar bears are already doomed to extinction. Spring now arrives a full week earlier to the Northern Hemisphere than it did just twenty years ago.

A report commissioned by Congress and released last fall (just in time to be ignored in the wake of September 11) concludes that if nothing is done, in a hundred years Boston will have the climate of Richmond or Atlanta, our coastal communities will be awash, and New England's maple-sugaring and brilliant fall foliage will be only a memory. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a UN-sponsored panel of hundreds of the world's top climate scientists, predicts that global temperature will soar as much as ten degrees Fahrenheit in this century, far more than earlier anticipated. To stabilize the climate, the IPCC concludes that we must reduce global carbon emissions by a daunting seventy percent.

Of course, climate change is just one environmental hazard among many.

Throughout the world, poor and working people, and especially people of color, are pollution's first victims. Their air, water, soil, and shelter are more contaminated, they toil in more hazardous workplaces, and they are more vulnerable to environmental catastrophes. Invasive development threatens the health, religious traditions, and social fabric of indigenous peoples.

"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality," wrote Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "tied in a single garment of destiny." Every religious tradition teaches us to hold sacred the wonders of creation, yet wantonly we desecrate them. Every religious tradition cautions us to temper our cravings for sensation and material things, yet we pursue them addictively, vainly hoping to fill our spiritual emptiness. Every religious tradition forbids theft, yet every day we live unsustainably we steal from our children and our children's children.

Just as Unitarian Universalists of earlier eras worked for the abolition of slavery and for women's rights, prison and education reform, peace, and civil rights, I believe we have a religious responsibility to protect the environment. If we do not, I fear our children and their children, if they survive, will ask us incredulously how, knowing what we knew, we could have failed to act.

In the 1960s and 1970s, a popular groundswell forced tough new laws regulating air and water pollution. By the 1990s, however, it was apparent that the global environment was continuing to degrade. This time, citizens were told that each one of us had the power to save the earth by doing "fifty simple things" like recycling, buying organic produce, and taking public transportation.

Now, I believe in personal responsibility. I recycle, I buy organic produce, and I take public transportation, although the bus doesn't stop quite as near my house as it did when I lived in Cambridge. As a consumer I try to choose less polluting products and services. If every person in the United States did all fifty simple things to save the earth, by golly, I think the earth would be well on its way to being saved. But we haven't, we don't, and it doesn't look like we're about to any time soon.

We've become accustomed to the convenience of disposable packaging and fast food, the comfort of year-round heating and air-conditioning, the cheap thrills of high-tech entertainment, and the flexibility and independence of automotive travel. As any recycler or organic shopper can tell you, it's almost always more expensive in time, money, or both to do the ecologically right thing. And because the chassis of capitalism is built on the engine of consumption, the most sophisticated propaganda machine in the history of the world, that is to say, advertising, works round-the-clock to persuade us to buy vast amounts of things we don't need.

But these are not insuperable obstacles. The insuperable obstacle to effective individual environmental action is this: its success depends upon millions of other individuals doing the same thing. We don't see them do it and have no reason to think they will. Indeed, while we're hanging up Saran Wrap on the clothesline, the mass media show everyone else racing around on snowmobiles and jet-skis.

A basic psychological principle called social proof says we'll do things we think other people are doing. Why should I sacrifice time, money, convenience, and pleasure for a speculative environmental payoff that assumes the cooperation of millions of strangers? Even if a vast simplicity movement succeeded in reducing demand for nonrenewable resources, without other intervention the price of these resources would decline, further stimulating the appetite of those consumers still trapped in thrall of thingdom.

Personal responsibility is essential. But it is not sufficient. In and of itself, it fails to challenge the entrenched interests of corporations and the governmental agencies that pander to them. For this reason, business and government are both enthusiastic supporters of environmental voluntarism: the notion that if each of us just does our part, recycles a little more, pollutes a little less, we won't need to enact any more bothersome laws or regulations. It's a comforting thought, but not a realistic one.

Just as the individual acts of conscience of slaveholders who freed their own slaves would never alone have brought an end to slavery, our individual lifestyle and consumer choices will not alone solve our environmental problems. We need strong international treaties and tough state and federal laws that put all of us on the same playing field with the same rules. We need to pay a price for goods and services that reflects their actual cost to the environment, not merely that of production. This cannot be done without some form of regulation.

And by an unfortunate coincidence, we need bold legislation and courageous political leadership at the precise moment when our political and legislative system is more beholden to capital and corporate interests than at any time in the last century. Whether by inclination, ideology, or the inducements of



Enron and its ilk, our congress and our president have fled every possible opportunity to face up to global climate change.

There's a huge gap between the environmental values of the public, confirmed in poll after poll, and the drill-and-burn policies of the present administration, a gap made vast by the powerlessness and isolation and alienation from the political process most Americans feel. However attached we may be to price, pleasure, and convenience, I believe that Americans would respond to an appeal to their patriotism, their decency, and their responsibility to future generations. Would our political leaders express about global climate change a tiny fraction of the outrage they display about terrorism, we could be well on our way to solving the problem.

How do we bridge the gap between what must be done and what is politically realistic? How can we give people a sense of hope and purpose and power to safeguard the future? How do we move from personal, local, and institutional efforts—vital as they are—to global transformation?

I'm just old enough to remember the early civil rights movement, when massive nonviolent demonstrations led directly to passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 and changed forever the political and moral landscape of the United States.

I remember news photos of black and white clergy, ministers and rabbis and nuns and seminary students, arms linked, dignified and implacable, marching and praying and singing in Selma and Montgomery and Nashville and Washington, DC. Even as a child I understood how these images seized the conscience of the nation. The whole movement was fired with religion, incubated in the southern black churches, propagated through the churches and synagogues of the North, infused with religious idealism and passion and song and story. If religious people could be enrolled in defense of the environment, if our participation were constant and courageous and visible, the environmental movement would gain a moral authority and strategic strength that could tip the balance of power.

Last February I co-founded Religious Witness for the Earth, an interfaith network dedicated to bearing public witness on critical environmental issues, especially global climate change. Our first action was a service of prayer and witness outside the Department of Energy in Washington, DC, last May, after which twenty-two of us, including Bob Luoma and Ernie Huber, were arrested as we prayed in front of the entrance. I'm sure they'd be happy to regale you with tales of the DC jail.

This act of civil disobedience has had ripple effects within and without religious communities that are still being felt. It will not be our last. We're gathering a week from tomorrow in Northampton to plan our next steps. Whether or not you can be with us in Northampton, I invite you to join Religious Witness for the Earth and help us do what we can and what we must to protect future generations from the depredations of ours, whether by writing to our state representative or going to jail.

I cannot promise that we will prevail. I cannot promise even that the human race will endure. The future is not ours to decide. All we can do in the face of violence and greed and hatred is to answer with courage, compassion, and love, and leave the rest to God.

250 million years ago, at the end of the Permian period, for reasons no one knows, ninety percent of the earth's species became extinct. Since then, there have been five more periods of massive extinction, including the present one. Each time, nature has somehow rebounded in astonishing abundance, diversity, and beauty. No doubt it will again.

Whether the human species will be part of the picture is uncertain. Perhaps the mantle of intelligence, creativity, and productivity will be passed to another species that will be kinder, wiser, more farsighted

than our own. In the long run, the earth will be just fine, and when it's time, too, finally passes, surely other worlds will carry on the great adventure of consciousness.

But we cannot stand by as the human race destroys itself, its habitat, and countless other species. To stem our slide toward extinction, the easy and comfortable measures are no longer adequate. Fifty simple things are not enough. It's time to do the harder thing, the longer reach, the greater sacrifice to defend the earth and the sweet imperiled experiment called humanity. Amen.

## **Making the Earth Sacred Again**

**Rev. Dr. Marilyn Sewell**

April 11, 1999

### **Opening Words**

From feminist philosopher and poet Susan Griffin, from her book, "Woman and Nature":

*"I know I am made from this earth, as my mother's hands were made from this earth, as her dreams were made from this earth and this paper, these hands, this tongue speaking, all that I know speaks to me through this earth and I long to tell you, you who are earth too, and listen as we speak to each other of what we know: the light is in us."*

### **Sermon**

I have been at this church for seven years, and for seven years I have never preached about our Seventh Principle, about environmental issues, until today. Now, I had to ask myself, why have I chosen to preach on any number of topics which might, on the surface of things, seem less important to the planet—topics like Viagra, topics like Elvis Presley—while the earth is going to that proverbial hell in a hand basket? Well, there are several reasons. First of all, I thought that I should probably have a personal relationship with nature in order to preach this sermon, and truthfully I hate nature. Now before some of you get too upset, hear me out.

Nature and I seem to be at odds with each other. As soon as I moved out to the Northwest almost seven years ago, I could tell that I was supposed to be more of an outdoor type than I am. No sooner I would meet someone than he would ask, "Do you hike? Do you cycle? Do you ski?" Sure, there were lots of ski slopes in Louisiana, where I grew up. And it snowed once in my childhood, a light dusting that turned us all out of school. After I arrived here, I tried to hike. I injured my foot and for about two years, I could hardly walk more than 30 yards. I tried to ski—not downhill of course but cross-country. Starting was simple, it was stopping I could never get the hang of.

The truth is I think of nature as "red in tooth and claw," as the enemy of my safety and well-being. I think of nature as bringing discomfort at the least and death at the worst. I identify with some of the suggestions left by backpackers last year on Forest Service comment cards: "Trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid building trails that go uphill." "Too many bugs and leeches and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the area of these pests." "Please pave the trails so they can be plowed of snow in the winter." "Chairlifts need to be in some places so that we can get to

wonderful views without having to hike to them.” “The places where trails do not exist are not well marked.” And then this is my favorite: “A McDonald’s would be nice at the trailhead.”

The second reason for my reluctance to preach on this topic is that it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the problems—and to feel guilty, because we all know that we are a part of the problem—and that we can’t help being so, because we live in this culture. With awareness comes a blessing, but also a burden, always, in human life. In no area is this truer than with environmental concerns. There, to know is to grieve. But I hope that you will not leave this sanctuary today feeling guilty and depressed. You didn’t invent the automobile and then pave over half the country. You didn’t spill oil from the Exxon Valdez. Your factory doesn’t pollute the streams. Your company doesn’t clear-cut. Today I’m going to ask you to become more aware of what you can do, and to not burden yourself with what you can’t do—to not burden yourself with guilt and cynicism and shame, which have never empowered people to virtue.

Making the earth sacred again. Once it was considered sacred. Before the established religions emerged—before Christianity, before Buddhism, before Hinduism—human beings articulated their worship through the earth. People venerated nature instead of deities. The sun, bringing light and life, was worshipped; prayer and ritual dancing were directed to the rain god, whose water caused the plants to grow. The Spirit was alive, diffused through all of nature, and tribal people felt at one with nature.

Instead of seeing ourselves as spiritually connected to family, clan, and land, we now see ourselves as separate individuals relating to other separate individuals. Applying our minds to the natural world, which we now view as dead matter to be used, we have produced an extraordinary culture in some ways: we have cars and airplanes that give us mobility, we have computers which let us communicate instantly with others on the other side of the globe, we have amazing medical technology. On a more mundane level, we have microwaves and blenders. But with technology, as with any change, there is always a cost. We find ourselves separated, lonely, fearful. As we have moved to objectify and control nature and harness its riches for ourselves, we find ourselves no longer at home in the world. We are strangers here. Says Native American Lame Deer, “Only human beings have come to a point where they no longer know why they exist. They have forgotten the secret knowledge of their bodies, their senses, their dreams.”

There is a strange ache inside for what has been lost, and mostly we don’t even know where that ache comes from. Then we see the ocean at sunset, and we feel at one with the sea and the earth and the stars, and we know. Or we simply take a walk in our neighborhood and gasp at the beauty of a tulip tree in full bloom, like the one across the street from my house, and we know. We know what we have lost. Our problem is not at base a technical problem—it is a spiritual problem. It is estrangement from the earth and from one another. How do we make the moon speak to us again of love and not see it just as a mass of rock where we planted our flag, our first colony in space? How do we make the earth sacred once again?

First, let’s take a look at how we arrived where we are. Perhaps our exile from the Garden started with Plato and Aristotle, those giants of Western thought, who separated the world-as-idea from the world-as-experience. There it started—this split of mind from body.

Judeo-Christian thought certainly played its part, as well. The Bible rejected the pagan worldview of nature permeated by many spirits in favor of the worship of one God. Animistic religion, in which every stream, every tree, every animal, had a guardian spirit, demanded that these spirits be propitiated before the stream was dammed or the tree cut or the animal killed. In denying pagan animism, in demystifying nature, some say Christianity opened the door to exploitation of the natural world. The Bible also suggests that humans are superior to nature and that nature exists to serve humans. From the first chapter of Genesis: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them

have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

The matter is not that simple, however. There are passages in the Bible that suggest that the natural world should be respected, even revered. The earth is exalted, is seen in the Psalms, for example, as alive and praising God: Psalm 148:2: “Praise the Lord, sun and moon,/ praise him, all you shining stars!/ Praise him, you highest heavens,/ and you waters above the heavens!” The Bible puts restraints on how humans use the earth, and the earth is never seen as dead matter to be exploited by people. For the theologian Augustine, the creation is infused with the grandeur of God. The Christian figure most notably associated with love of nature was Francis of Assisi. An early account says of him: “When he found an abundance of flowers, he preached to them and invited them to praise the Lord as though they were endowed with reason. In the same way he exhorted with the sincerest purity cornfields and vineyards, stones and forests and all the beautiful things of the fields . . . .”<sup>1</sup>

In Christian thought humans were placed above the earth and her creatures, but as good stewards, with the understanding that all creatures, including humans, were radically dependent upon God. It was during the Renaissance that the paradigm change came. During that time, human beings were increasingly elevated as the measure of all things. Humans became godlike in their intelligence and creativity—it was their destiny to master the creation. When we come to the writings of Bacon, Descartes, and Newton, we see a view of nature that is mechanistic, lacking any sense of the sacred. For them, the physical world was created by God, but was not divine. The world of nature could be dissected, studied, used for the benefit of man. Whatever was not human could be modified at will, exploited for gain. And so it stands, until this day.

Western culture is seriously questioning these assumptions for the first time. We do not, of course, want to deny scientific truth for poetic truth. We do not want to deny the benefits of technology. We certainly do not want to go back to a world of superstition in which animals and even humans were sometimes sacrificed to appease the gods of nature. But is it not possible even in this mechanistic world we have created to cultivate attitudes of thankfulness, of connection with the earth, of recognition of our interdependence with all other species? To cultivate a spirituality that is more inclusive than just our personal relationship with the Divine, just our personal salvation, but rather a spirituality that acknowledges our relationship with and dependence upon the earth and all her creatures? When it comes to the woes of the environment, we can never save ourselves individually—and if we are damned, if we literally choke on our garbage, we will be damned together.

And we are choking on our garbage. I remember back in the 60’s when I heard Senator Margaret Chase Smith being interviewed by Hugh Downs on the “Today” show. I’ll never forget that interview. Hugh asked her, “Senator Smith, what do you think is the biggest problem facing humanity today?” And she had a one-word answer. She simply said, “Garbage.” I remember being puzzled. Gee, couldn’t she come up with a better answer than that? Now I understand.

We can learn about a more earth-based spirituality from several sources: from the pagan groups in our midst, from eco-feminist thought, and certainly from Native Americans. Anthropologist Paula Gunn Allen, who comes from a Pueblo background, writes in her book, *The Sacred Hoop*: “We are the land. To the best of my understanding, that is the fundamental idea that permeates American Indian life; the land and the people are the same. . . . The earth is not a mere source of survival, distant from the creatures it

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<sup>1</sup>Roger Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 68.

nurtures and from the spirit that breathes in us. . . . Rather for the American Indians . . . the earth is being, as all creatures are also being: aware, palpable, intelligent, alive . . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Bear Heart, of the Muskogee tribe, writes, “When I was three days old, my mother took me to a hilltop near our home and introduced me to the elements. First she introduced me to the four directions—East, South, West, and North. ‘I’m asking special blessings for this child,’ my mother said. You surround our lives and keep us going. Please protect him and bring balance into his life.’ Then she touched my tiny feet to this Mother Earth, and said, ‘Dear Mother and Grandmother Earth, one day this child will walk, play, and run on you. I will try to teach him to have respect for you as he grows up.’” Bear Heart was introduced, then, to the sun, to the wind, to the water. Next his mother put some ashes on his forehead, saying, “Fire, burn away the obstacles of life for this child. Make the way clear so that he will not stumble in walking a path of learning to love and respect all of life.”<sup>3</sup> This is a different kind of baptism, one that places the child in clear relationship to the earth, all the days of his life.

If we are in exile from nature, then how far have we gone? Can we be redeemed? The facts are scary. Tropical deforestation is taking place at the rate of 25,000,000 acres a year, an area the size of Indiana. Every year we convert 3,000,000 acres of cropland to urban uses. Every day three species go extinct. Crop rotation has been abandoned, and pesticides and herbicides are used so that agri-business can plant the same crop year after year: two bushels of topsoil are lost for every bushel of corn produced. DDT is showing up in Antarctic penguins. No longer just a theory, global warming is here. From the Book of Deuteronomy: “I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses,” says Moses. “Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to God’s voice, and hold fast to God.” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

How personal has this desecration of the planet become for you? For me it is becoming increasingly personal. My son Kash went to college at U.C.L.A., and some days he couldn’t do his usual run, because the smog was so bad. If he tried he would cough and choke. I went to see him—once. It took me an hour and a half to drive sixteen miles. What about all the immune-deficiency health problems people are having, all the allergies, chronic fatigue? And I worry about the amount of cancer I see. Oh, yes, we’ve gotten better at curing it, but why do we have so much? Why is there so little emphasis on environmental causes and prevention? Who stands to gain? Who stands to lose?

Is there hope that we can turn things around? Yes, I believe there is. Thomas Berry, a leading theological thinker on environmental issues, says that though there is more pollution—much, much more—than say, in the ‘70’s, many organizations have been formed to increase our awareness and to deal with the problems. No longer can any politician be anti-environment and be elected—young people today are too well educated about these issues to allow that. Never again will a politician say, as Ronald Reagan said of the giant redwoods, “When you’ve seen one tree, you’ve seen them all.” Not to mention Dan Quayle, who is remembered for several gems: he once said, “It’s time for the human race to enter the solar system.” And on another occasion, he intoned, “It isn’t pollution that’s harming the environment. It’s the impurities in our air and water that are doing it.”

How do we heal this soul sickness? In contemporary North American Hispanic communities, soul loss is called *susto*. The loss occurred when we withdrew from nature, when we began to think of ourselves as the only sentient beings. Indian people relocated to an urban slum of Peru seek healing by returning to

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<sup>2</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Bear Heart, with Molly Larkin, *The Wind is My Mother: the Life and Teaching of a Native American Shaman*. New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1996, pp. 3-4.

the forest at night, to the land that they once knew. They renew their connections through visions of the river, of animals, of plants. The cure for susto, soul sickness, says Native American Linda Hogan, cannot be found in books. "It is written in the bark of a tree, in the moonlit silence of night, in the bank of a river and the water's motion. . . . A person seems so little and small, and without is the river, the mountain, the forest of fern and tree, the desert with its lizards, the . . . movements of life. The cure for soul loss is in the mist of morning, the grass that grew a little through the night, the first warmth of sunlight, the waking human infused with intelligence and spirit."<sup>4</sup>

The paradigm needs to shift again from the literal and utilitarian to the sacred. When we deeply respect the earth as something sacred, we would never desecrate it. Our way of knowing needs to be holistic, connective, participatory, systemic. We must see the earth as a system of intricate patterns, and see ourselves as a part of those patterns. We have a sense of incarnation, and now we must move to co-incarnation, and see the Divine interwoven in all.

You may be asking at this point, what can I do to make a difference? The problems seem so immense, and the solutions so difficult to get hold of. Actually, many, many people are working in various arenas to get at specific problems, and some of them are in our Seventh Principle group right here at the church. Stop by their table in the Parish Hall after the service to see how you can become involved.

In your personal life, you can't do everything, but you can do something. Start small. I have started by walking a mile to the grocery and then a mile back rather than driving. And the Associate Minister Tom Disrud and I carpool to meetings whenever we can. I eat organic foods as much as possible. These are small things, but they are a beginning. Some people in our church have gone much farther than I in living out our Seventh Principle. John Allison is a creative recycler. John recently found new homes for old appliances and cabinetry when friends remodeled their kitchen. Leslie Pohl-Kosbau has been the director of Community Gardens for 23 years, where she enables city dwellers to grow their own fruits and vegetables. Roberta Richards takes her two pre-schoolers to church on the bus rather than driving. Joe Walicki works to protect wild places by getting them designated as wilderness areas. Lin Harmon-Walker left a lucrative career as a lawyer in 1996 to become the Executive Director of Friends of Trees. The point is not to save the world—the point is to do your part and to raise consciousness so that more and more people understand. That's all.

Nobody is asking you to be an ascetic. I like Theodore Roszak's concept of "sustainable extravagance." Yes, sometimes we want to be excessive. So buy a delicious foreign cheese, or try a wine you've never tried, or take a luscious bubble bath, or purchase a single red rose, just for yourself. These little splurges are satisfying, and they don't take a high toll on the environment.

For me, the biggest reason for us to turn things around is our children. We want to pass on to them a world where they can breathe the air, where they can drink the water, where they can feel safe in purchasing food. One day they will ask questions, awkward questions. A twelve-year-old girl gave a remarkable speech at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June of 1992. She said, "I'm only a child and I don't have all the solutions, but I want you to realize, neither do you. You don't know how to fix the holes in the ozone layer. You don't know how to bring the salmon back up a dead stream. You don't know how to bring back an animal now extinct. And you can't bring back a forest where there is now a desert. If you don't know how to fix it, please stop breaking it . . . . You teach us how to behave in the world. You teach us not to fight with others; to work things out; to respect others; to clean up our mess;

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Hogan, "The Great Without," *Parabola*, Spring 1999, pp. 22 and 24.

not to hurt other creatures; to share, not be greedy. Then why do you go out and do the things you tell us not to do?" Why, indeed.

We're not talking about giving a donation to Greenpeace once a year, or the Sierra Club. We're talking about seeing the earth as holy and us as conscious participants in its holiness. We're talking about passing on to the next generation a viable living space for them and for their children. What, I ask you, could be more important than this? So be it. Amen.

### **Prayer**

Creator God, we ask for forgiveness when we have failed to respect the magnificent creation you have given us. Wake us up, and help us to see with new eyes. Help us to heal the scars on our home the earth. Help us to cherish your good gifts and care for them as we should. So be it. Amen.

### **Benediction**

Go now in thankfulness for the beauty and fruitfulness of the earth. Go in peace and go in love.

## **Two Homilies**

**Rev. David Borglum**

### **I. Reflections on Psalm 8**

Imagine yourself as the Psalmist, silently gazing into the heavens on a cloudless night with no city light to impede your view. Observe the black sky punctuated with white dots that we call "stars." In the darkness and stillness you feel awe, astonishment, and delight at the universe, which feels like an immense cathedral.

*"O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens."*

You sense that the universe is incomprehensibly immense.

Most of us live in homes or apartments or condominiums, which are on streets, which are in cities or villages, which are in the United States or Canada or Puerto Rico, countries which occupy a very small portion of Planet Earth's land mass

Earth is rotating and revolving around our friendly and life-giving local medium-sized star, the sun, which is one million times larger than our little planet. Now light travels about 186,000 miles per second and travels around the circumference of Earth more than seven times in one second. It takes the sun's light more than seven minutes to reach us. Our solar system is part of the Milky Way, which has about 300 billion stars.

Our entire solar system is being whipped around the outer edge of the Milky Way at a speed of 180 miles a second. Alpha Centauries, the next closest star, is four light years away; what we see today happened about the time my daughter Angela was born. The overwhelming majority of what we see in the night sky occurred before WE were ever born. It takes 30,000 light years for Sagittarius (in the center of our

galaxy) to reach us. With binoculars, we can see the Andromeda galaxy; we're actually seeing Andromeda's light of two and a half million years ago, when the first humans were first discovering the use of tools.

The Milky Way and Andromeda pinwheel around one another; with satellite galaxies, we are the "local group" which revolves around a central hub called the Virgo Cluster (a group of one thousand galaxies.) It's estimated that there are about one trillion (one thousand thousand thousand thousand) galaxies in our universe. And the universe keeps expanding.

While Psalmist did not have the scientific and mathematical information that we have today, the Psalmist lived in and communed with the elements and the night sky much more than we modern folks do. Our factual knowledge is by far the smaller portion.

So if you get upset that the A's or Giants lost a baseball game, or a recipe flops, or your computer crashes, or even if a loved one dies or leaves, you might go to a quiet place away from city light, lose yourself in the night sky and regain perspective.

As you merge with the immense universe, you reflect on your role in the larger scheme of things. At first you feel utterly small and insignificant:

*"When I look at your heavens, the works of your finger,  
the moon and the stars that you have established  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?"*

Yet being a human in such a universe is such a precious gift and blessing:

*"Yet You have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honor.  
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
You have put all things under their feet."*

Walter Brueggemann describes the meaning of "dominion" with these words:

*"The dominance is that of a shepherd who cares for, tends, and feeds the animal. Thus the talk of 'dominion' does not have to do with exploitation and abuse. It has to do with securing the well-being of every other creature and bringing the promise of each to full fruition...the role of the human person is to see to it that the creation becomes fully the creation willed by God."  
(Bruggemann, Genesis [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982], pp.32-33)*

## **II. Who Is My Neighbor? Reflections on the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke: 10:25-37**

The not-so-well intentioned lawyer in each of us, eager to know that God is on our side and that we have special in's with the Creator, asks Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus' famous parable blasts the assumption that our neighbors are limited to law-abiding religiously observant folks of our religious perspective. It celebrates a group that was despised by most Jews in Jesus' day because it was ethnically, religiously, and geographically different. The purpose of Jesus' famous parable of the Good Samaritan is to shatter prejudice and self-righteous superiority and to break down barriers people place on their compassion.



Three hermeneutical questions to ask are: Who are our neighbors today? Who or what are the contemporary counterparts of Samaritans? Because of our prejudices and preoccupations, do we fail to recognize and appreciate others that do serve and express compassion?

Our neighbors include: the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered; our sister and brothers of all ethnic minorities; prisoners, usually treated shamefully as subhuman and deprived of dignity and basic rights; the homeless, hungry and other poor in our country and abroad; maybe even fundamentalists whom I just know are wrong.

Today it's imperative that we expand the concept of neighbor to include two new groups as well: future generations and non-human life forms.

The well being, if not very survival, of our grandchildren and great grandchildren, depends on the actions of folks like us today. Can we love them as we love ourselves?

And just as law-abiding Jews in Jesus' day believed that they were God's chosen (and superior) people, so we humans from overdeveloped countries have been taught to believe that we are the very pinnacle of creation, God's crowning glory; in comparison to us, all other life forms are inconsequential. Who cares if a few thousand mice are blinded, strapped down, or are injected with carcinogenic substances to do "product testing" or "medical research" of questionable value?

Now admittedly, Jesus didn't talk about future generations or other species. The viability of the planet in 50 or 100 years and the mass extinction of species simply were not issues in His age. They are crucial issues in ours. As Thomas Berry writes in *Dream of the Earth*, "To wantonly destroy a living species is to silence forever a divine voice."

While the Parable of the Good Samaritan is all about compassion, it's not a "nice" parable. It has bite, punch, and a potent challenge to change our lives.

### **The Parable of the Good Redwood Tree**

A person is thrown in the ditch. Actually, I think the person was you. And probably me, too. I suspect we're all stuck in the ditch. It's not a pleasant ditch to be in; it's summertime and it's very hot and getting hotter by the year, there are no trees to shade us, and the aquifers below us and the air above us are polluted. It stinks in there.

An active lay woman, on three committees in her local church and one in the Conference, goes driving by on her way to an important church meeting. She has six file folders filled with paper and a larger stack of loose papers in the front passenger seat; while they're all for her meeting, she'll never read most of them. She's afraid she'll be late to her very important meeting and is driving too fast to see the people in the ditch.

Later a clergyman, on five committees in his own church and three of the larger church, flies over the site at breakneck speed. He has even more papers stuffed into his briefcase. He's going too fast to even see the ditch, much less the people in it.

Just a couple of miles away is a redwood tree in a park. For over 2000 years it's stood there, receiving energy from the sun's fire and light, nutrients from the earth, water from rainfall. Since before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth it's been working in partnership with animals by breathing in carbon dioxide and breathing out oxygen, while animals breathe in oxygen to breathe out carbon dioxide in the wondrous balance of life. That act of service has become increasingly important because human animals have

grown so numerous; moreover, humans have been creating massive amounts of carbon dioxide by burning fossil fuels, and this has destabilized the delicate balance of Earth's atmosphere.

A logging company wants to cut down the tree so that it can make and sell more paper, probably for the very important meetings of the very busy people and for advertisements in the newspapers and magazines of the cars that the very busy people need in order to drive to their meetings. But some others said, "We must save this redwood tree."

Jesus said, "Now which of these, the lay woman, the clergyman, or the redwood tree, is helping the persons in the ditch (that's all of us) the most? Which of the three is serving the most? Which is most fully living the way that our Creator wants them to live?"

## Mother in Green

Rev. Margaret Keip

*There is something in all of us that feels deep connection with the past. Perhaps the sudden dampness of a beach cave or the lines of sunlight piercing through the intricate lace patterns of the leaves in a darkened grove of tall trees will awaken from the hidden recesses of our minds the distant echoes of a remote and ancient time, taking us back to the early stirrings of human life on the planet. ...In the beginning, people prayed to the Creatress of Life... At the very dawn of religion, God was a woman. Do you remember? [Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, 1978]*

When I really stop, stock-still, silence my assumptions, and think about it, it seems utterly obvious that the original human image of the divine—source, creator and nurturer of life—would be as Mother. Think about it. How could it not?

The thought feels so foreign now. Yet, for up to 25,000 of the 30,000 years or more since the dawn of human consciousness, it was an utterly natural assumption that god—the source of our being and becoming, the wonder and mystery of it all—was Mother, immanent in the burgeoning world, the fertile earth. The cycling seasons of spring into summer into autumn into winter and spring again (begin anywhere you will) — the sequence of birth and awakening, growing, ripening and giving birth, aging and dying — these are revelations as true as any scripture. Truer! As true as the truest reading of their universal language we that can render. They are revelations of kinship between humans and animals and plants and the world we share. Plants pregnant with fruits—and animals pregnant with offspring—and the earth pregnant with us all.

Her name was ISIS in Egypt, ISHTAR in Babylon, ANANNA in Sumer, ASTARTE in Canaan. She was the Great Mother. She was creator of the universe and source of its bounty; she was prophet and healer. And tribes in temperate lands who worshipped her gave birth themselves to the earliest systems of government and law, to agriculture, architecture, medicine, metallurgy, ceramics, textiles, wheeled vehicles and written language.

Meanwhile, over eons, a vast transformation had been taking place in time's patient pace, as food gathering evolved into gardening, and hunting gave way to herding. People were settling on the land, claiming a place. And once our ways of life tie us to land, we then to go on to tie the land to us. The earliest known examples of written language are temple accounts of land rental payments.

In these societies the mother was the head of the clan, inheritance was passed on to daughters, and a husband lived in his wife's home. Herodotus, a Greek historian writing in the 5th century BC, reports that

in Egypt "the women go in the market place, transact affairs and occupy themselves with business while the husbands stay home and weave." Marriage contracts of the day stipulate that even if a wife should divorce her husband she would continue to feed and clothe him and see that he was properly buried. And love poems discovered in Egyptian tombs suggest that Egyptian women did the courting, and might ply the man of their choice with intoxicants to weaken his protests.

Many of the goddess communities were governed by assembly, with both men and women taking active part. But some were matriarchies—governed by women—because they were also theocracies, governed by priests, and the priests were women.

In the goddess religions, the creation of life was holy, and sexuality itself was celebration. It's well nigh impossible for us to comprehend, much less honor or even allow this, growing up as we have in a shame-based, sexually repressed (and thus obsessed) society — sexuality being too powerful a drive to ignore or deny, though these have been tried. In truth, Western civilization evolved as we know it in reaction to the goddess religions, a reaction that grew over the several thousand years that it took for waves of tribes migrating from the north to overrun and conquer the lands of the Goddess.

These nomadic tribes were primarily Alpine folk, bigger and taller, with horse-drawn chariots and iron weapons; and they began invading the predominantly agricultural Mediterranean world sometime around 3500 BC. They were hunter-warriors who worshiped mountain gods, gods who rained fire from the sky and spoke in storm and thunder; gods like Yahweh.

For several thousand years these cultures intermingled. Invaders married temple priestesses. And the goddess religions absorbed the mountain gods, while the Goddess herself survived as the popular choice of the people for thousands of years after the initial invasions.

But the partnership unraveled. Matrilineal systems (with name, property and authority traced through one's mother) eroded patriarchal power. Mother-kinship had to go, and thus, so did the Great Mother goddess. It was a political issue at heart, and the consequences for women were immense. For children, too, who could never have been deemed "illegitimate" in a mother-kinship culture. Patriarchal systems gained ascendancy, and have held so through the millennia since.

Thomas Berry, Catholic monk and scholar and passionate eco-theologian, turning 90 next year, names four patriarchies that have controlled Western history and become progressively destructive: the classical empires, the institutional church (not the least his own), the nation-state, and the modern corporation. That their achievements have been vast is evident. Less evident is that they have been plundering the planet and devastating its life systems. Rarely evident, until now.

When free-market economic theory was conceived (by Adam Smith in 1776), the world population was one-tenth of what it is now and natural resources abounded — while in contrast, human inventions were rare and precious. Two centuries later we're awash in ingenious technology, while "all the goods and services we trade ultimately depend on natural resources and processes" that are rapidly dwindling. "No longer can we rely on the infinite bounty of nature to provide healthy soil, clean air, and potable water." [Lissa Harris, "The Wealth of Nature", *Grist Magazine*, April 2003]

The earth can exist without us. We cannot exist without the earth, as Thomas Berry flatly—or rather roundly!—declares.

Alan Watts once framed the point in a beguiling way:

*If a flower had a God it would not be transcendent flower but a field. — Moreover, a field as discussed in physics, an integrated pattern of energy, a field that would not only be flowering, but also earthing, raining, shining, birding, worming and being. [peopling, too] A sensitive flower could feel out through its roots and membranes into this entire pattern, and discover itself as a particular exultation of the whole field. The field flows into the flower, and the flower is a wiggle in the flow....*

The word “god”, Watts concludes, is more of an exclamation than a proper name; it expresses reverence and love for our reality. Putting a human face on it will do, if we do not take it literally. [ Alan Watts, *In My Own Way*, Random House, 1973]

Something never anticipated has been occurring. Not the least among Unitarian Universalists—when over the course of three years of debate and study and sequential votes, from 1993 to 1995, our annual UUA General Assemblies occurring each June added a sixth source to “the living tradition” we claim:

*Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.*

This was heralded already in our 7th principle, respecting the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Now we were reclaiming a heritage. It was not an empty gesture. There has followed the “Green Sanctuary” program for becoming active, practicing, deeply committed, Earth-friendly congregations—just as together you here have undertaken this year.

All this reflects the re-emergence in our time of something ancient to humans, a sense of sacred kinship with nature itself. The Gaia hypothesis expresses it among serious scientists at the forefront of the “deep ecology” movement. Gaia was the name given by ancient Greeks to the earth as primordial Mother. Biochemist James Lovelock borrowed her name for his thesis that the planet behaves as a great living system, one vast and complex organism in which everything that arises relates to everything else.

This sensibility has never, in truth, disappeared completely, despite its having long fallen into disrepute and disuse. Hear this example, from an American classic.

Henry David Thoreau was assailed by loneliness during the first several weeks after going to live in his woods by Walden Pond [as I would have been, too, and perhaps you]. And then, in the midst of a gentle rain, he writes —

*I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops; and in every sight and sound around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once, like an atmosphere, sustaining me. ...Every little pine-needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.*

Hildegard of Bingen was a 12th century [1098-1179] mystic, a German Benedictine nun. She was a preacher at a time when canon law forbade women to preach, a named composer when most music was anonymous, a writer, an artist, a visionary, an herbalist and healer. Her home was a cloister in a lush river valley in Bavaria, and her theology was grounded in that rich earth.

Humankind itself is an earth, she said, an earth that contains all moistness, all verdancy, all germinating power. We are meant to be green, she proclaimed. Gaze at the beauty of earth’s greenings — that is the word of God. And she said we are endowed with light:

*The air is life, greening and blossoming.  
The waters flow with life.  
The sun is lit with life.  
The moon, when waning, is again rekindled by the sun,  
waxing with life once more.  
The stars shine, radiating with life-light.  
[All creation is gifted with the] ecstasy of [God's] LIGHT.*

And we know now, ever since photosynthesis was first understood, that light itself feeds a world that is green. Green chlorophyll in leaves uses energy from the sun to convert water and carbon dioxide from the air and nutrients from the soil into sugar—food for plants, and in turn, food for us. This is Mother earth and Father sun, in love all around us. Can any reality better honor your mother, your father, your own self as nurturer of life, than their vibrant dance?

Years ago I was given an indelible experience—a flight encircling the Monterey Peninsula in a single engine airplane — which flew not too high to sever me from knowing the earth below as my home, yet high enough to see the land anew. And gazing down, I discovered what I would want first of all to do if I were the Great Mother.

I would want to take my hand, now measuring so large against the landscape, and caress those green velvet hills, run my fingers down the folded canyons, scratch behind the trees. — But I would have to be oh, so careful not to disturb the slumbering earth, lest it purr in pleasure and rub back against my hand, and unsettle all the tiny creatures living there.

I have understood the old goddesses and gods better now, after that flight.

## **Thinking About Nature: Do Environmental Ethics Matter?**

**William S. Lynn, Ph.D.**

The recent articles in *Sierra North Star* on environmental ethics are intriguing. How we value and relate to nature is certainly important. For those of us less philosophically inclined, however, we may legitimately ask if they matter? Do environmental ethics make a difference, or are they a distraction from the central business of environmental politics and policies?

Let us explore this challenge by beginning with a story.... You are having dinner with friends and new acquaintances at a local restaurant. The conversation turns to protecting the environment. One of the acquaintances advocates what amounts to raping the earth for the resources necessary for “economic growth”. The conversation becomes heated. You debate the negative social externalities of pollution, the idiocy of wasteful consumption, the naive faith in high technology, the human need to experience the natural world for physical and psychological health, the importance of balancing human populations to the earth’s carrying capacity, the viability of alternative forms of economic development, our responsibilities to children and future generations, political-economy and environmental justice, and questions of biodiversity. Finally, in a condescending and sneering manner, your protagonist accuses you of being a “tree-lover”.

“So? What’s wrong with that?” you ask.

"Trees are just things", he responds, "I care about *people!*"

"So do I, but nature has rights too!"

"Nature can't have rights. Only people can, because people make those rights. They're political. What you are really saying is that trees are as valuable as people. I think that's immoral. People come first in my book".

At this point your friends begin to squirm. You can see it in their eyes; "she's gone off the deep end—again". Everybody would love to talk about something else, anything but the rights of nature. And once again you feel, well, cheated. Later that week you discuss this with your best friend.

"The guy's an intellectual gnat; his views were simplistic. Besides, I knew the issues, and I was persuasive. Yet defending his position on the basis of morals, that is, saying humans have greater moral value than anything else in nature, seemed to turn the tables. And you know what? I didn't know what to say, or how to respond! Why? Well, I never really thought about it before. And maybe he's right. After all, humans are the most advanced and dominant life-form on the planet, aren't they? Since only humans think morally, we can't have moral obligations to anything that isn't human, can we? This makes human needs primary, doesn't it? So how can I defend the notion that nature has moral value? Besides, what the hell do I really mean by 'the rights of nature' anyway? Then again, why is it that anyone invoking economic growth or human superiority is recognized as reasonable? Why is it that whenever I say nature has moral value, I'm regarded as hysterical?"

Sound familiar? I expect so. Having experienced a similar scenario six years ago, I began clarifying my ethical assumptions regarding nature. Indeed, the process led to my current occupation as a graduate student in geography. So having recalled our common experience through the device of fiction, what do you think now? Is an environmental ethic important? My answer is yes, and while the reasons are many, I will note just three practical ones. First, a moral appreciation of nature forms one of the core motivations for being an environmentalist. Second, environmental ethics helps justify environmentalism to others. Third, an ethic regarding nature clarifies our moral vision of how humans should relate to the natural world.

### **Reason 1: A Core Motivation**

As a Sierra Club member, I often focus my attention on specific problems or political campaigns regarding the natural world. Many of us share this focus. Without doubt, environmental policy and politics is central to our individual and Club activities. Yet we can be preoccupied with these matters, losing the forest for the trees, and forgetting the reasons why we became environmentalists. We may fail to generate, recognize or articulate our conceptions about the moral value of nature. Indeed, the need to consider nature in a moral way is a core motivation to why we became environmentalists in the first place. We want a safe, aesthetic, and fecund nature not only for ourselves, our children, or other human beings, but because we have direct moral obligations to some or all of the beings, entities, and processes of nature. GreenPeace activists in zodiacs blocking a whaling harpoon do not risk death because they want a more rational utilization of 'the whale resource'. They act on the conviction that the whale is a being of moral worth, and it is our ethical obligation to protect she and her calf.

### **Reason 2: Justifying Environmentalism**

With other environmentalists, we often take this moral appreciation of nature 'on faith'. Since we share this perspective, there seems little need to discuss, develop or defend it. When this 'faith' is challenged, however, we are inarticulate against the skeptic. Indeed, unable to defend our perspective, it is taken as

an unreasonable assumption. We may be accused of imposing our personal preferences on others, of being emotional over the “harvest” of animals, or participating in a mystical pagan cult. To counter such tactics, we need to articulate the reasons for and validity of our perspective. We will not convince everyone. An old Quaker saying notes “I have no defense against the closed mind”, and universal conversion is too much to require of anyone or any idea. Even so, an environmental ethic helps us to disavow unfair labels, influence personal and social perspectives on nature, and draw sympathetic persons to our camp.

### **Reason 3: Envisioning Moral Goals**

An environmental ethic helps us clarify the moral ends we wish to achieve in our relationships with nature. Take, for example, the end of achieving rights for nature. It is true that ‘rights’ are a political concept, created by human beings in the context of society and culture. Because of this, perhaps political rights are best reserved for human beings. But rights ‘language’ has a much wider meaning, reflecting a distinction between political and moral rights. To assert the ‘rights of nature’ is not to say that nature has or can produce political rights. Rather it is a claim that there are more or less right and moral ways to relate with nature, ways which should be recognized politically and reflected through law.

This is similar to the abolitionists’ claim that African-American rights were violated through slavery. Certainly slaves did not have political rights under the constitution; they were human property. Yet to say slaves had moral rights was perfectly comprehensible, however controversial. It was a call for law and politics to reflect the moral imperatives of liberty and dignity for all human beings, regardless of the politically and morally irrelevant criteria of skin colour.

There are other reasons for the importance of environmental ethics, but space demands they await another discussion. Let us return to our story.... You spent last year reading environmental ethics and ecofeminism. While attending a political fund-raiser, you are drawn into a argument over environmentalism. The lobbyist from BWCAW Extraction Inc. states that environmentalism is a special interest movement of the rich who are seeking to protect their favorite vacation spots. You debate with him the history of the movement, the connections with public and environmental health, the aspirations of working-class people for a better quality of life, the injustice of imposing risks upon others through the building of polluting power plants and mines, the racism behind placing toxic waste and tailings dumps in poverty-stricken areas of North America and the Third World, the corporate greed behind calls for markets in clean air and water, and the centrality of green politics to the populist revolutions in eastern Europe. You demonstrate a clear grasp of the social ethics and political economy of environmentalism. In desperation, the lobbyist pulls out his ‘trump card’.

“Isn’t there something wrong with those who care more about loons than people”, he says. “All this talk about environmental values and justice is just a facade. My company is interested in providing jobs for unemployed Minnesotans. That’s justice. All you really care about is nature, and you’re willing to sacrifice a man’s livelihood for it”.

Your reply is cogent. “First off, I don’t accept the notion that we must destroy the environment in order to have jobs. People and nature are compatible. The trick is to find appropriate development to preserve the integrity of both. Second, you are advocating a form of unsustainable development—a flash in the pan. You’ll go in, hire a few low-wage workers, leave with the profits, and people will be worse off than before. They won’t have a decent job, and they’ll have a degraded environment. Where’s the ethics in that? Finally, I do care about loons and so should you. They are beings with needs of their own. They have as much moral right to be there as you or I, and we are obligated to take their needs into account”.

“That’s nonsense”, he replies, “Loons haven’t moral rights; they aren’t human. Besides, even if they did, it’s us or them, mankind or loons. And people are on the top of the list, as far as I’m concerned”.

“Seems to me you’re stuck in a dualistic way of thinking about things. Just because an animal isn’t human, doesn’t mean it can’t have moral rights. That’s called speciesism. It is no different than racism. As for this us/them talk, there’s no reason to think of everything in terms of hierarchies centred on human beings. That’s called anthropocentrism, and it is no different than ethnocentrism. Why don’t you try thinking in terms of interconnections. If we are ever going to care for other people, we need to learn to care for nature as well”.

Clearly exasperated, the lobbyist stalks off, muttering. An aid to the Senator, however, approaches you. Having overheard your conversation, she is impressed with the way you handled yourself and asks about your ideas for environmentally sound and sustainable development. As an African-American, she has also heard that the novelist Alice Walker makes a connection between racism, sexism and speciesism, and wants to know if you know anything about that.

Do you want this scenario to sound familiar? It can. Indeed, I frequently experience this opening of minds as I discuss environmental ethics with professors, graduate students, and the undergraduates I teach. So as you can see, environmental ethics do matter! To prepare ourselves to live this story-line we need only to discover, discuss and defend our moral relationship with nature.

Thanks. Share the earth.

*Note from Author: I wrote this popular-press essay some years ago as a graduate student in geography at the University of Minnesota. Sierra North Star (now the Sierra Journal) is the news magazine of the North Star chapter of the Sierra Club, based in Minneapolis, MN. See Lynn, William S. (1992) Thinking About Nature: Do Environmental Ethics Matter? Sierra North Star, 39:3 et seq.*

## **Biography**

William S. Lynn, Ph.D. is Co-Director and Senior Research Scholar at the Center for Humans and Nature (<http://www.humansandnature.org>), and Director of the Center’s Humans, Animals and Nature program. Bill received his doctorate in geography from the University of Minnesota (2000), where he studied philosophies of geography, critical landscape studies, practical ethics, interpretive social science, and qualitative methods. His research explores animal ethics and global ethics, with a focus on wildlife conservation and global sustainability. A founding editor of the journal *Ethics, Place and Environment*, he is a Research Associate at Vassar College, and a consulting ethicist (<http://www.practicaethics.net>). His current writing and public appearances focuses on wolf recovery and predator management, animals in urban landscapes, posthuman ethics and social theory, and cosmopolitan perspectives on sustainability and justice. He is currently finishing a book, *Practical Ethics: Moral Understanding in a More Than Human World*.



# The Mud and Dirt of Things

Rev. Margaret Keip

May 16, 2004

*Let me go where'er I will, I hear a skyborn music still  
It sounds from all things, all things old;  
It sounds from all things, all things young;  
From all that's fair, from all that's foul,  
Peals out a cheerful, cheerful song.  
It is not only in the rose; it is not only in the bird  
Nor only where the rainbow glows  
Nor in the song of woman heard...  
But in the mud and dirt of things  
There always, always something sings.  
--Ralph Waldo Emerson*

*Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return.*

—Ancient Hebrew priests wrote that line into Genesis, chapter 3, as a curse from Yahweh. But it's not. It's not a curse.

Loren Eiseley stated the matter richly when he wrote of his wonder at how it is managed “that the simple dust takes on a history and begins to weave these unique and never recurring apparitions in the stream of time.” In the years of my existence, he wrote, “every atom, every molecule that composes me has changed its position or danced away and beyond to become part of other things.” And “new molecules have come from the grass and the bodies of animals to be part of me a little while.”

“All flesh is grass,” wrote the ancient prophet, Isaiah.

“Look for me under your boot-soles,” agreed Walt Whitman. “You will hardly know who I am or what I mean, but I shall be good health to you nevertheless.”

As Lily Tomlin puts it, “we all time-share the same atoms.”

With the dumbfounding discovery in the 20th century that matter and energy are interchangeable, manifestations of each other, physicists now assure us that “nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace; nature does not know extinction,” in the words of one; “all it knows is transformation.” [Wernher von Braun]

Transformation! — Our bodies not only into dust, but onward, even into warmth or light. And our consciousness...? If “nothing in nature can disappear without a trace,” is consciousness **a part** of nature, too?—or **apart from** it? We can only wonder about the fate of consciousness.

From what we know of the cosmos at the moment, we are composed quite literally of stardust. *Star dust!*—“sky born music”—incarnated for unique moments as conscious human beings; able to savor the beauty of stars, the awe of awareness.

We belong to a creative cosmos which physicists claim resembles more a great thought than a great thing. Thus, the universe appears to be sheer activity. Energy is more elemental than matter. Things, then, are not beings; they are events in time, they are becomings. You and I are, too.

These are principles of “process thought” (a perspective grounded in quantum physics and Greek philosophy, and first formulated by Alfred North Whitehead some 75 years ago). It informs much of how I think and what I trust and aim to live by. In this view, everything—each event—that happens is a selective embodiment of the whole universe preceding it. And death is not destruction. It is merely completion of an indelible moment, and bridge to another.

It tickles me to find this same understanding expressed by Václav Havel, the eloquent and courageous playwright who in 1989 became the first president of a free Czechoslovakia: “Our death ends nothing,” he says, “because everything is forever...an integral aspect of..the cosmos, of nature, and of life. ...Nothing is forgotten.”

More scientific folks accept this as true of elements and atoms; for we have learned that even rocks record their history, once one knows how to read them. The more mystical among us believe it true also of energy and consciousness. Either way, begin with the premise that *nature does not know extinction, only transformation*; spin it out a while; and it will follow that we cannot ever really throw anything away!

Spin it still farther, and everywhere becomes *home*. This beautiful blue-green planet for starters. Viewed from space, the fences, the boundaries, the lines and “stitches on our maps where we think we really split the planet into parts” [Joseph Pintauro], all disappear.

This floor, this plot of land, the oceans to east and west, and the mountains between and beyond them are all part of each other. So are the house where you are living, and the wheels that carry you hither and yon. There is no place but home. And no where else that's **real** to be. “Elsewhere” exists only in memory and in imagination — as when we image ourselves somewhere else, and don't connect that somewhere else with who and where we are right now.

Separation is a trick of perception. — A very useful trick for living in the world, where we can only deal with a small slice of life at a time, but ultimately false. We still belong to it all; and all of it, to us. Believing something is gone when we can no longer see or touch it is only a habit of concrete thinking; safe, but also sad, because the immediate loss of what we tangibly love is always wrenching. We instinctively **attach** — to existence, and to each other. As poet Lisa Bancel (a student at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley in the mid 1970s) keenly captures it:

*The mist is God, no doubt,  
But here and now  
I know with sheer and utter certainty  
That sometimes, sometimes,  
None will do but human arms.*

Martin Buber spoke of a YES which allows us to be, and which comes to us from one human being to another. Yet it is also true that as we grow we each need to say our own YES to existence, and embrace with our own arms the experiences that shape our lives, even the tragic ones. All that we have been, felt, done, achieved, has ineradicably been felt, done, achieved. Now it simply is. Kept, not discarded. Available to warn, guide, illumine all that is possible now. painful or repellent, Whether glorious or joyful — *none* of it is dispensable to who we may become.

Nor are you and I dispensable. If nothing can be thrown away, we cannot be either. Indeed, even as you are simply sitting here, you are busily **not** throwing yourself away. Your cells are at diligent work renewing you. Physiologists declare that our bodies completely renew themselves—every component tissue—every six years. Yet friends from long ago still recognize you! You continue to be somehow uniquely, indelibly, yourself.

How often—or ever—do you ponder what is your **self**? Generally, I image my self as ending at the outer surface of my skin. But there are little hairs, some of them ever so faint, that venture out farther. And then there is an envelope of radiant heat and a field of electrical energy generated by my body and yours. And what of the pheromones of scent, unique to each individual, that we leave behind us in discernible trails wherever we go? —So that "we are marked as self even by the chemicals we leave beneath the soles of our shoes." [Lewis Thomas's words] Bloodhounds can track us. Everywhere you've been a bit of you still is!

There leaps to mind a poem my husband Fred and I enjoy quoting to each other at apt moments. It's entitled "The Floor is Dirty," by Edward Field (The New American Poetry, ed. Donald Hall, 1960); from it come these lines:

*The floor having accumulated particles of myself,  
I call it dirty;...  
He whom you knew is a trail of leavings around the world.*

I happened a while ago upon a stunning statistic: 75% of household dust is made up of human skin cells. We are shedding more than we realize! — and we call it dirt. To the earth, it's raw material for re-creation. If house dust is mostly human skin cells, it's us! — So next time, why not say "hi" to those dust bunnies before bidding them goodbye?

We live intimately with the earth. Every time we breathe we exchange some of ourselves with the world. And every time we eat we transform other life into our own. Now those lives, whether born as spore or seed or egg, live on as us. Joining our bodies with our foods, we link ourselves to the lives which birthed them, and to the fields and flowing waters where they grew. We survive, not just *on* the earth, but *with* it, in a constant exchange of being. And anything is related to everything else.

All of this I count as good news, or to use the ancient term for it, gospel. However, if we wish to carry on into the far future as anything remotely recognizable... Well, this is a challenge.

You may know of the *Gaia hypothesis*. **Gaia** was the name given by ancient Greeks to the Earth as primordial Mother. Biochemist James Lovelock has borrowed her name for his provocative vision of our planet as a unified, evolving system of life that behaves as if it were a living creature, one complex organism, able to adjust its systems, its temperatures, the composition of its air and sea and soil, so as to nourish global survival.

Whether we embrace this image literally or as metaphor, it invites us into *biospheric thinking*. And it has spawned a movement called "deep ecology," grounded on these principles: One, that the well-being and flourishing of life on Earth, all of life, has value in itself, intrinsic value, independent of any species' apparent usefulness to us. Secondly, that we have no human right to reduce this myriad richness and diversity, except to satisfy vital needs (of which overpopulating the planet with humans is not one). And, third, that our survival as a species depends upon our recognizing and honoring this.

Gaia will survive her most gifted children, if she must. The Earth will outlast this "brief egocentric moment" [Ellen Goodman] that we call it ours. If the greenhouse effect, the depletion of the ozone, induce fever, a rise in temperature may "melt the polar ice caps and drown us, or allow ultraviolet radiation to burn us, sluff off the topsoil and starve us, or freeze us in an ice age..." [R. Don Wright, letter to the editor, *Christian Century*, 5/6/92] The options available to a healthy immune system are many.

Somewhere I encountered this alluring Earth "personals" ad:

*Temperate but endangered planet,  
enjoys weather, northern lights, continental drift.  
Seeks caring relationship with intelligent life form.*

We have a perception problem (or, to spin it in jargon, we've got "attitude"). We humans are so tiny in proportion to the Earth and the Cosmos that we experience the globe as flat and time as linear. And the range of activity perceptible by our senses is so narrow that we see most of existence as inert, impassive. Usefulness is our basic measure. We live in a world of *things* — a playground for an inventive and ingenious species (which we are).

And as the biggest, strongest kids on the planet we Americans claim most of the toys — in spirit similar to this "Toddler's Creed" that made the rounds sometime ago:

*If I want it, it's mine.  
If it looks just like mine, it is mine.  
If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.  
If I can take it away from you, it's mine.  
If we're building something together, all the pieces are mine.  
If I give it to you and change my mind later, it's mine.  
If it's ever been mine, it will never really be anyone else's.  
— And when I'm done with it, it's trash.*

We trash our planet this way. We've begun at least to feel somewhat guilty about all we claim, consume and discard. Guilt, however, is poor motivation, unless it heralds awareness, and leads us to cherish our fresh, blue-green vision of home, and to challenge assumptions that we've heretofore followed blind. Assumptions that have led us to trash our cities, trash our forests, trash our oceans, trash each other — in the extreme of what Buber called an "I-it" relationship with life, treating all but ourselves as things.

One knows awareness is burgeoning when the problem shows up in New Yorker cartoons.—Like one whole page in full color depicting "recycling Hell": endless bins, each with labels on them: "broken blue ballpoint pens"... "orange pekoe tea bags"... "used tan rubber bands only".

As I write this my nose starts to tickle and I reach for a kleenex, and awareness dawns that I have no workaday handkerchiefs. I haven't had any for years. I'm so enmired in throw-away living that there's no way to escape from it clean.—But suppose that's the very point. I can't escape, and I'm not clean. I'm "shedding more than I realize." I could return to handkerchiefs...and then consume energy, water, detergents to wash them. How can I tread on the Earth and leave the lightest possible footprint? Very often I cannot know; but for starters, I can care.

And what shall we do with our trash?— if there's no place we can really throw it away because there is no "away"? Suppose we befriend it. Enable its next career. Respect our trash collectors as the personal luxury they truly are. Say "hello" to dust, as it passes. And along the way, become beloved partners with a planet, and know that... *in the mud and dirt of things, there always, always something sings.*

# Fire and Emptiness: Unitarian Universalism and the Universe Story

Patricia Gordon, Ph.D.

*(Editor's Note: While the following essay is probably too lengthy for even the most patient of UU congregations, the ideas presented here offer rich possibilities for a series of homilies!)*

I came to dwell in both the Universe Story community and the Unitarian Universalism community because as a participant in these I am immersed in the ever-emerging truth. The Unitarian Universalist icon, a flaming chalice within a double circle, can symbolize this open-ended, dynamic quest for truth, both in its ever-renewing flame and in its movement away from the center of the circle. However, no one interpretation for the chalice is official, a stance quintessentially Unitarian. In my tradition there is no dogma, not even around our icon. We are each free to create our own ever-evolving spiritual meaning.

The flaming chalice image is surrounded by emptiness within its double circle, and emptiness surrounds the actual chalice lit before every service in the congregation's sanctuary. This emptiness is a welcoming space. My Unitarian spiritual community in Montreal, Canada embraces atheists, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Pagans, and others. The sanctuary and services offer a supportive empty space, a common ground free of specific religious beliefs. This ground is warmed by a community that not only nurtures our quests for individual truth and personal well-being, but also, since we are a world-centered tradition, fosters the flourishing of all the Earth community's expressions of life.

The Universe Story can deepen and enrich the Unitarian Universalist ongoing search for individual truth, its common ground for diverse spiritual beliefs, and service to the world. This possibility has been officially recognized by the Canadian Unitarian Council in its environmental policy adopted in 1999. The policy calls for an understanding of the universe and our place and purpose in it, a re-establishment of our spiritual relationship with Earth, a new story or myth essential to this quest, and integration of the values expressed in the policy into our individual and congregational religious rituals and practices. If this vision were to ignite the passion of enough Unitarian members, what kinds of individual and congregational practices would emerge?

I IMAGINE MY CONGREGATION twenty-five years from now. The word "Unitarian," whose original meaning was "one God, not a trinity," has shifted its meaning to "one common ground for all seekers." And the word "Universalist," which originally meant "all are saved; none are cast out from God," now signifies "all are part of the Universe and its ongoing Story." The spiritual practices that have emerged are those which move us toward remembering and re-remembering this Whole. I imagine...

## The Wonders

"The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted...There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star." — Henry David Thoreau, Unitarian

In our sanctuary the week after winter solstice, I gaze at our chalice burning on its intricately carved stand. On the walls to the right, back, and left is our long scroll of the Timeline of Light artwork depicting the 14-billion year story of the Universe from The Radiance to the Continuing Journey into the unknown future.[1]

In profound silence, we meditate on the wonders of matter, energy, life, and mind: from Mystery the fiery unfolding of The Radiance, matter and energy spiraling into galaxies; from Mystery the double star-spirals of life whose atoms are fire-birtherd;[2] from Mystery the fire of the mind, spiraling upward in ever more encompassing enlightenment. What wonder will next shimmer out of Mystery? Each of us —atheist,

Hindu, Pagan, Christian, Jew —may name and describe the creative ground differently, but all honor the reality of Mystery.

Continually sparking forth from Mystery are new miracles of matter, life, and mind. Elementary particles erupt into existence and quickly vanish: "even in the darkest region beyond the Great Wall of galaxies, even in the void between the superclusters, even in the gaps between the synapses of the neurons in the brain, there occurs an incessant foaming, a flashing flame, a shining-forth-from and a dissolving-back-into" (Swimme 1996, pp. 93, 101). Life dazzles into new species: the light-eating cyanobacteria, sunfish, copper butterflies, golden iguanas, ruby-throated hummingbirds, sun bears. New creations sparkle forth from the brilliant minds of fire-taming paleolithic humans, Plato, Nicolaus Copernicus, Jan Vermeer, Emily Dickinson, Albert Einstein, Mohandas Gandhi.

The Universe, the Great Wild, is "devoted to surprise." Cosmologist Brian Swimme captures the wondrous history of the Universe in one sentence: "You take hydrogen gas, and you leave it alone, and it turns into rosebushes, giraffes, and humans" (Swimme 1990, p. 1; Bridle 2001, p. 40).

Who and what will emerge next? "From wonder to wonder existence opens" (Lao Tzu, trans. Bynner 1972, p. 31).

## **The Communion**

"We are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us...Not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations." — Henry David Thoreau

In the following weeks, I and other members of the congregation gather to celebrate communions with the Universe through the Cosmic Walk.[3] Candles are arranged in a gigantic spiral on the sanctuary floor, each one accompanied by a child's drawing, made in Religious Education classes, representing a major, creative flare in the unfolding Universe Story. Each week different creative moments in the Universe Story are illuminated. Photographs and paintings of these moments enrich the sanctuary walls with their beauty. The chalice, representing Mystery, stands at the center of the spiral.

In the first Cosmic Walk service, children and adults joyfully and continuously loop through the spiral, enveloped by inspiring music, while the minister tells the story of the numinous transformations of matter: fireball particles, hydrogen atoms, star-studded galaxies, elements forged in stars, solid planets, life, humans. We sit, and speaking together, share communion. What does it mean to our lives that we are transformed stardust? that, in human form, we are the Universe?

In the second Cosmic Walk service, the minister recounts the numinous transformations of energy: fireball, hydrogen atoms, Sun, plants, humans. We sit, and speaking together, share communion. What does it mean to our lives that we are sunlight? that we are cosmic fire?

In the third Cosmic Walk, the minister stories the numinous transformations of life, celebrating our direct ancestors: the first ancestral cell, sea worms, lobe-finned fish, warm-blooded reptiles, tree-dwelling mammals, humans. We sit, and speaking together, share communion. What does it mean to us that we are part of life's immense journey? that we are one Family?

In the final Cosmic Walk, the minister recounts the numinous transformations of human awareness and care, ever more embracing, still to be completed: from individual family, tribe, empire, and nation to Earth's human family; from local wild kin, national ecosystems, and the whole Earth community to the

Universe's galactic neighborhoods; from regional and planetary cyclical patterns to the Universe's laws and evolutionary dynamics; from an individual culture's Mystery to the many-named Mystery. We sit, and speaking together, share communion. What does it mean to our lives that we are all-encompassing awareness and care? that our embrace is still to be completed?

## **The Gratitudes**

### **The Solitary Gratitudes**

"It is true, I never assisted the sun materially in his rising, but, doubt not, it was of the last importance only to be present at it." — Henry David Thoreau

Every morning each of us in the congregation either steps outdoors, sits indoors in front of a small lit chalice, or, elsewhere, withdraws for a quiet moment, and imagines all the planets in the embrace of the Sun and the slow rolling of the great Earth beneath our feet as our home turns toward and then away from our sustaining star (Swimme 1996, pp. 26-27). We reflect with gratitude on the delights of the duet played by Sun and Earth: golden pears, brass fanfares, silken shirts, scented herbs, wild kin, wind spin, mist.

At the midday meal, each of us extends our mind to imagine the daily lives of other species and other humans in our St. Lawrence River Valley home and in our larger planetary home. In gratitude we then reflect on our intimate sharing of Earth's water and air as they are passed unendingly from one Family member to another. In gratitude we reflect on the sharing of life, as the matter and energy of all lives is eventually taken into that of others. We are one body, ever transforming. We are one tide, ebbing and flowing. We are one breath, together inspiring. We are one fire from the beginning, empowering.[4]

In the evening, holding in mind once more our whole planetary home with its edge of dawn and shadow forever sweeping, we contemplate our own and Earth's dark losses that day: death by fang and fire; the ripping of homes; the black cape slowly suffocating the bright flame of mind and body. We reflect with gratitude on the gifts that may come from ordeal, for we know that from the beginning of the Universe's evolution, heroic, undreamed of new capacities, creations, beauty, and life have emerged from destruction and pain, time and time again.

### **The Communal Gratitudes**

"Let the night overtake thee everywhere at home." — Henry David Thoreau

On a weekend in the late spring, the congregation as a whole makes a pilgrimage of gratitude to chosen places and inhabitants, both wild and human, in the St. Lawrence River Valley life community. Every year, we visit different sites, human cultures and professions, and wild kin, thank them for the splendor of their gifts to the community, and give them something they need in return. The recipients of our gratefulness range from the rare forest of Pointe-aux-Trembles to the bird sanctuary of Senneville, from Mohawks to musicians, from earthworms to fiddlehead ferns. Also, there are two places that are honored every year. The congregation journeys to the St. Lawrence River itself, or its tributaries, and Mont Royal, the mountain in the middle of the city. Both the mighty river and the serene mountain pour blessings and a unique identity upon the Montreal island community and receive our generous gifts in return, from picking up litter to taking action against developers and polluters.

The following week, in a special service in the church sanctuary, members meditate on the chalice's doublet of rings encompassing the flame of life, just as the circles within circles of natural communities and their cycles hold within them the flame of all our lives. We know we are sustained and enriched not

only by the embrace of the communities and cycles of our part of the St. Lawrence Valley, but also by the circles of interdependence that ripple out to the entire Great Lakes watershed and beyond to the whole planet. Color slides projected on a gigantic screen, songs, stories, and symbolic dance, inspire our gratitude for the bright gifts of landscapes, beings, and cycles around Earth, from the bluegreen algae to the Mindo Nambillo Cloudforest, to the carbon cycle, to the citizens of Porto Alegre, to the Adelle penguin. We close the circle of the continuing stream of offerings by giving back something in turn.

Summer solstice is marked by the outdoor Feast of Elements,[5] a congregational picnic paying homage to our Ancestral Stars, which gifted our part of the Milky Way galaxy with the elements, the stardust, that eventually formed Earth and ourselves. Surrounded by wilderness, far from city lights, we celebrate these early generations of massive stars that forged all the complex elements in their fiery bellies and then poured their creations into the heavens as they exploded in blazes of light. After the feast, when Earth finally rolls into darkness, we revel in the stars. "We are immersed in stars, we eat stars, we walk on stars, we breathe stars, we swim through stars." (Rogers 1997, pp. 52-53)

One July or August night, our congregation's members again journey far from the city, and, with small telescopes, gaze intensely toward Sagittarius and the radiant center of the Milky Way. The children sing a song about the mammoths who roamed our continent 30,000 years ago, when the light now reaching our eyes began its journey from this starry heart. From our place within one of the luminous spiral arms of our galactic home, we cast our vision into the splendors of the Small Sagittarius Starcloud and the Lagoon, Trifid, Star-Queen, and Swan nebulae. We recall the glorious photographs of other gems of our galaxy: the Dust Clouds of the Eagle Nebula, the Horsehead Nebula, the globular star cluster in the constellation Hercules.

Joyously, we begin spinning, some of us slow and graceful and some sizzling, happily twirling alone, swinging in duos, eddying in small clouds, or swirling in spirals, wobbling, laughing, falling over backwards, reeling into beauty. As we lie on the ground facing the heavens, the minister asks us to imagine our Milky Way and its partner, the Andromeda Galaxy, in their immense, blazing pinwheel around one another, each accompanied by a revolving entourage of small satellite galaxies. These two spirals of fire circling in emptiness are, in turn, with hundreds of other distant galactic clusters, swinging around the Virgo Cluster of a thousand burning galaxies. We know that the Virgo Cluster itself is part of an even greater Virgo Supercluster, and that this cluster of clusters is only one of countless superclusters in our expanding Universe. The minister pauses in silence, as we meditate on our Deep Home: fireworks cascading through Mystery.

As I reflect, gratitude and awe kindles within me for the exquisite fine-tuning of the Universe's forces and values that make galaxies, stars, planets, life, and mind possible. My spine tingles when I consider the degree of this fine-tuning. Had the gravitational force been a trillionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of one percent stronger or weaker, it would have either crushed the newborn Universe into a black hole or failed to gather matter into stars (Bridle 2001, p. 40). If the Radiance in the beginning had not poured forth 101 million particles for every 100 million antiparticles, the Universe would have winked out when particles and antiparticles were annihilating each other in the first minutes of its existence (Swimme 1998a, p. 14). If the force that binds together subatomic particles in the nuclei of atoms were weaker by a minute fraction, then the universe would never have forged anything more complex than hydrogen atoms. Yet, if that same force had been stronger by a minute fraction, "then all the hydrogen in the early universe would have fused into helium —with the consequence of no water, stars, or life" (Rue 2000, p. 63). The list of cosmic improbabilities continues, stunning my mind. I remember the scientists who have made this knowledge possible. I shine with gratitude.



## **The Sorrows**

One early autumn weekend the congregation, darkly dressed, pilgrimages to places of sorrow. We visit the homes of some of the threatened species in our part of the Valley: the brown snake, the water snake, and the red-shouldered hawk, whose Valley homes and lives are being blown out like candles. The children who have volunteered to recount the story of each creature help us to imagine the life, sensations, and emotions of the animals who are being cast out from our community. The congregation then stands in silence. We take time, as well, to mourn the Valley members already eliminated from their island home, among them cougars, spotted turtles, elk, and wolves.

We then pilgrimage to the places of poison: Petro Canada; of hunger: our neighborhood's Food Bank; of injustice: the City Hall; and of suffering: the Montreal Hospital. Through powerful actions and aid—long a hallmark of both the Unitarian and Universalist traditions, which merged in 1961—we carry our burning desire for justice and compassion into our island community.

Returning to the congregation's sanctuary, we meditate on an extinguished chalice and the emptiness left by the vanished flame. Through art, photographs, dance, texts, and music we learn about some of the lights of joy and presence that have been extinguished from our wider Earth community. We expand our compassion to embrace some of the sorrows found across our planet: places of poison: Chernobyl; of hunger: Calcutta; of injustice: the WTO; of sickness: Botswana. We sorrow for the world's threatened peoples and species: the Siberian Shoer, the Kenyan Ogiek, the Iberian lynx, the Great Raft spider, Spix's macaw. We take time, too, to honor the memory of extinct peoples and species, those who are gone forever: the Ubykh of the Black Sea, the Assurini Indians, the sea mink, Miss Waldron's red colobus monkey, the Xerces Blue butterfly.

We emerge from our mourning together and relight the chalice. We recall that the flaming chalice as the symbol of Unitarian Universalism originated in active service on behalf of the world. During World War II, the Unitarian Service Committee was founded to assist Eastern Europeans, among them Unitarians as well as Jews, who were desperate to escape Nazi persecution. The fiery chalice icon was created in this time of need. At its birth, the chalice icon's burning oil was explained as a symbol of helpfulness and sacrifice. Today we rededicate ourselves to that vision. Permeated with the energy that, through our food, streams into us from our Sun, the energy which is the cosmic fire of the Radiance itself, we take action.

## **The Purifications**

Our sorrows for Earth, our fights for justice, our rescue efforts, as well as the suffering in our private lives, place this cosmic fire burning within us in grave danger. Brian Swimme warns, "In each moment, we face the cosmic responsibility to shape and discharge this fire in a manner worthy of its numinous origins... This is the central fire of your self, the central fire of the entire cosmos: it must not be wasted on trivialities or revenge, resentment or despair." (Swimme 1984, p. 170)

We use these words as a touchstone in the evening purifications we practice daily in our homes. In the flame of our cosmic fire each of us strives to purify ourselves, to empty ourselves of the poisons of mind and heart: partial truths, trivialities, anger, fear. The broken symmetry of our chalice icon, its movement away from the center of the circle, reminds us that imperfection—and its gifts—are ongoing. There will always be partial truths, and the opportunity to enlarge them. There will always be trivialities, and the opportunity to see further. There will always be anger, and the opportunity to transform. There will always be fear and hurt, and the opportunity to heal.

These private practices are especially important in the seven days between the weekend of Sorrows and the congregation's Dark Service, which deepens our purification with a liturgy of ultimate loss. The service

begins with the chalice and a row of burning candles illuminating the front of the sanctuary. The chalice remains burning throughout the service, representing the continuing creativity of Mystery, but one by one the candles are snuffed out, each extinguished candle representing one of the vast losses in the cosmic unfurling: the breaking of the perfect symmetry of the void with the creation of the Universe itself; the Great Annihilation of particles and antiparticles; the Second Annihilation of galactic collisions; the death of massive stars as they explode their rich elements into the heavens; the great extinctions: the Ice Deaths, the Great Dying, the Death from the Sky, the Fire Death, the Death from Within; the future death of the Sun and Earth;[6] the death of the Universe itself.

The minister speaks, adapting the words of Brian Swimme:

*All creativity has a cost. For something to be created, something else has to "dissolve." So everything in the ongoing creative event of the Universe is ultimately lost: the emptiness of the void, the fireball form, stars, species, individuals, special moments —everything. Perhaps even the Universe itself is a flashing show, which will one day be required by ultimate Mystery.*

*We arrive here and everything is given to us. These gifts are a result of sacrifices on the part of the Universe —the fireball, stars, extinct species, Sun, Earth, animals, plants, and other humans. All the gifts from these were needed and are needed for our lives. They are the cost of our existence. The Universe is an ongoing sacrificial event. What is required of us is reciprocal giving. We find ourselves in this place of exchange, this great feasting where everything is nourishing everything else. Things arrive and give themselves over for the adventure of the Universe.*  
(Swimme 1990, p. 5)

After the last candle has been snuffed, the chalice still aflame, we sit, and speaking together, share communion. What does it mean to our lives that all will be lost, that all is slipping away into Mystery and the Great On-Flowing? How can we know which losses and fears we must fight, discount, or creatively accept? How can awareness of our inescapable death galvanize us to live nobly, to create, to feed the ongoing Story of the Universe?

## **The Creations**

"Grow wild according to thy nature." —Thoreau

On an exuberant, many-colored autumn weekend, those who are able in the congregation immerse themselves in the wilderness, in self-willed land that is freely-manifesting, self-organizing, exciting, unpredictable, creative, evolving. We bring no chalices; we ourselves will each become a leaping flame, a burning leaf bearing beauty into the world. We are here to invoke creation, to call forth our gifts to the Universe. To remain continually on the unfurling edge of creation, to move with the Mystery, "to create as a spiritual discipline" is "the practice of the wild." (Swimme 1998b, p. 7; Snyder 1990, p. 10)

Under the early twilight sky, the ceremony begins. Through dance and movement, children and adults reenact the great emergences of power in the self-willed, self-organizing Universe: in the beginning, the storms of light whirling around helpless specks of matter; on early Earth, the immense material cycles and activities of water, crust, and air dashing, heaving, and swirling the first, fragile living cells; later, these gigantic, material forces and the powers of life's competition and predation intensely pressuring the vulnerable emerging human; now, the human imagination, the newest planetary shaping power, heating Earth, redirecting rivers, and deciding who among the Family shall die and who shall live, and how. We dance the sad story of the ongoing control and imprisonment of our imaginative potency by our inherited primate mind: this mind's lack of sharing with other species; its focus on the local, abrupt, and immediate;

its intense desire to reproduce its own kind; and its emotional bonding limited to its own family (Swimme 1998b, p. 3). We dance hopelessness. We dance despair.

Our minister then reads the words of geologist Thomas Berry and cosmologist Brian Swimme:

*We are not isolated in the chill of space with the burden of the future upon us and without the aid of any other power. We are supported by that same power that spun the galaxies into space, lit the sun, and brought Earth and its living forms into being. We live immersed in a sea of energy beyond all comprehension. We are ... situated in that very place and rooted in that very power that brought forth all the matter and energy of the Universe. With this energy we have the potential to fashion a human presence as magnificent and beautiful as an ocean or a star.*" (Berry 1999, pp. 174-75; Swimme 1996, p. 104; 1990, p. 1).

A child then ignites a fire, blazing in the heart of the Universe. We dancers burst forth, unfurling out of our prison, our shell, the chrysalis where we have been incubating so long. Our imaginations and torches kindled, we spiral out, carrying our radiance into the world. Now a fully human species, we are Adventurers in Imagination: Celebrators, Symbol Weavers, All-Embracing Empathizers, Sorrowers, Unconditional Lovers, Vast Minds and Hearts, Stunning Beauty, and Incredible Inventors of Gifts.[7]

We return to the fire, gathering around the warmth to share inspiring stories of contributors to these human roles, these practices of the imagination: the O'odum, The Wildlands Project, Jane Goodall, Karl-Henrik Robert, Alan Featherstone, Wangari Maathai, Gaviotas, John Todd, Annie Dillard, Curitiba, and many more.

At first light the following day, we gather to greet the Sun and express gratitude to Earth for carrying us once more into our star's exciting, self-willed presence, its surprising flares, relentless fusions, and abundant streams of gifts. Then I, as this morning's leader, face the congregation and launch forth our species' challenge: "The Wild is both law-abiding and unpredictable. Shall we bring the laws and spontaneities of our imagination into alignment with the laws and spontaneities of life, matter, and energy? Shall we rewild ourselves and become native to the Great Wilderness that is the Universe?"

All cry "Yes!" and then we sink deeply into play. Through carefully chosen games, theater, songs, and sports, we immerse ourselves in the laws of life, matter, and energy. We learn and relearn that nothing disappears, everything spreads, waste equals food, all wholes are parts, all parts are wholes, diversity survives, resistance enhances, synergy prospers, and creativity costs. All day, we name the laws, we move with the laws, we embody the laws. As Earth sweeps further into light, we are flooded with illumination.

As Earth wheels into the abundant night lavished with stars, we in our sleeping bags plunge into Wilderness Dreaming. All night we open ourselves to the upwelling of gifts, the visions of new creations, individual and communal, we can pour into the Universe.

Emerging once again into the rolling edge of light, glowing in the morning Sun, we unfurl our night's surprises and, together, day Dream them onward. Ideas flash and burgeon. Excitement and delight lure us to move with our inspirations, to embody our visions. At peak moments we shout, "The dream drives the action!" (Berry 1999, p. 201).

Enthused, freely manifesting, law-abiding, transformed, we go wild and turn our burning beauty loose in the world.

## Emptiness

"Be it life or death, we crave only reality." —Thoreau

The yearly cycle of ceremonies woven into our pattern of regular Sunday services is drawing to a close. On the winter solstice, the longest night of the year, the congregation's members —atheists and those from traditions East and West —temporarily withdraw from the world and enter the bare-walled sanctuary, the space kept empty of specific beliefs that is welcoming to all. As with the emptiness surrounding our sanctuary's flaming chalice, the absence of doctrine allows our individual flickers of truth to freely stretch and find their way. Our minister recounts how the Unitarian tradition of respect for differing spiritual beliefs began. Taking us back to the heretic-burning times of the sixteenth century, she weaves the tale of Sebastian Castellion, a university professor in Basel who, questioning the execution of a Unitarian precursor, Spanish theologian Servetus, wrote the first extended, principled statement on religious freedom of the mind. And she recounts the story of the first edict of religious toleration in history, declared in Transylvania in 1568 by the Unitarian king John Sigismund.

Reading in unison from our *Living Tradition*,<sup>[8]</sup> we remind ourselves that we have drawn together to support each other's unique spiritual indwelling, the "direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life."

In the service's clearing for mind and spirit, each person silently reflects, contemplates, prays, or meditates, dwelling in reality and naming mystery in their own way. I name reality, the forms of fire and the empty mystery, "Spirit." What does it mean to my life that I am Spirit? I am continually stretching to embody more of that Reality through the practices of imagination and the practices of meditation. I open my heart, mind, and soul to re-member, to remember the Whole. The whole Universe is Chalice, Mystery, a Flame of Emptiness.

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*Author's Note:* This essay was written in May 2002. The quotations by Henry David Thoreau that appear as epigraphs are all drawn from his *Walden*. Using the 1962 edition of *Thoreau: Walden and Other Writings*, edited by Joseph Wood Krutch (New York: Bantam), epigraph quotations are drawn from the following pages: "The Wonders" pp. 168, 131; "The Communion" pp. 177, 232; "The Solitary Gratitude" p. 118; "The Communal Gratitude" p. 259; "The Creations" 259; "Emptiness" p. 178.

## Notes

1. The original Timeline of Light is an artistic depiction of part of the story of the Universe, created in scroll form by Montessori educator John Fowler. His email address is [jfow@aol.com](mailto:jfow@aol.com).
2. The phrase "from Mystery the double star-spirals of life whose atoms are fire-birthed" refers to the fact that the double helix of our DNA is made up of atoms created in the burning and explosions of stars that self-destructed as supernovae in our area of the galaxy.
3. The original Cosmic Walk was created by Sister Miriam McGillis of Genesis Farm, New Jersey. A version of the Cosmic Walk may be found at <http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/cosmic.htm>

4. The last four lines are from *Marriage to Earth* (Gordon 2001a, p. 1), part of a Universe Story-inspired marriage ceremony created for the wedding of Connie Barlow and Michael Dowd. The videotape of this ceremony is available through LouNiznik@aol.com. The line "We are one tide, ebbing and flowing" is from Piercy 1980, p. 134.
5. This is a variation on the Feast of Elements created by Connie Barlow and Michael Dowd for the December-January holiday season. See: <http://www.thegreatstory.org/Feastofelements.html>
6. Details on these losses can be found in Gordon 2001b.
7. Details on the human imagination and roles can be found in the Third Wonder section of Gordon, 2001b.
- 8 The title *Living Tradition* is a modification of the title of the Unitarian Universalist (UU) hymnal *Singing the Living Tradition*. In addition to hymns, the book contains readings supportive of individual freedom in spiritual practices and beliefs and a list of UU spiritual sources and traditions. The quotation is taken from the latter. See <http://www.uua.org/aboutuua/principles.html>.

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# Worship Service Sampler

## The Earth Our Mother

This service was conducted by Intern Laura Horton on Sunday, May 9, 2004, at the Olympia Brown UU Church, Racine, Wisconsin

PRELUDE: "Suliram" (traditional Indonesian, arr. Robert DeCormier), OBUUC Choir

### CHALICE-LIGHTING

Visions of harmony between humans and our environment exist in every culture and every place. A chant from the Navajo Indian tradition says:

The mountains, I become part of it.  
The herbs, the fir tree, I become part of it.  
The morning mists, the clouds, the gathering waters,  
I become part of it.  
The wilderness, the dew drops, the pollen . . .  
I become part of it.

(from Elizabeth Roberts, *Earth Prayers from around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations for Honoring the Earth*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1991)

The contemporary Israeli poet Shin Shalom writes:

On Tu B'shavat  
when spring comes  
An angel descends  
ledger in hand  
and enters each bud, each twig, each tree, and all our garden flowers.  
From town to town, from village to village  
the angel makes a winged way  
searching the valleys, inspecting the hills  
flying over the desert  
and returns to heaven.  
And when the ledger will be full  
of trees and blossoms and shrubs  
when the desert is turned into a meadow  
and all our land a watered garden  
the Messiah will appear.

(From Roger Gottlieb, ed., *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment* [Routledge, 1995], p. 96. N.B. Tu B'shavat is the Jewish "New Year of the Trees," a sort of fiscal year for trees when calculating tithes of fruit, etc. in ancient times.)

And an Ashanti prayer from Africa says:

Creator of our land,  
our earth, the trees,  
the animals and humans,  
all is for your honor.  
The drums beat it out,  
and people sing about it,

and they dance with noisy joy. . . .  
What a wonderful world you have made out of wet mud,  
and what beautiful men and women!  
We thank you for all the beauty of this earth.

(from Elizabeth Roberts, *Earth Prayers from around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems,  
and Invocations for Honoring the Earth*)

For the beauty of this earth, and for the wisdom to protect it, we light our chalice flame.

HYMN #77: "Seek Not Afar for Beauty"

#### GESTURE OF FRIENDSHIP

I am a part of the earth.  
I am a part of the solid, unshakeable,  
Immutable rock  
Of the mountain;  
A part of the stark, rainwashed slabs of slate,  
A part of the walls of wet and weathering gritstone,  
A part of the crumbling granite of shining boulders.  
I am part of what makes  
The green rounded hill  
With its splashes of laughing yellow gorse.

Through the earth I am aware  
of what I am:  
All that is firmly fixed and endures forever,  
All that is shifting imperceptibly,  
Being gently folded and unfolded,  
All that holds the possibility  
Of shattering violence of eruption;  
All that is contained in  
Is, and Was, and Shall Be.

For such awareness, coming from the earth,  
I give my thanks today  
For the earth, and my part in it.

"Through the Earth I am Aware" by Elizabeth Rogers, a British Unitarian

JOYS AND CONCERNS: Responsive Reading #551 "Earth Teach Me"

#### PASTORAL PRAYER:

"The Hollow of His Hands, the Curve of Her Arms," by Max Coots (in L. Annie  
Foerster, *For Praying Out Loud* [Boston: Skinner House, 2003])

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: "Song of the Tewa"



OFFERTORY: "Orkney Lullaby," by Donna Schultz

SERMON: "The Earth Our Mother" Laura Horton (sermon follows)

HYMN #163: "For the Earth Forever Turning"

CLOSING WORDS:

"Earth Mother, Star Mother," by Starhawk (from Elizabeth Roberts, *Earth Prayers from around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations for Honoring the Earth* [HarperSanFrancisco, 1991])

EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE FLAME

POSTLUDE

SERMON

The Earth Our Mother

© 2004 Laura Horton, Intern

Olympia Brown UU Church, Racine, WI, May 9, 2004

In recent years a lot of us have taken satisfaction in imagining the earth as a mother—the mother of us all, from whose body we emerge and to whom we will all return again. To me it's a lovely image because it's so tender—it helps us feel love and gratitude toward this planet that sustains us in so many ways. Just like a loving parent, it gives us water, food, shelter, other living companions, and a million other things that we need to survive and thrive.

On the other hand, I don't *really* think the Earth is a woman, any more than I think that God is a man. In fact, there's a whole school of feminist environmental philosophy that says the image of Earth as Mother is dangerous, because it reinforces a false stereotype that women are closer to nature than men are, and that in turn reinforces male domination over women.

So I like to play a little with that image of the earth as a mother. How about a father too? The earth as father might evoke very different emotional reactions in you. I invite you to experiment later on with how it feels to imagine "the Earth, our Mother and Father."

In the meantime, thinking about how the earth is like a parent to us can help inspire us to respond to the earth as parents ourselves. It's true that we couldn't survive without all the gifts we get from the earth. But it's also true that we are so powerful that we have to take responsibility for the things we do that hurt the earth, just as parents of young children have to take responsibility for the safety of those children. It goes both ways. So, today, I'd like to suggest three ways that we can act like parents and caretakers for our beloved earth.

The first one is by *creatively celebrating* environmental values. If we want to take care of the earth, one of the best ways we can do that is to make it *fun* for ourselves and other people!

Now, "fun" isn't usually the first word that comes to mind when people think of environmentalism. A lot of middle-class people in this country are actually turned off by environmentalism because they think it

means depriving themselves and feeling guilty all the time. But I agree with the philosopher Theodore Roszak, who says, “Environmentalists will never achieve their ends by creating a sense of privation. . . . It’s . . . like Puritans telling people to rein in their sexuality.” In fact, we all have a basic need for *extravagance* in our lives. Roszak says that in traditional cultures, people satisfied this need with festivals where they dressed up and ate and danced all night long. But in modern culture, we often turn to compulsive shopping or other kinds of addictive behavior. What we need is a new idea of “sustainable extravagance.” For environmentalism to take off in the broader culture, we have to show people that there are lots of ways to satisfy ourselves and have fun with simple pleasures that don’t tax our natural resources too much, like a long bath or a special meal or even a day off from work just to relax.<sup>5</sup>

There’s a group I like that promotes this message, called the Center for a New American Dream<sup>6</sup>. They have a book called *More Fun, Less Stuff*, and that’s their basic message—that getting rid of extraneous stuff frees you up to have a lot more fun in your life! They also have a brochure on gift-giving with some of the best creative, low-cost ideas I’ve ever seen. My favorite was for small children in your life who you don’t see every day: send them an old favorite book of yours, with an audio tape of you, reading the book out loud, for them to listen to. I’m already planning to do this for my niece once she gets a little bit older.

I also want to share with you a fantastic creative celebration that I was at last year. One of our ministers in Chicago, Clare Butterfield, works with a group of adults and children in Humboldt Park, which is kind of a tough neighborhood on the west side of Chicago. These kids are doing their best to stay clear of gangs and drugs, and Clare’s program has given them an amazing focus for their energies. They decided they wanted to learn about gardening and composting, so they did: they learned how to make worm bins for composting food scraps, and they set up a miniature ecosystem with little fish in tanks and vegetables in bins fertilized by the waste from the fish!

I saw all this when I went to their big festival last spring, an interfaith community party called “Wormapalooza.” It was exciting to see these kids proudly demonstrating their projects, and the best part of all was a play the kids put on called “Worms on Strike.” They dressed up as worms from the compost bins, demanding better working conditions like “More food scraps!” “More moisture!” and “More newspaper strips!” It was so cute to see the costumes, the script was really funny, and all of us in the audience learned how to take care of worm bins. Afterwards, the kids invited us to build our own worm bins and take them home. Spirits were high, the children really educated us, and it was just extravagantly delightful. What a model this was for environmental work!

Another thing we can do is to *love for the long haul*. The writer Grace Paley says, “[I]t is essential to love the natural world before you can understand it. . . . [I]t would be dangerous to undertake understanding without that love, as well as love’s classy child—awe—and its everyday child—responsibility.”<sup>7</sup> This is a great lesson for activists. Before we rush to action, we can practice loving the earth, with that deep kind of love that leads to awe and a sense of personal responsibility.

And this will also help us love our fellow human beings, who are also parts of this earth—even the ones whose values seem to be totally discordant with our own. When we’re angry about an action that the President or one of our representatives has taken, many of us write letters of protest. And sometimes our

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<sup>5</sup> Jay Walljasper, “Sustainable Extravagance,” *Utne Reader*, March/April 1999. Reprinted in *Choices for Sustainable Living* (Portland, OR: Northwest Earth Institute, 2000), p. VI-6.

<sup>6</sup> Their website is at [www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org).

<sup>7</sup> Grace Paley, book dedication, in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, ed., *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990).

letters themselves are very angry. But the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh has a radical suggestion. He says that, to be most effective, we need to learn how to write *love letters* to our politicians, stating our views but with empathy for them and their situation. He says, “If we divide reality into two camps—the violent and the nonviolent—and stand in one camp while attacking the other, the world will never have peace. We will always blame and condemn those we feel are responsible for wars and social injustice, without recognizing the degree of violence in ourselves.”<sup>8</sup>

Likewise with environmentalism. If we really think about it, we ourselves are part of the problems we’re trying to solve, just as much as we’re part of the solutions. In this community, just about all of us use electricity that comes from coal plants, hard as we lobby for different options. Most of us buy at least some foods that are grown by big agribusiness companies that use lots of pesticides and water for irrigation. Most of us drive cars or take buses that run on fossil fuels. The list goes on. Totally opting out of the dominant culture and becoming completely sustainable is unrealistic for most people right now. The truth is that we are, at least in part, complicit in the very environmental damage that we want so badly to prevent.

Sometimes that realization can be almost enough to make us throw up our hands in despair. At that point, we have to work hard to practice compassion for *ourselves* and decide to love ourselves for the long haul. With compassion, we can recognize what we’re doing, take a look, and discover that we may not be environmentally perfect, or even close, but there are some things we can do differently. There are also *some* things, maybe a lot of things, that we’re doing really well already!

When the church’s Green Sanctuary committee started up in the fall, one of the first things we did was an “environmental audit” of the church, to see how we were doing environmentally right now. We found out that there was quite a bit we could feel proud about. With the help of volunteers, we’re doing a lot of recycling. The children’s religious education program and our regular worship services incorporate rich environmental values. We use our coffee mugs every week. And again, the list goes on.

We also saw opportunities to look at some other church activities with an environmental lens. Maybe at some point, we thought, the church would want to consider socially and environmentally responsible investing. We’re keeping our eyes open for an environmentally themed project to collaborate on with the Racine Interfaith Coalition, like improving hazardous waste pickups in non-white neighborhoods. And we’ve made a contribution to the renovation of our new office space. Working with the rehab committee, we researched a lot of options, and I am proud to say that the new office will have a carpet and ceiling tiles made with recycled fibers, a super-high-efficiency heating and air conditioning system, and paint with low emissions, to name only a few things.

Of course, all this didn’t happen overnight. Many of you in this room know far better than I how long it’s taken to achieve the environmental progress we’ve made so far in this country. And we all know we’re not yet where we want to be. In our denomination alone, the Unitarian Universalist Association has been issuing statements in favor of environmental protection since 1966. So it takes patience. Keeping alive our love for the earth, for ourselves, and for each other can help us hang in there for the long haul.

And, finally, as caretakers of the earth, we can *protect* the earth and our children *with passion*. We can be activists and agitators, celebrating and loving but also defending what we love.

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<sup>8</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, “Ahimsa: The Path of Harmlessness,” in *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1993), pp. 65–66.

Now, some of you may know that Mother's Day actually started out as a day for political protest against war and violence. The Unitarian Julia Ward Howe, who wrote the Battle Hymn of the Republic during the Civil War, became an antiwar activist later in life. She came up with the idea of a Mother's Day of protest against war, and she issued a proclamation that read in part:

"We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience. We women of one country will be too tender of those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs. From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says 'Disarm, Disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice.' "

And so, in this spirit, I suggest to you a new Mother's Day Proclamation: "We will not have great environmental questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands and wives shall not come in from our farms and our yards, reeking with pesticides, for hugs and kisses. Our children shall not be taught by TV commercials to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of conservation, sustainability, and interdependence. We members of one species will be too tender toward those of another species to allow our children to be trained to injure them. From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice says, 'The sword of environmental devastation is not the balance of justice.' "

Now, justice is the key to the last thing I want to tell you about today. Some of you may have heard about the concept of environmental racism—the fact that, all over the country, toxic waste sites, trash-burning facilities, and highly polluting factories are far more likely to be placed in majority-African-American or Latino/Latina communities. This is a statistical fact, and an ugly one. But people in those communities are starting to fight back—and a lot of those people are mothers who are fiercely concerned for their families.

On the far South Side of Chicago, there's a public housing project with the lovely name of Altgeld Gardens that just happens to be built right on top of a toxic waste site. They've also had problems with PCB contamination and illegal trash dumping. Rates of cancer and respiratory diseases are sky-high. But Hazel Johnson, a resident of Altgeld Gardens, decided to do something about it. She founded the group People for Community Recovery to lobby the Chicago Housing Authority and other government agencies to clean up her neighborhood. Now her daughter Cheryl continues the work. They're still fighting, but they are determined not to give up.

Likewise, in Los Angeles, a group of Mexican American mothers have joined together as Mothers of East Los Angeles to lobby against environmental racism in their neighborhood. They say, "let it be known that communities of color . . . will unite whenever our children are threatened." That's protecting with passion.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, I'd like to tell you about a woman named Rachel Bagby, who lives in a poor neighborhood of Philadelphia, the city where I was born. It's an old city, and there's a lot of segregation, and for a lot of folks it's a pretty grim place to live. But Rachel has done some amazing things. She founded an agency called the Philadelphia Community Rehabilitation Corporation that renovates vacant houses, provides teenagers with their first summer jobs, offers literacy tutoring . . . *and* turns vacant lots into gardens. Rachel recalls that years ago she had to beg the city for space to start gardening. She says, "We asked for [the lots] in order to make the place look better than growing a whole lot of weeds. We just grow

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<sup>9</sup> Gabriel Gutiérrez, "Mothers of East Los Angeles Strike Back," in Robert D. Bullard, ed., *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994), p. 231.

something that's more useful—food and flowers. Make it beautiful. And the food is outta sight.”<sup>10</sup> The gardens have expanded over the years, and now she and other neighborhood gardeners grow and preserve tomatoes, peppers, black-eyed peas, okra, potatoes, and lots of other good things.

Rachel is especially passionate about her work with the children in the neighborhood. She says a lot of them have no idea where food comes from, because their parents don't either. Many of the adults don't want to help out—they don't want to have to wash the dirt off the vegetables, or lots of the women don't want to have to cut their long fingernails. But the children tend to be excited about gardening, and Rachel believes that if they stay involved, some of them at least will be able to beat the odds and stay out of jail. She says:

“If you can appreciate the Earth, you can appreciate the beauty of yourself. Even if this has beauty, I, too, have beauty. The same creator created both. And if I learned to take care of that I'll also take care of myself and help take care of others. . . . And then see that's giving them confidence in themselves that they can do things, too, other than . . . break other people's windows and curse in the street.”<sup>11</sup>

So Rachel and her gardeners work with these children. In the fall, they carve pumpkins and play with bales of hay—because some kids have never even seen a bundle of hay before. In the winter they make decorations out of pine cones. She wants these children to understand what she learned growing up on a farm—the cycles of nature, how plants grow and where our food comes from and the basic goodness of it all.

When you're working with people, she says, “you can't do it in a hurry and you can't do it one time and you can't limit the times that you hafta do it. . . . Don't start without patience, honey.”<sup>12</sup> Good advice for all of us. May it be so.

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<sup>10</sup> Rachel L. Bagby, “Daughters of Growing Things,” in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, ed., *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), p. 232.

<sup>11</sup> Bagby, pp. 242–43.

<sup>12</sup> Bagby, pp. 247–48.

## **The Man Who Planted Trees**

*An Intergenerational Service*

Unitarian Universalist South Church, Portsmouth, New Hampshire

This imaginative service was given on February 15, 2004 at the Portsmouth, NH Unitarian Universalist Church and was shared by their DRE Sandra Greenfield. The service centers around the story "The Man Who Planted Trees," by Jean Giorno,[ Michael McCurdy, Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, VT, 1985.]

Prior to the service, an artist in the congregation created a canvass in black and white of a barren landscape using the etchings in the book as her inspiration. This 4'x6' painting was placed on the chancel, covered. A table of paints and other supplies was set aside, hidden from view. The canvass was not uncovered until the story began.

Different instruments represented elements or situations in the story: Pennywhistle...acorn

Hands rub....wind

Bassoon ...trees

Percussion, war, desolate village

Flute...water

Organ...happy village ,

and they either played while passages were read or they played alone. The pieces were created by each musician, depending on their varying artistic and technical capabilities. Each musician was supplied with a copy of the story which was edited by Rev. Marta Flanagan to an appropriate length and was marked indicating where each instrument should play.

While the story and music were expressed, the painting took place. The artist began adding color to the barren landscape following the story of how the trees brought new life to the villages, mountains and waterways. She did not finish by time the story was ended, so she continued right to the end of the service. The children remained in their seats with their families, and they were riveted.

There were two services that morning; so one of the finished paintings was auctioned at the annual fundraiser and the other hangs in their RE Space.

A lesson from the service follows:

## **An Apple To Keep**

*Materials needed: one apple and a sharp knife*

Imagine this apple (hold up an apple) as the earth. Picture the oceans, the mountains, the forests, the swamps, and the deserts. Picture the cities, the highways, and the factories. Picture all of this as the place we live.

Well, actually, we can't LIVE in all these places. Three-fourths of the earth is the oceans of the world.

So let's get rid of the oceans (cut apple into quarters and set aside three of them)

What's left? Right...one-fourth. This is the earth.

But not all of the earth can be lived on or worked on (slice in half and set aside one of the halves). This is the part people can't live or work on...the north and south poles, the deserts, the swamps, and the high mountains.

What's left? Right...one-eighth. This is where humans live, but not necessarily where they grow their food.

(Slice the one-eighth piece into four sections...put aside three of the four of them).

What's this? Right one-thirty-second.

These pieces represent the places where soil is too poor to farm, where it's too rocky, wet, cold or steep to produce food.

They also represent the cities, houses, highways, shopping malls, schools, parks, factories, parking lots and miniature golf courses where people live, play and work – but do not grow any food.

(Take the 1/32 piece that's left and carefully peel it).

This small scrap of apple peel represents the farmable surface of topsoil of the planet, the thin skin of the Earth's crust upon which humankind totally depends. It is less than five feet deep and is a fixed amount of food-producing land.

(Eat the 1/32 piece of apple).

That was very good, but I am going to carefully save this tiny piece of apple skin and treat it as if my life depends on it, because in the real world it does!

## **The Earth Is Our Mother**

This service was contributed by Reena Kondo, From a Community Women's Service, March 2, 2003, Community Church of New York

### **Chalice Lighting:**

We light this chalice with hopes for a bright future.  
May our children their children, all children  
Intermingle their laughter throughout the world.  
May they be as the rainbow  
Color and hope for the coming dawn.

**Hymn #303** "We Are The Earth Upright and Proud"

**Community Spiritual Dance Group** ("Walk, Waddle & Roll")

**Congregational Reading: #520** "O Our Mother the Earth"

## Significance of Calling Directions

Children calling directions

Song: "Place of Power"

**Children's Dance** "Circle Round"

## Readings

*After each reading, the congregation and choir joined in this chant:*

Earth & Air & Fire & Water  
Return, Return, Return, Return

**I Believe In Nature,** *By Florence Emmons (Editor's Note: See Words for Opening and Lighting the Chalice, page 2, for more on Ms. Emmons)*

We light this chalice to honor the orderly processes of the Universe, which hold the planets in their orbits and control the activities of microscopic cells.

To honor the pervading, impartial forces of nature through which destruction is made constructive;

To honor the ever-changing beauty of the natural world, which brings joy and inspiration to many people;

We believe in the healing and restorative power of nature without which all living things would be in great jeopardy;

We believe in the profound lessons which nature teaches; lessons of struggle and adaptability, tenacity and purpose, endurance and growth, patience, balance, and the inevitability of cause and effect;

We believe in the hope and faith which nature gives to the observant through predictable, compensatory certainties: light after dark, warmth after cold, peaceful calm after lashing storm, and always the miracle of the sun, the rain and the seed.

## Warning

Breathe air with caution. The medical and scientific communities have determined that the air you breathe may be harmful to your health.

You can choose not to smoke. Or to drink too much. Or take too many aspirin.

But what if the words above were applied to the very air you breathe?

Farfetched? Unfortunately not. In many areas of the U. S. the warning above is warranted. The truth of these words is all around you. It's in the dead and dying trees that line our highways. It's in the noxious, suffocating haze that hangs over our cities and countryside on hot summer days. Saddest of all, it's the hidden sub-text in many of the obituaries you read in your morning paper—Little Leaguer felled by an asthma attack; grandmother of twelve dead of a heart attack; school principal, never smoked a day in his life, gone from lung cancer.

Nearly half of us—121 million in the U.S.—live, work and play where the air is unhealthy—and the two main things that make our air so dangerous are power plant emissions and diesel trucks. In fact, 30,000



premature deaths a year are related to coal-fired power plants alone. ---*From Physicians for Social Responsibility*

### **A Few Thoughts on Water**

1. "When a subsidiary of Bechtel took over water delivery services in Bolivia, water rates rose so high the poor were spending a major part of their income on water. The people rebelled, mounted an uprising, and won! Here is their declaration. I think it poses exactly the alternative we need to focus on in our thinking, our organizing and our actions." --- *Starhawk*

2. The Cochabamba Declaration:

Here, in this city which has been an inspiration to the world  
For its retaking of that right through civil action, courage  
And sacrifice standing as heroes and heroines against  
Corporate, institutional and governmental abuse and trade  
Agreements which destroy that right, in use of our freedom and  
Dignity, we declare the following:

For the right to life, for the respect of nature and the uses  
And traditions of our ancestors and our peoples, for all time  
The following shall be declared as inviolable rights with  
Regard to the uses of water given us by the earth:

1. Water belongs to the earth and all species and is sacred  
To life, therefore, the world's water must be conserved,  
Reclaimed and protected for all future  
Generations and its  
Natural patterns respected.
  2. Water is a fundamental human right and a public trust to  
Be guarded by all levels of government,  
Therefore, it should  
Not be commodified, privatized or traded for commercial purposes.  
These rights must be enshrined at all levels of government. In particular,  
An international treaty must  
Ensure these principles are noncontrovertable.
  3. Water is best protected by local communities and  
Citizens who must be respected as equal partners with  
Governments in the protection and regulation of water.  
Peoples of the earth are the only vehicle to promote earth  
Democracy and save water.
3. Are some of you thinking that water problems exist only in far away countries? Here are some comments on water issues in the US from <http://www.thenation.com>
  4. Got Drought? Say Hello to the Water Profiteers!

"I suppose that Homeland czar Tom Ridge is too busy ..... to notice or care that dozens of American communities presently find themselves under assault by foreign powers like RWE, Suez, Vivendi, and Perrier," writes Jim Hightower.

"The water profiteers are seizing control by using weaselly politicians, campaign contributions, NAFTA, the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank. An example of their reach can be found in the Water Investment Act moving through Congress, a generally worthy bill to provide funds for local

cities to upgrade or expand their water systems. But industry lobbyists have tucked two little bombs into it, which remain in the House version:

1. a city cannot get federal financing unless it “has considered” privatizing its water system; and
2. private water corporations could get public subsidies for their water schemes.”

## **Hold The Tuna**

An FDA advisory panel has urged the agency to warn pregnant women to limit the amount of canned tuna they eat because it contains mercury, which can harm the nervous system of an unborn child. (Last year the FDA advised pregnant women not to eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish, but it did not include tuna on the list.) Health officials say there is no need for women to cut out tuna entirely but advise that it may be prudent to limit consumption to one can a week.

Don't believe it . . . when President Bush says that, to protect our security, we have to drill for oil in America's most pristine and sacred places. What we really need to do is make our economy less dependent on oil.

Don't believe it . . . when he says we can make ourselves safer by building new nuclear plants and relicensing old ones. Nuclear plants are sitting ducks for terrorist attacks and nuclear power never was – and never will be – a safe and secure energy source.

Don't believe it . . . when he says that the government handouts he wants to give to giant oil, coal and nuclear companies are an urgent national priority. Those outrageous subsidies will lead our nation in exactly the wrong direction.

Don't believe it . . . when he says relying on renewable energy to achieve genuine security is some kind of pipe dream. Most renewable energy sources – like solar and wind power – are decentralized and invulnerable to disruption. They're safe, secure, and 100 percent homegrown.

Don't believe it . . . when President Bush and his administration suggest that in the name of fighting terrorism, we have to tolerate the devastation of our environment.

And most important of all, don't believe it . . . when they suggest that, in the name of national unity, we should silence our voices and bury our values. *From Greenpeace*

## **WANTED: A Shift in Consciousness**

“Certainly action is essential to raise consciousness about rain forests (the lungs of the planet), the health risk of pollution and holes in the ozone layer, saving dolphins, and resource depletion through wasteful over-consumption. But as long as the notion of humans' right to dominate and conquer nature prevails, we are like the legendary boy putting his finger in the hole in the dike.

What is needed is a fundamental shift in consciousness about the connectedness or linking of all life forms on this planet and our responsibility in our cultural and technological evolution to act in harmony with nature, rather than just to exploit it.” *From The Partnership Way* by Riane Eisler

## **Food Chain**

What fascinated me were the elegant black-and-white diagrams representing ecological Food chains. One year, the arrows of energy flowed from sunlight to grass, from grass to cows, and from cows to milk. Another year, it was sunlight to diatoms, diatoms to crustaceans, crustaceans to smelt, smelt to mackerel,

mackerel to tuna. In each of these diagrams, it was man, as a drinker of milk and an eater of tuna fish, who occupied the top slot. At some point – I don't remember when exactly—the idea of bio-magnification was introduced. This was Rachel Carson's big point, of course – that long-lived toxic chemicals, such as chlorinated pesticides, do not remain diluted when they are broadcast out into the environment. Instead, they magnify – are concentrated – inexorably as they move up the food chain. Smelt to mackerel. Mackerel to tuna. Tuna to man.

As the rarer members of the higher links dine upon the commoners below them, poisons dispersed among the many are drawn up into the bodies of the few. This process of concentration can be described mathematically, and I spent a lot of hours working out such equations. As a general rule, persistent toxic chemicals concentrate by a factor of 10 to 100 with every link ascended.

A passing comment during an ecology seminar made me look at the poster more closely. "Man", a visiting professor intoned wryly, is not at the top of the food chain. His breastfed infants are."

Of course! After the tuna sandwiches and glasses of cow's milk are all consumed, there still remains one more chance for the contaminants they carry to magnify, and that takes place inside the breasts of nursing mothers, where the calories gleaned from food are transferred into human milk. The human food chain depicted on the bulletin board was missing an entire trophic level – as was every other diagram I'd studied, from grade school to graduate school. The absent link was the last one, the top one, the one occupied by nursing babies.

Why was the final link in the chain left out?

The reason for this omission eludes me. Perhaps it reflects a larger cultural denial of breastfeeding. In any case, a failure to acknowledge the unique position of the breastfed infant within the ecological world prevents us from having an informed public conversation about a very real problem: the bio-magnified presence of persistent toxic chemicals in breast milk. From "Having Faith" By Sandra Steingraber, Biologist

**Choir:** GAIA

**Seventh Principle Project. A Reflection** by Reena Kondo (not included )

**Hymn #163** "For The Earth Forever Turning"

**Exit:** Earth Banner Leads, Congregation is invited to dance (freeform) behind it to the song: "The Earth Is My Mother"

# Celebrations and Rituals

## A Maypole Dance from Alaska

Rev. Jana Peirce

*(Thanks to Rev. Jana Peirce for sharing this celebration)*

The UU Fellowship of Fairbanks, Alaska includes a Maypole celebration in our calendar because recognizing the arrival of spring is important here in Interior Alaska, where winter is so long and spring doesn't fully arrive until May. We have danced the outdoor Maypole dance with late-spring snow dusting the ground or even falling down on us. Other years it has been beautifully sunny.

The ceremonial elements, other than the dance itself, vary from year to year. The music and readings are all nature-and-spring-centered. We almost always start with Morning has Broken, and often include "Spirit of Life". The words for our songs are printed on half-sheets of paper that we distribute along with small rocks to weight them down so people can put them on the ground next to them while they are dancing.

The entire service is conducted in a circle around the Maypole. There are several readings or poems about spring, and, often, at least a child does one of the readings. One year we had four children do a spring poem adapted for four voices. Another year, we wrote poetic phrases about spring on slips of paper. Each person selected a random slip to read aloud, and collectively we created our own poem to spring.

Our maypole is a peeled spruce pole with 12 ribbons--6 of one color, 6 of another, alternating. Having more colors makes it even more beautiful, but also more confusing. Usually, we don't practice ahead of time, so less confusion is good! Several members of the Fellowship play live music for the service, often including several teens -- usually guitar, flute, a couple fiddles. They play a variety of country dance-type folk tunes that work well with the dance. We do several maypole dances, starting with the youngest children sometimes holding the hand of an adult or older child) just walking or skipping around the pole clockwise and then counter-clockwise to the music to wrap and unwrap the ribbons around the pole. Then we do two or three other dances of increasing complexity. When a dance is done (the pole is woven and then unwoven), dancers stand with their ribbons until new people from the circle come forward to take their ribbons. Usually everyone - preschoolers to octogenarians - dances at least one dance. We finish after about 4 dances, when it seems that everyone who wants to dance has done so.

After the last dance, we have a closing song and/or reading. One year, we added a brief new member welcome ceremony, and another year had a general appreciation ritual, where we passed a basket around with daisies. Everyone took one and then the circle dissolved as each person went to someone else, exchanging flowers while saying what they appreciated about the other person.

It's a great intergenerational service and good community outreach, often attracting families with children. You can see some of our own photos of Maypole celebrations over the years on our website [www.uuff.org](http://www.uuff.org).

There are written sources to learn the various dances, but is a lot easier to learn by watching. Find someone in your community that already does a maypole and learn from them. Waldorf schools are a good resource. Most do a Maypole every year and they have really polished it. If you have a larger RE program than we do, the week or two before the RE teachers could set up a small maypole in a

classroom and children could learn one of the maypole dances. In addition children could make flowers wreaths and crowns for both children and adults to wear at the service. The girls can be encouraged to wear white dresses and boys to dress up in spring colors for the celebration.

## **We Are Made of Stardust**

Adapted from materials by Connie Barlow

A Meditative, Participatory Ritual, November 2003. [www.thegreatstory.org](http://www.thegreatstory.org)

**Intention:** To help participants deeply experience their connection to ancestral stars, and to easily and joyously learn the wonders of chemical creation inside the fiery furnaces of stars.

**Materials:** At least one Candle. Glitter (available at crafts stores or children's departments), along with a shell or other object to hold the glitter and for passage hand to hand. Water in a lovely bowl or container. Chime or bell. Other relevant or seasonal altar objects.

**Size of Group:** This ritual is adaptable to any size of group, but it is most profound when it can be conducted in the round, with a circle of seats around a central altar table or cloth.

**Teaching the Underlying Science:** This ritual has been written with the expectation that participants will already have had at least a brief instructional introduction to the grounding science of chemical formation in stars. So you may need to spend the first 20 minutes to half hour providing this foundation for all. All this background science can be learned easily by going to "Stardust Background" on <http://www.thegreatstory.org/> website. You may wish to create a "Periodic Table" of your own, based on the chart you will see in this file. You may also wish to purchase a book or posters ([www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov)) of Hubble Space Telescope photographs <http://hubblesite.org/gallery/album/> and hold these up to show examples of Red Giant emissions and of the atom-rich remnants of supernova explosions.

**Other Preparations:** Ideally the ritual can be conducted in a darkened room, in which the candle or candles cast the most light. Optional: Encourage participants in advance to bring a meaningful piece of jewelry, a symbol of an elder/mentor they wish to hold in mind, and one altar object.

**Welcome, Introductions, What's to Come:** (Do this part however works best for your group.) You may ask each person, for their introduction, to include a brief explanation of their altar object, if they so choose.

**Invocation:** You may wish to give several participants a chance to choose to read to the group one of the "Classic Quotes" of the Epic of Evolution, or a dramatic (perhaps acted-out) reading of Paula Hirschboeck's "Buddha Bowl" evolutionary parable (<http://www.thegreatstory.org/BuddhaBowl.html>) or a short duet reading of Connie Barlow's, "Who Am I". <http://www.thegreatstory.org/who-parable.html>

(All of these are available at <http://www.thegreatstory.org/>)

### ***The Stardust Ritual - Outline of Content for One Person Leading the Stardust Ritual***

1. THE GREAT RADIANCE (Big Bang) Light central candle; turn off house lights. 13.7 billion years ago.
2. EMERGENCE OF HYDROGEN and the formation of great clouds of hydrogen gas. Commune with hydrogen by anointing ourselves with WATER (H<sub>2</sub>O), recognizing that each hydrogen atom is a true

elder: 13.7 billion years old. While doing so, one by one, we may each speak of an ELDER, a mentor dear to us, whose legacy we carry with us and commit to further.

3. CREATION OF CARBON, NITROGEN, OXYGEN in Red Giant Stars (as our own sun will become), and the giving away of those elements crucial for life in the exhalations of such stars. Here we focus on our BREATH: the in-breath of oxygen (from plants), and our out-breath of carbon dioxide (given back to plants), and the vast supply of nitrogen that comprises the atmosphere. All these (especially nitrogen) are the gifts of Red Giant stars.

4. CREATION OF SILICON, CALCIUM, ETC. in hot blue, massive stars. Here we reflect on how the structural frame of our bodies (calcium of bone) is born within stars when the structural frame of rocks (silicon) is fused with more helium. Participants will feel their bones holding them upright, and may choose to speak the names of rock formations that have been meaningful in their lives.

5. CREATION OF COPPER, GOLD, AND SILVER in the explosion phase of hot blue stars, when these stars become supernovas. At the start of the ritual, and in anticipation of this part, some participants may have placed rings or other jewelry on the altar, which will be ritualistically taken back at this time, one by one, while each person may choose to speak of their significance.

6. BLACK HOLES, DARK MATTER, AND DARK ENERGY. Let us not neglect the 96% of the Universe that we know almost nothing about (23% dark matter and 73% dark energy), while honoring the generative "darkness" that periodically comes into our own lives.

7. GLITTER AND SONG. Close the ritual by anointing the foreheads of one another, in turn, with stardust (glitter), while the group repeatedly sings a chant-song, "You are made of stardust, every single atom, of carbon and of oxygen, calcium and iron." When all are anointed, rise, all join hands, while still singing, but change the "You" to "We".

## ***The Stardust Ritual - Outline of Content for Six Persons Leading the Stardust Ritual***

*Editor's Note: this has been adapted from the original text by Connie Barlow, [www.TheGreatStory.org](http://www.TheGreatStory.org)*

LEADER #1: LIGHT (recruit a partner to light the candle while you read this reverentially. Both come forward and begin by ringing CHIME and waiting for it to fade out before you start speaking.)

In the beginning there was mystery and darkness. Out of this mystery and darkness, the universe was born in a Great Radiance of brilliant light and boundless energy!

LEADER #2: HYDROGEN/WATER (you will come forward to lead this part right after the candle is lit and the candle leaders have returned to their seats. Silently pour water into a bowl, standing so that everyone can see the trickle of water, and pouring from a height that will enhance the sound of the falling water. Then speak:

"Hydrogen is the elder of all. Each atom of hydrogen that swirls in water and within us is 13 billion years old. (pause) I invite each of us to come forward to anoint forehead or hand with this elder atom. As we do so, let us silently hold in gratitude the elders in our own lives who taught us, guided us, and brought out the best in us. And let us open to the ways in which we too can mentor others." (anoint your own forehead or hand, RING CHIME, AND RETURN TO SEAT.) [If there are 10 or fewer people in the circle, change the wording to invite people to speak aloud a mentor's name and to say something about

their gift. If there are too many people, modify the words so that you anoint only yourself and then invite silent gratitude.)

#### LEADER #3: AIR/BREATH

(you will guide this part right after the water anointment ritual. You will come forward, pause, breathe, and then invite all to take a deep breath. After the outbreath say:

“In that breath, we each inhaled recycled stardust, the gifts of Red Giant stars, ancestors who lived and died before our Sun was born. (pause) Through the creativity of those ancient stars, atoms were joined into all the NITROGEN that now colors the sky blue. Other atoms were shaped into all the OXYGEN that now burns in our cells and powers our awareness. And still other atoms were fused into all the CARBON that we, in turn, offer as a gift to the plant realm, in the carbon dioxide that we exhale. (pause) Let us breathe together once more as we remember these grandparent stars, as we give thanks for the ongoing creativity of the Cosmos.” (pause, RING CHIME, AND RETURN TO YOUR SEAT).

#### LEADER #4: CALCIUM/BONES

(you will guide this process right after the person who guided the Breath part of the ritual returns to seat. Come forward, pause, breath, and then say:

“In the bellies of hot blue-white stars were created all the silicon atoms that now bind the rocks of Earth. These blue-white stars also brought forth all the calcium atoms that now bind the bones of our bodies. (slight pause) I invite us all to close our eyes and sit up tall (slight pause), resting on our bones (pause), feet fully on the floor. (pause until shuffling ends). Let us take this moment to remember in gratitude, the grandparent stars who bequeathed us these sturdy gifts: the calcium in our bones, the silicon in stones deep within the Earth.”

(pause for 10 seconds. RING CHIME TO END AND RETURN TO YOUR SEAT).

#### LEADER # 5: PRECIOUS METALS

(you will guide this part of the ritual right after the person who guided the BONES/CALCIUM part of the ritual returns to their seat. Come forward, pause, breath, and begin to speak:)

“Let us now reflect on, marvel at, any metals we may be wearing: any copper, silver, gold, platinum. Even the iron in a belt buckle, or metal filling in a tooth! (pause) Let us remember that these very atoms of metal were created in the awesome explosion of a supernova that signaled the death of an ancient star. (pause) Surely there is beauty and new life that emerges from every death. (RING CHIME, RETURN TO SEAT.)

#### LEADER #6: CONCLUSION

(You will guide this part of the ritual right after the person who guided the PRECIOUS METALS part of the ritual returns to seat. Perhaps recruit a partner to alternate with you in reading the poems. Come forward, pause, breathe, and begin to read:)

We humans have always been drawn to the stars. We have always yearned for relationship. And so, in 1943, the French author Antoine de St. Exupery had his little Prince speak these words: “In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them I shall be laughing, when you look at the sky at night.”

In 1989, Native American poet Joy Harjo wrote of another kind of relationship with the stars:

"I can hear the sizzle of a newborn star,  
and know that anything of meaning,  
of fierce magic, is emerging here.  
I am witness to flexible eternity, the evolving past.  
And I know I shall live forever,  
as dust or breath in the face of stars,  
In the shifting pattern of winds."

Twenty years ago and on through today, our eyes grow teary when we watch the Lion King speak these words to his adventurous little son: "Simba let me tell you something that my father told me. Look at the stars. The great kings of the past look down on us from those stars. So whenever you feel alone, just remember that those kings will always be there to guide you – and so will I."

Science has barred us from a literal understanding of the Lion King's words. And yet, we CAN cultivate an embodied sense of the stars as our ancestors too. A quarter century ago, the astronomer Carl Sagan concluded his television series Cosmos in this way: "We are the local embodiment of a Cosmos grown to self-awareness. We have begun to contemplate our origins. We are star-stuff pondering the stars!"

(PAUSE, RING CHIME AND RETURN TO SEAT)

NOTE: the ritual can either end here or another person can invite participants to anoint himself or herself with "stardust" (glitter) while an appropriate short song or chant is repeated such as the following doxology:

Praise birth and death amid the stars  
Whence came all atoms that we are.  
Praise cosmic temporality,  
Each moment precious as can be.

Praise birth and death upon this Earth,  
Rejuvenation and rebirth.  
Praise beauty rise and then depart,  
Fullness of spirit, breaking heart.

Amen

## **The Universe Story as Unfolding of the Triple Goddess and Her Seasonal Celebration**

Glenys Livingstone

*(Editors Note: We are pleased to include the following as an inspiration to many seasonal celebrations and as a meaningful glimpse of the spiritual implications of living in the Southern hemisphere.)*

### **The Context: The Way the Cosmos Was for a White Protestant Australian Country Girl**

And the Great Cosmic Schoolbus, full of children to be delivered all over the world, pulled up in the outback. Red dust flew. The land was flat and dry ... well, at least that's how it looked to her. There were actually a few trees, and hills, and there was a bit of greenery, and the soil did seem to grow some crops. But comparatively speaking ... I mean, this Schoolbus had driven by, and stopped, at some fantastic



places! At this place where she was supposed to get off, there were no buildings ... well, there was one painted wooden structure — a house, she supposed — and a couple of unpainted ones. But where were the great stone universities, conservatoriums, art galleries, observatories, ancient places of worship, piazzas, great works of art on every bridge? In fact, where were the bridges?

"No, no ... there must be some mistake," the girl thought. "Excuse me," she said to the driver, "wrong Stop."

"Afraid not," said the driver, "this is it."

"No" she said. "I don't want to get off here. I'm sure you have made a mistake. I want More than what is here."

"Listen young one," said the driver, "this is where your ancestors have come to. This is your entry point. Your ancestors are creating something new here, beginning again like their ancestors did millennia ago in other places. It doesn't look like much yet, but give it several hundred years or a bit more, maybe a millennium, and there will be a big change. You will be a part of it, in fact."

"No" she said. "I won't have that long. I will only be able to see the small picture. And I will know in my soul that I am missing something, but I won't know what. Are you sure you've got the right ancestors? Don't my lot have more books?"

"Listen, dear; this is it. I have to leave you. This is where you Enter, for whatever complex weaving that is going on."

"I will be one of the hungry children," she protested, " ... not for food. I will feel the hunger in my being. In fact, I will feel like I am not being, and for a long time I won't even know. I will feel like a stranger here."

"Almost everyone feels like that at first, but they soon adjust."

"No" she said again. "I won't adjust ... I will remember that there is More, much More. And as soon as I can, I will go away from here to find It."

"I'm sorry," said the driver. "I have to go."

The girl disembarked. The Great Cosmic Schoolbus pulled away. Red dust flew. She sat down in the dirt, a tot with wavy platinum hair, and there she wept, as she remembered Other Times and Other Places ... the More. She wept and she wept in the red dirt, turning it to mud; until gradually, the visual memories blurred, and great stones rolled across entrances in her mind. She stopped crying and looked about her. A woman's voice was calling. "For me?" she wondered. The woman appeared, and picked the girl up, commenting jovially on her grubby state, and took her inside.

This is the beginning of a story I wrote for myself to understand my cultural roots. It proceeded to explain a cosmic story that the girl believed about "the manufacture" of the Universe by a Mechanic — a Male Deity who was no Poet. In this Universe there was no female involved at the Creative level, and indeed all the chaos and pain of the world was her fault, the result of her insatiable innate wickedness, or at least, her ineptness and stupidity.

This deep internalized sense of being "Other" was exacerbated by a salient story of displacement in the Southern Hemisphere. That is, most of the texts and graphics explaining the Cosmos to an Australian and white child were (and still often are) drawn from the Northern Hemisphere perspective. The Moon in her phases was "backwards"; Sun's daily movement from East to West was described as being "clockwise";

the seasons in the stories were always at odds with real experience. This was never regarded as important enough to mention, but deep within me from the beginning there was scribed the cosmic essence of disregarding one's senses.

And whereas my ancestors had known a synchronicity of the Christianized calendar with the older indigenous ways — for the Christian holy days had been based upon the old seasonal calendar — in Australia, parts of which do have a similar seasonal articulation to the lands of our forebears, most of us with this heritage grow up with no idea that Earth has any relationship to spiritual matters. Here in the South land, the supernatural drama of God and Jesus is completely unrelated to material reality; Earth is nothing more than a ball of dirt upon which we travail. Southern Hemisphere Christianity has been a particularly barren, cerebral religion, since its rituals and holy celebrations have been irrelevant to place. While it is true that Northern Hemisphere Christianity for centuries attempted to dissociate from the pagan roots of its calendar, the church celebrations nevertheless retained some congruency with Earth's rhythms. And who knows what many of the people have actually been celebrating over the centuries? Perhaps just the names had been changed. When the people lit candles and sang at the Winter Solstice, though they called it Christmas, there remained a resonance with something earlier upon which this ritual was based. In the Southern Hemisphere, this ritual practiced in the blazing heat of Summer Solstice knew no such resonance. The Southern children of this religious practice have thus suffered a poverty of spirit, a deep divorce from Earth that few others in the history of Gaia's religions have ever known.

### **Celebrating the Female Metaphor (Virgin, Mother, Crone) in Earth's Seasonal Rituals**

For a few decades I have been "re-storying" the Female (as Goddess metaphor) in Her triple aspects to the Center of the Cosmos, finding Her within myself and facilitating that process in others through teaching and writing. This increasingly has included sensing and celebrating Her — the Triple Goddess — in Earth and in Her seasonal cycles, and as these cycles manifest in the Southern Hemisphere. I have been calling what I do "Celebrating Gaia" and "Gaian spirituality." The name "Gaia" has, for me, come to represent not only Earth, but the entire Cosmic Presence: Earth is at one with Her context.

I have adapted the Wheel of the Year of the Pagan tradition as a way of celebrating the Triple Goddess — thus plumbing the Wheel's earliest metaphor, but combining it with my own experience and with Western scientific understandings. I have identified Her three faces of Virgin, Mother, and Crone with the three aspects of Cosmogogenesis articulated by physicist Brian Swimme and cultural historian Thomas Berry in *The Universe Story* (1992, p. 71-78). These three aspects of Creativity that unfold the Cosmos are differentiation, communion, and autopoiesis. In brief, differentiation means "to be is to be different" — completely new and fresh. Communion means "to be is to be related" — embedded in the web of life. Autopoiesis (also called interiority or subjectivity) means, "to be is to be a center of creativity" — sentient space.

The "Seasonal Moments", as Thomas Berry has named the seasonal points (1994), or "Sabbats" as they are traditionally known in the Pagan Wheel of the Year, provide a pattern/Poetry that may be identified with the three-fold Creativity of Cosmogogenesis and with the three phases of Gaia's annual breath: the waxing, peaking, and waning. Surely this triple-phased dynamic is Her creative formula. It is a ubiquitous dynamic, repeated everywhere: in body cycles of all kinds, plant cycles, the moon phases, and the breath in every moment. The breath is a microcosm of the whole Creative Cosmos, as it moves through the three phases — waxing, peaking, and waning — returning to a space from which it begins anew. This Creativity apparent in the seasonal cycle is a movement into light/manifestation, and into dark/the unmanifest. It is an awesome process of creation and destruction that is consistently creative in its overall

arc (Swimme 1990, video 5); it has been so for 13 billion years according to western science, eternally according to some spiritual traditions.

Into these traditional, seasonal celebrations I have woven the conscious celebration of Cosmogogenesis, the Creative Unfolding of "Gaia-Universe & Earth". The celebrations begin with Earth-Sun relationship; that is the reason for their existence, since the earliest of human times. The resulting Creativity of the play of light and dark in this Earth-Sun relationship has translated into food, and into human psyches. The creative telling of our personal stories, and how we wish them to unfold, may be folded into the seasonal moment because that is where we each interface intimately with Gaia. Throughout, there is the connection to the Larger Story, Gaia's long Cosmic Story, as our own story that we are participants in — sometimes quite obviously so.

I have come to consider the participation in Earth's moments of transition, Her "holy-days," as a cultural practice that may enable us to "realize that we live in a participatory universe" (Spretnak 1993, p. 22). The practice awakens us to where we are and who we are, and fosters more responsible action. It is an "ecological psychology," a psychology that enables deep participation in our Habitat, which is personal, cultural, and cosmic.

The dark Crone phase of the seasonal cycle pairs with Autopoeisis of the cosmological process. Here we find sentience, subjectivity, interiority, the creative center. The light Virgin phase, in turn, celebrates Differentiation — diversity, complexity, multiform nature, articulation. Communion — the Mother phase — is celebrated throughout, though particularly at the Solstices, when there is a point of interchange, a Gateway into manifest or unmanifest states of being.

There are eight seasonal points in The Wheel of the Year: Winter and Summer Solstice, Spring and Autumn Equinox, and four "cross-quarter" days — Early Spring, High Spring, Early Autumn, Deep Autumn. These eight seasonal moments are known by various names; it is the Celtic names I tend to use. And surely there will be many ways of folding in aspects of Gaia's story, of enriching Pagan tradition with the knowings newly presented by science. To begin, I offer the following.

### **The Wheel of the Year**

WINTER SOLSTICE / YULE, June 20-23 in the Southern Hemisphere. This is the darkest point, the peaking of the Dark. The light cycle begins; it is "born," if you like. The Origin of all manifestation is celebrated. The Primeval Fireball, the Great Origin, is echoed in the beginning of Sun's "return" at this seasonal moment. We also celebrate the explosion of Tiamat, the Grandmother Supernova of our Solar System. This is a time, too, to celebrate any birth, including the births and rebirths in our psyches, imaginations, and minds.

EARLY SPRING / IMBOLC, August 2 in the Southern Hemisphere. This is the time to celebrate the continued birthing, the rushing away of the Fireball, the continued rippling forth of Creation. It is understanding the difficulties, the resistances that even Gaia-Universe has encountered, and how such difficulties have served the Unfolding of the Story as we know it. Imbolc celebrates Gaia's rush to diversity, differentiation. As celebrants, we honor and commit to this creative principle in our own lives, our own selves. The "Urge to Be," as I name the Virgin aspect, is celebrated at this turn of the Wheel. The first stirrings, the tender beginnings, are nurtured. It is a time of commitment to each individual, beautiful presence that is part of the whole. This cross-quarter is dedicated to Brigid in my tradition, from whose name the word "Bride" comes. It is a celebration of the Self, a "bridal" commitment to Being.

SPRING EQUINOX / EOSTAR, September 20-23 in the Southern Hemisphere. Now the light reaches a new level of power. At this Seasonal Moment, light and dark have come into balance, with the light about to grow yet stronger. Eostar/Equinox is celebrated as the joyful return of the Lost One — and we have all been lost, individually and collectively. The story told at this time is the return of "Persephone" (an image of Beloved Lost Daughter), with Wisdom gained. Her emergence from the Underworld may be understood as a collective experience of emergence into a new era, the Ecozoic Era that Swimme and Berry speak of (1992, pp. 253-54). Eostar/Equinox reminds us of the creative balance/edge that has fostered life's evolution for billions of years. Cosmologically, this is the curvature of space-time. We celebrate, too, the innate balance and harmony, the "Persephone" Seed, that enables each of us to step into the power of manifest Being.

HIGH SPRING / BELTANE, October 31 in the Southern Hemisphere. The light is still increasing; the flowers are turning to fruit; fertility is the agenda. The Virgin face is morphing into the Mother. Beltane is a celebration of mating and desire, the deep awesome dynamic that brings forth all things and allows the Dance of Life. Beltane is the time of the dance around the pole, the "Novapole" in the Southern Hemisphere, as this season celebrates the centrality of Allurement/Desire in the Universe Story. The Charge of the Goddess says She is that "which is attained at the end of desire" (Starhawk 1989, p. 91). Brian Swimme writes that "the unity of the world rests on the pursuit of passion" (1984, p. 48). In this celebration, individuals may come to sense their participation in this Desire, and to enjoy it. Beltane is also a good time to celebrate the advent of meiotic sex, which was an evolutionary move that advanced all three aspects of Cosmogonesis (Swimme and Berry 1992, p. 108).

SUMMER SOLSTICE /LITHA, December 20-23 in the Southern Hemisphere. Light reaches Fullness in our part of Earth. The breath peaks. We celebrate the ripening of the Sun, in the fruits, in the grains, in us. In that peaking, the dark part of the cycle begins — the dark is "born," if you like. That is, the fullness of Life, the fullness of our Creativity, our individual Passion, is not ours to hold. It is given over to the Larger Picture, passed on. Like the grains and the fruits, we are Food for the Universe — in our daily acts, as well as ultimately. Summer Solstice celebrates Origins again; this time our return, the return of all manifestation to the unmanifest. It celebrates the fulfillment of the purpose of the breath, of this life — the Gift of it — the Giving Away of it. Traditionally, Litha is celebrated as the Bliss of Union of the Goddess and God, the Beloved and Lover, the maturing of Love: distinctions dissolve in the peaking of such Passion. We celebrate Gaia's Teeming Abundant Creativity and how "She gives it away, She pours it forth," as we say in the ritual. We recall that this is what Mother Sun does, this is what Earth does, and this is what we may do with the abundant Creativity that ripens within us. This cosmology assents to and nurtures a concentration of Being, which innately demands to be poured forth; it creates a generosity within, since abundance is its very nature. We celebrate the innate Generosity of the Universe, for which Sun may be our model.

EARLY AUTUMN /LAMMAS, February 2 in the Southern Hemisphere. This is the feast of the Bread, the Harvest of Life, the cutting, the releasing of the breath, the waxing dark; the time to celebrate dissolution, the return to Source. Like Imbolc, its polar opposite on the Wheel, it is a time of dedication — this time to the Larger Self. It is the time for "making sacred," which is the meaning of the term "sacrifice." It is not a self-abnegation, it is a fulfillment of purpose, a fulfillment of the Passion that is in you — just as the fruit fulfills its purpose in the eating. This Seasonal Moment celebrates the beginning of dismantling, de-structuring, and there are many such moments in the evolutionary story that could be so remembered; perhaps even our present ending of the Cenozoic Era, as Swimme and Berry describe the ongoing extinctions and planetary destruction (1992, pp. 241-50). Gaia has done a lot of this de-structuring; it is in Her nature to return all to the "Sentient Soup." We recall the Dark Sentience at the base of Being. In Swimme's terminology, this is the "All-Nourishing Abyss," the Mystery at the base of being. The All-

Nourishing Abyss is both generative and infinitely absorbing — a Power out of which particles spontaneously emerge and into which they are absorbed (1996, p. 100). We image this Power as the Great Receiver, the Old Compassionate One, complete forgiveness, Transformer, Depth of Love.

AUTUMN EQUINOX / MABON, March 20-23 in the Southern Hemisphere. Light and dark again come into balance, this time with the dark about to strengthen. We express thanksgiving for all that has been gained, and accept the losses that have been involved in the gain. Traditionally, the loved One is lost; the Seed goes into the ground. The loved One descends into the fertility of the dark, for the gaining of Wisdom. We are the loved One; and we, as the Mother, grieve. Yet we hold hope in the Creative balance, in the sacred Thread of Life that continues beneath the seen in the unmanifest, and that has eternally done so. The Seed, the "Persephone," which is ritually planted, represents that very perdurable balance which has brought forth the entire evolutionary story. In Greece, Autumn Equinox was the time for celebrating the Great Eleusinian Mysteries, with the initiates gaining Sight and Knowledge of the immortal process of Life and Death. Mabon is the Seasonal Moment for recognizing the loss of every moment of existence — an awareness that every moment dissolves and is never repeated, thus honoring the Story of Gaia- Universe as irreversible and nonrepeatable. It is also then true that every moment is totally new. We grieve the Loss, and we celebrate the Moment. We give thanks in a harvest feast.

DEEP AUTUMN / SAMHAIN (pronounced SAUW-en), April 30 in the Southern Hemisphere. This cross quarter (known as "Halloween" in Christian times) is a journeying yet further into darkness — into the Transformation of Death — and therein the conception of the new. The need for such journeying is poorly understood in our times, as we are divorced from the generativity of the Dark. Here we find the face of the Crone moving into the fertility of the Mother; it is the Seasonal Moment for conceiving the new, for resolution. Deep Autumn is traditionally the New Year. It is a celebration of the "Space to Be," the Womb from which all may manifest again and afresh. We participate in the continuing unfolding. We are co-creators of that unfolding. Samhain is a time for celebrating the Becomings, the unimaginable More that Gaia has become, and will yet become. It is a time for remembering the ancestors — creatural, plant, and human — out of whom we and the present have arisen. It is also a time for imagining what it means to be the ancestors of the future, to know that we are free to conceive Much More.

### **A Taste of the Deep Autumn Ritual**

In all of our Sabbats, we begin by "creating the sacred space." For the Deep Autumn / Samhain Sabbat, we create sacred space by remembering our elemental origins; that we are, in truth, billions of years old, and that there is nothing we have not been. In the ritual, each participant recalls something of their individual transformation journey — "old selves" each has been. We remember by way of the children's game of "going in and out the windows." At the conclusion of this "game," when each has shown old selves, the celebrant greets the participants as "Great Ones" who have "come through so many changes" Š "as Gaia Herself has done." Each participant is then presented with a gingerbread snake, which is "symbol of life renewed," and blessed with the invocation: "You are More, much more." Reading from the poetry of Robin Morgan (1976, p. 84), the celebrant invites all to consume their gingerbread snakes in three parts; first, imagining their old selves, then remembering the ancestors, and finally by naming the old cultural stories in whose transformation we wish to participate. After meditating on these "endings", a ball of golden thread is passed around, with the chant: "Free to radiate whatever we conceive." The "conceptions" are spoken, the thread is cut. The participants are offered apples to eat — the "fruit of never-ending renewal" (Walker 1983, pp. 48-50).

## The Transformation Journey Of The White Protestant Australian Country Girl

Sometimes inside her, the girl ached for poetry. It did exist somewhere, didn't it? ... once upon a time? But she could not remember clearly. Her mother did read her "once-upon-a-time" stories, called "fairy tales," that sometimes implied Other Worlds. But often the stories just seemed a more extreme version of what she experienced here.

The "once-upon-a-time" stories gave clues to other possible places and characters in the Universe. They seemed to contain bits that the mother did not want to tell. The mother would falter as she read, and then proceed as if making it up.

The girl wondered, What did the wolf really do to Little Red Riding Hood and the grandma? What other horrible things were possible that she had not yet imagined? Her mother would have spared her the whole tale if she could have, it seemed. The girl felt her mother's wish for more hopeful tales, tales of a better world. The mother had an ember in her heart that longed for a world that she could embrace, one that she could even just dream of ... if something would help her imagine it.

How did the girl begin to remember the Other Times and Other Places? How did she take the Cosmos of her childhood and lift it from her soul? Where did the alchemy begin? Where was the seed? What voice whispered to her? The girl was always listening for Something Else, because she felt the hunger, and she remembered the ember of desire in her mother's heart.

Stories did leak in — stories of a change sweeping the world outside. These stories came mostly threaded in music. From a long way away, Other Times and Places filtered in — just little bits here and there.

The girl scraped and licked up these stories as she did the remaining cake mix from a bowl. It was like a tapping on the stones that had rolled across entrances in her mind the day she sat weeping in the dirt. She heard It, the More, beckon. She could not have refused.

There was also the communion of the land and the sun and the stars. The land and the sun were more ancient than any story she had heard told in this place; and the stars held infinity in their embrace.

The girl thought about this.

Another crack in this Cosmos came when the girl experienced the Creative Force of Life within her own body. Eventually, the girl carried a child within her, and she knew tangibly the power of the Universe. Yes! The power of the Universe was in her, too. They had lied.

The girl went away. She went a long way away. She traveled light years from her mother's womb. Where, she wanted to know, was her Mother? The girl traveled deeply into herself, into her deep space. She pulled in the anchors, she trusted herself to the ocean and the wind and the stars. She found other maids also seeking their Mother. Together they would create the map.

The Form, the Shape that they sought was not in any Atlas. Her gaps had been covered up, her hollows filled in, her name blanked out. She lay buried, silent, but with a detectable visceral pulsation. So they would dig out the hollows and the gaps with their hands. They would roll away the stones. They would utter her Word. They would Dream the Other Times and Other Places, expanding and transmitting the echoes that dimly resonated within them. Soon they would vibrate visibly, audibly with the Song, and beam the radiant enlivening Vision from Her re-awakened eyes. There was More — much More.

The girl had become a transmitter for her bloodline, beaming in the new colors and textures, sending on the ripples. Indeed, this was her part — her part in the complex weaving that the Schoolbus driver had foretold. She did not belong there; this was as it should be. Her passion to run, to leave, was the Wisdom ... yet always with her mother's hunger for better tales to tell in her heart.

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Editor's Note: This essay is adapted from Glenys Livingstone's doctoral thesis, "The Female Metaphor — Virgin, Mother, Crone — of the Dynamic Cosmological Unfolding: Her Embodiment in Seasonal Ritual as a Catalyst for Personal and Cultural Change," University of Western Sydney, 2003. Glenys lives with her Beloved in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney, lectures casually in Ecological Psychology, and facilitates seasonal ritual celebrations for various groups as well as for her own community. You can visit her website at <http://www.divinexpressions.com.au>.

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# Blessing of the Animals

Rev. Katherine Jesch

## **Service Outline**

Prelude - "Carnival of the Animals"

Opening Song - "Enter, Rejoice, and Come In"

Chalice Lighting

As the flame is lit, sing:

Rise up, o flame, by thy light glowing.  
Show us beauty, vision, and joy.

Opening Words - "Come into Animal Presence" poem by Denise Levertov, *The Life Around Us: Selected Poems on Ecological Themes*, 1997, New Directions.

Meditation

Candles for our animal companions no longer with us.

Song "All God's Critters Have a Place in the Choir" by Bill Staines

Homily "Learning from Our Animal Companions" Rev. Katherine Jesch [(text follows)]

Blessing the Animals (A second, alternative, participatory animal blessing follows the Homily)

Circulate among the congregation, stopping for each animal:

What is this [refer to the kind of animal]'s name?

"Bless [name]. And may [name] and those who care for her/him be held lovingly in the hand of creation."

Unison Closing Words:

Gracious Creator, Hear and bless  
Thy beasts and singing birds  
And guard with tenderness  
Small things that have no words.      Amen

Closing Song - "From You I Receive" (Sing three times):

From you I receive,  
To you I give  
Together we share,  
By this we live.



## ***Homily - Learning from Our Animal Companions***

*Rev. Katherine Jesch*

We learn much from our animal brothers and sisters. We learn how to love. And we learn that we are loveable. We learn responsibility – that it's important to be reliable in caring for those who depend on us. We learn how to play – do you remember when you were three years old – how you rolled around and giggled with your beloved puppy or kitten?

What else do we learn from our animal companions? Certainly we learn about friendship, about being there for one another, about sharing the fun, sharing our food (under the table), sharing our sorrow when things go wrong.

Our animal companions teach us a lot. They show us an intelligence that doesn't depend on human language – they're very smart; they just don't use our words. We learn acceptance – we can better appreciate others just the way they are, because we experience acceptance – not just judgment and criticism – from our animal friends. They teach us about the cycles of life.

When I was five years old, we had a fish tank with guppies in it. We watched in amazement as those little fish gave birth to even tinier brand new babies. A few months later, my new baby brother Kevin came home from the hospital with my mother. We understood how he got there. That same year, our beloved dog, Frisky, got sick. We put my little sister's outgrown sweater on him to keep him warm. And we put him in the playpen in the kitchen next to the stove oven, where my mother's fresh bread was baking. We took turns sitting on the floor next to Frisky, watching and petting him. After a few days of keeping this vigil, we got up one morning and he was gone. He had died during the night, and my daddy buried him in a special place under the house. His bones are probably still there, but his spirit is surely running along the shore of San Francisco Bay.

So you see, we experience the cycles of life with our animal companions. Children have always learned about the interconnected web of all existence, and their part in this web, from watching the cycles of life around them.

The changing seasons are more than a change in temperature and color. Spring is a time of new life and growth – the planting season when hopes for the future are made real by hard work. When new animals are born and have to be nurtured. Summer is a time of taking care, of weeding and watching, working and watering. It's also a time of playing outdoors, swimming in the creek, chasing in the woods, exploring the abundance of nature all around us, and anticipating the harvest to come. Fall is a time of harvest, of reaping what has been sown; of storing away the bounty of the earth for the coming of winter. And winter is a time of rest, of decay and recycling, of gathering strength. It is time of waiting quietly for the dawn, for the new birth that will come in the spring. It is a time of transition.

Animals have been part of these cycles from time before time. Whether domesticated or wild, our animal brothers and sisters experience the same progression of seasons, from the tiniest microscopic organism, to the hugest mammal, the blue whale. Whether the strangest insect, the most amazing caterpillar/cocoon/butterfly; the most cuddly koala, the most vicious looking monster of a great white shark; whether a familiar human being like your new baby brother or sister, all animals are subject to the laws of nature.

All animals experience birth, growth, death, and decay. They teach us patience and acceptance of these cycles. The most important lesson we learn from our animal companions is that we are all part of the

interdependent web. As Unitarian Universalists, our seventh principle reminds us to respect the interdependent web of all existence – that we are a part of this web. This means that not only do they depend on us, but we depend on them.

Every animal has a role in the ecosystem, just like everyone in your family has a job to do. Someone must pick up the toys, buy the groceries and cook the dinner, set the table and wash the dishes, take out the garbage and mow the lawn. If someone doesn't do his or her job, the whole system breaks down.

In nature, bacteria and insects are the recyclers. Bees carry pollen from one flower to another, making sure the generations of plants continue through time. Birds help with this too, carrying seeds from one area to another. Predator animals make their contribution by keeping the populations of certain other species under control, taking out the weak or the sick, and insuring that the strong and healthy ones are the ones that reproduce.

By watching, by carefully observing and studying, we can learn how nature works and where we fit into the whole system. We can learn how to keep the system healthy, sometimes how to fix the system when our actions cause damage.

If we pay attention, if we really think carefully about our interdependence with our brothers and sisters in nature, we will understand our responsibility. We will act more carefully to protect and heal the earth, and to make sure our actions don't cause more damage.

From our animal companions we will learn to strengthen our love and caring – for ourselves, for each other, and for all of the earth.

### ***Alternative Participatory Animal Blessing***

Assemble in a circle, singing "We're All a Family Under One Sun" (Linda O. Peebles)

Naming - Go around circle; let each person name themselves and their pets.

Our Joys - Let people say out loud what are the joys of owning a pet

Our Sorrows - When a pet dies, we never forget them. Let us name these pets, picture them in our memories, and say, "For the love of our dear friends, we give thanks."

The Promise - The minister asks the following questions and the participants respond with "I will" or "I promise".

- All you pet lovers and pet guardians, young and old, strong and gentle, I ask you:
- Will you be responsible for the pets in your care?
- Will you promise to be sure they are well fed and have enough water?
- Will you care for them when they are sick, and give yourself unselfishly to their health and well-being?
- Will you give your time and be gentle with your friend?
- Will you play regularly and exercise often with your pet?
- Will you protect your pet from all that may harm?
- Will you treat them with respect, and remember that they are dependent on you?
- Will you let your pet into your heart and receive without embarrassment all the love your pet has to give you?

Blessing [Minister then circulates and gives blessing to each pet.]

# Small Inspirations: Quotations on the Environment and Environmental Justice

"The major problems in the world are the result of the difference between the way nature works and the way man thinks." - Gregory Bateson

The Four Laws of Ecology:

1. Everything is connected to everything else.
  2. Everything must go somewhere.
  3. Nature knows best.
  4. There is no such thing as a free lunch.
- Barry Commoner

"Economics must be seen as a small sub-branch of ecology." - Gary Snyder

"The earth provides for every man's need but not for every man's greed." - Gandhi

"Only mature people might utter the two words our civilization most desperately needs to hear: "That's enough." - Bill McKibben

"As birds have flight, our special gift is reason. We could exercise our reason to do what no other animal can do: we could limit ourselves voluntarily, choose to remain God's creatures instead of making ourselves gods. Such restraint - not genetic engineering or planetary management - is the real challenge, the hard thing." - Bill McKibben

"One of the great dreams of man must be to find some place between the extremes of nature and civilization where it is possible to live without regret." - Barry Lopez

"Happiness is the middle ground between having too little and having too much." - Unknown

"We must live together as brothers or perish together as fools." - Martin Luther King

"Problems cannot be solved at the same level of awareness that created them." - Albert Einstein

"How do we care for all the children of all the species for all time?" - William McDonough

"At this turning point in our relationship with Earth, we work for an evolution: from dominance to partnership; from fragmentation to connection; from insecurity, to interdependence." - David Suzuki (from Declaration of Interdependence)

"If we don't change direction, we're likely to end up where we're going." - Chinese proverb? Yogi Berra?

"Our leaders got confused, so we're all leaders now." - Joanna Macy

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

"The greatest use of a life is to spend it for something that will outlast it." - William James

"You can't always get what you want, but if you try real hard you just might find you get what you need." - Mick Jagger, Rolling Stones

"If you want to be successful, know what you're doing, love what you're doing, and believe in what you're doing." - Will Rogers

"The joy of living comes from immersion in something that we know to be bigger, better, more enduring and worthier than we are." - John Mason Brown

"Man judges man by his achievements. God judges man by his efforts." - Unattributed

"I am only one  
But still I am one.  
I cannot do everything.  
But still I can do something.  
And because I cannot do everything  
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." - Edward Everett Hale

"People say, what is the sense of our small effort.  
They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time.  
A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions.  
Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that.  
No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless.  
There's too much work to do."  
- Dorothy Day

"A person will worship something—have no doubt about that.

We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Politicians are like weather vanes. Our job is to make the wind blow." - David Brower

"What do we live for, if not to make life less difficult for others?" - George Eliot

"To treat life as less than a miracle is to give up on it." - Wendell Berry

"We are as large as our loves." - Baruch Spinoza

"Sermons seldom hinder us from pursuing our self-interest, so we need to be a little more enlightened about what our self-interest is. It would not occur to me, for example, to exhort you to refrain from cutting off your leg. That wouldn't occur to me or to you, because your leg is part of you. Well, so are the trees in the Amazon Basin; they are our external lungs. We are just beginning to wake up to that. We are gradually discovering that we are our world." - Joanna Macy

"Nature is the unseen intelligence that loved us into being." - Elbert Hubbard

"Humanity has reached the biological point where it must either lose all belief in the universe or quite resolutely worship it. This is where we must look for the origin of the present crisis in morality. Henceforth the world will only kneel before the organic center of its evolution." - Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

“A morality of reverence will also be a morality of responsibility—not a responsibility based on duty and fear of disobedience but a responsibility based on care for what we cherish and revere.” - Matthew Fox

"When we tug at a single thing in Nature, we find it attached to the rest of the world." - John Muir

“What the world desperately needs is information and heightened consciousness, the awareness of the fact that the global environmental crisis is the primary and most crucial issue the world currently faces. That crisis should constitute the primary agenda item for all our institutions—from the churches to government. Indeed, it may be argued that the current pathology of all our institutions—including the churches—is evidenced in their refusal, for a variety of reasons, to make the environmental issue their principal agenda item....I would argue that the greatest service the churches could render the world at this time is providing education concerning facts of the environmental crisis, the ingredients in our thinking and action that have contributed to the crisis, and the resources we already have available to us for altering our way of thinking and action in constructive ways.” - Douglas Bowman

“What a time to be alive! Humankind has dawning upon its consciousness a new perception of its origins—the nature of life, the world, the universe, God...We stand on the threshold of a new time for the earth, for we are confronted with the prospect of taking a new evolutionary step. We are challenged to enter into a new life by the prospect of adopting a new way of thinking.” - Douglas Bowman

“As the turning point approaches, the realization that evolutionary changes of this magnitude cannot be prevented by short-term political activities proves our strongest hope for the future.” - Fritjof Capra

“It is time to invent moral reasoning of a new and more powerful kind, to look to the very roots of motivation and understand why, in what circumstances and on which occasions we cherish and protect life.... We are human in good part because of the particular way we affiliate with other organisms.... they offer the challenge and freedom innately sought. To the extent that each person can feel like a naturalist, the old excitement of the untrammled world will be regained. I offer this as a formula of reenchantment to invigorate poetry and myth....” - Edmund O. Wilson

“The sacred itself is impossible to describe because it transcends all of our categories and the very conditions of our perception and our language. Nevertheless, the immediate experience of its presence is so real that it makes everything else look wispy and evanescent in itself, though real in the sense that everything alive is an “ark” for the sacred. When I perceive myself as such a vessel, I become able to see the sacred in every living creature.” - Martha Heyneman, from *The Breathing Cathedral*.

### **Quotations from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

“There is nothing more tragic in all this world than to know right and not to do it.” --Selma, 1965, quoted in Richard Deats', Martin Luther King, Jr.: Spirit-Led Prophet, p. 98

“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” --“Letter from Birmingham Jail,” in Why We Can't Wait, p. 77.

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. . . . We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: “Too late.” --Where Do We Go from Here? p. 222.

### **Quotations on Viewing the Earth from Space**

“Once a photograph of the Earth, taken from space, is available... a new idea as powerful as any in history will be let loose....” - Sir Fred Hoyle, 1948

“Before I flew I was already aware of how small and vulnerable our planet is; but only when I saw it from space, in all its ineffable beauty and fragility, did I realize that humankind's most urgent task is to cherish and preserve it for future generations.” - Sigmund Jahn, astronaut

“During a space flight, the psyche of each astronaut is reshaped. Having seen the sun, the stars, and our planet, you become more full of life, softer. You begin to look at all living things with greater trepidation and you begin to be more kind and patient with the people around you. At any rate that is what happened to me.” - Boris Volynov, astronaut

“The first day we all pointed to our own countries. The third or fourth day we were pointing to our continents. By the fifth day we were aware of only one Earth.” - Prince Sultan bin Salman al-Saud, astronaut

“From space, I get the definite, but indescribable feeling that this, my maternal Planet, is somehow actually breathing--faintly sighing in her sleep--ever so slowly winking and wimpling in the benign light of the sun, while her muscle like clouds writhe in their own metric tempo as veritable tissues of a thing alive.” - Guy Murchie, astronaut

"From the moon, Earth is so small and so fragile, and such a precious little spot in that universe, that you can block it out with your thumb. Then you realize that on that spot, that little blue and white thing, is everything that means anything to you—all of history and music and poetry and art and death and birth and love, tears, joy, games, all of it right there on that little spot that you can cover with your thumb. And you realize from that perspective that you've changed forever, that there is something new there, that the relationship is no longer what it was." - Rusty Schweickart, astronaut

"With all the arguments, pro and con, for going to the moon, no one suggested that we should do it to look at Earth. But that may in fact have been the most important reason of all." - Joseph P. Allen, astronaut

"For those who have seen the Earth from space, and for the hundreds and perhaps thousands more who will, the experience most certainly changes your perspective. The things that we share in our world are far more valuable than those which divide us." - Donald Williams, astronaut

"Looking outward to the blackness of space, sprinkled with the glory of a universe of lights, I saw majesty—but no welcome. Below was a welcoming planet. There, contained in the thin, moving, incredibly fragile shell of the biosphere is everything that is dear to you, all the human drama and comedy. That's where life is; that's where all the good stuff is." - Loren Acton, astronaut

"The Earth was small, light blue, and so touchingly alone, our home that must be defended like a holy relic. The Earth was absolutely round. I believe I never knew what the word round meant until I saw Earth from space." - Aleksei Leonov astronaut

"My first view -- a panorama of brilliant deep blue ocean, shot with shades of green and gray and white -- was of atolls and clouds. Close to the window I could see that this Pacific scene in motion was rimmed by the great curved limb of the Earth. It had a thin halo of blue held close, and beyond, black space. I held my breath, but something was missing -- I felt strangely unfulfilled. Here was a tremendous visual spectacle, but viewed in silence. There was no grand musical accompaniment; no triumphant, inspired sonata or symphony. Each one of us must write the music of this sphere for ourselves." - Charles Walker, astronaut

"The sun truly "comes up like thunder," and it sets just as fast. Each sunrise and sunset lasts only a few seconds. But in that time you see at least eight different bands of color come and go, from a brilliant red to the brightest and deepest blue. And you see sixteen sunrises and sixteen sunsets every day you're in space. No sunrise or sunset is ever the same." - Joseph Allen, astronaut



"The Earth reminded us of a Christmas tree ornament hanging in the blackness of space. As we got farther and farther away it diminished in size. Finally it shrank to the size of a marble, the most beautiful marble you can imagine. That beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a man, has to make a man appreciate the creation of God and the love of God." - James Irwin, astronaut

"Suddenly, from behind the rim of the moon, in long, slow-motion moments of immense majesty, there emerges a sparkling blue and white jewel, a light, delicate sky-blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, rising gradually like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. It takes more than a moment to fully realize this is Earth . . . home." - Edgar Mitchell, astronaut

"My view of our planet was a glimpse of divinity." - Edgar Mitchell, astronaut

"For the first time in my life I saw the horizon as a curved line. It was accentuated by a thin seam of dark blue light -- our atmosphere. Obviously this was not the ocean of air I had been told it was so many times in my life. I was terrified by its fragile appearance." - Ulf Merbold, Federal Republic of Germany

"A Chinese tale tells of some men sent to harm a young girl who, upon seeing her beauty, become her protectors rather than her violators. That's how I felt seeing the Earth for the first time. I could not help but love and cherish her." - Taylor Wang, China/USA

#### **Quotations from the work of Annie Dillard**

Selections below are from the following books by Annie Dillard:

*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

*Holy the Firm*

*Teaching a Stone to Talk*

Trees have a curious relationship to the subject of the present moment. There are many created things in the universe that outlive us, that outlive the sun, even, but I can't think about them. I live with trees.

There are creatures under our feet, creatures that live over our heads, but trees live quite convincingly in the same filament of air we inhabit, and, in addition, they extend impressively in both directions, up and down, shearing rock and fanning air, doing their real business just out of reach. A blind man's idea of hugeness is a tree. They have their sturdy bodies and special skills; they garner fresh water; they abide.

I would like to learn, or remember, how to live. I come to Hollins Pond not so much to learn how to live as, frankly, to forget about it. That is, I don't think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular...but I might learn something of mindlessness, something of the purity of living in the physical senses and the dignity of living without bias or motive. The weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons. I would like to live as I should...And I

suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will.

If the landscape reveals one certainty, it is that the extravagant gesture is the very stuff of creation. After the one extravagant gesture of creation in the first place, the universe has continued to deal exclusively in extravagances, flinging intricacies and colossi down aeons of emptiness...The whole show has been on fire from the word go. I come down to the water to cool my eyes. But everywhere I look I see fire; that which isn't flint is tinder, and the whole world sparks and flames.

My God, I look at the creek. It is the answer to Merton's prayer, "Give us time!" It never stops.... You don't run down the present, pursue it with baited hooks and nets. You wait for it, empty-handed, and you are filled. You'll have fish left over. The creek is the one great giver. It is, by definition, Christmas, the incarnation. This old rock planet gets the present for a present on its birthday every day.

The creation is not a study, roughed-in sketch; it is supremely, meticulously created, created abundantly, extravagantly, and in fine... Even on the perfectly ordinary and clearly visible level, creation carries on with an intricacy unfathomable and apparently uncalled for. The lone ping into being of the first hydrogen atom ex nihilo was so unthinkable, violently radical, that surely it ought to have been enough, more than enough. But look what happens. You open the door and all heaven and hell break loose.

Every live thing is a survivor on a kind of extended emergency bivouac. But at the same time we are also created. In the Koran, Allah asks, "The heaven and the earth and all in between, thinkest thou I made them in jest?" It's a good question. What do we think of the created universe, spanning an unthinkable void with an unthinkable profusion of forms? ...If the giant water bug was not made in jest, was it then made in earnest?

Esoteric Christianity, I read, posits a substance. It is a created substance, lower than metals and minerals on a "spiritual scale," and lower than salts and earths, occurring beneath salts and earths in the waxy deepness of planets, but never on the surface of planets where men could discern it; and it is in touch with the Absolute, at base. In touch with the Absolute! At base. The name of this substance is: Holy the Firm.

All day long I feel created. I can see the blown dust on the skin on the back of my hand, the tiny trapezoids of chipped clay, moistened and breathed alive.

Like boys on dolphins, the continents ride their crustal plates. New lands shoulder up from the waves, and old lands buckle under. The very landscapes heave; change burgeons into change. Gray granite bobs up, red clay compresses; yellow sandstone tilts, surging in forests, incised by streams. The

mountains tremble, the ice rasps back and forth, and the protoplasm furls in shock waves, up the rock valleys and down, ramifying possibilities, riddling the mountains. Life and the rocks, like spirit and matter, are a fringed matrix, lapped and lapping, clasping and held.... The planet spins, rapt inside its intricate mists. The galaxy is a flung thing, loose in the night, and our solar system is one of the many dotted campfires ringed with tossed rocks.

The creator goes off on one wild, specific tangent after another, or millions simultaneously, with an exuberance that would seem to be unwarranted, and with an abandoned energy sprung from an unfathomable font. What is going on here? The point of the dragonfly's terrible lip, the giant water bug, birdsong, or the beautiful dazzle and flash of sunlighted minnows, is not that it all fits together like clockwork -- for it doesn't, particularly, not even inside the goldfish bowl -- but that it all flows so freely wild, like the creek, that it all surges in such a free, fringed tangle. Freedom is the world's water and weather, the world's nourishment freely given, its soil and sap: and the creator loves pizzazz.

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(Editor's Note: This bibliography is intended to act not only as a reference to works cited in this resource, but also a general resource for other materials to inspire Earth-honoring worship. We welcome your annotated additions. Please send suggested additions to [office@uiministryforearth.org](mailto:office@uiministryforearth.org)

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