

Earthcare, Our Spiritual Journey Home

WHAT does that have to do with me? So what? That's how some people respond when told that another tree frog species or primate species in a distant tropical forest is critically endangered or has gone extinct because of humans' voracious appetites for limited resources.

We modern humans have been very successful at shielding ourselves from the discomforts and dangers of the natural world. This also has led to a tragic alienation from other species. In many ways both subtle and overt, we are taught from birth to think of ourselves as superior and independent. We no longer see ourselves as part of a living web of interdependent relationships. This loss of awareness and caring has encouraged lifestyles that relentlessly tear at the web of life, making us vulnerable to extinction ourselves.

Why is it commonly assumed that the natural world exists only to satisfy humans' demands? In his book, *The Dream of the Earth*, Thomas Berry says that our basic attitudes are products of a largely unconscious *story* that our particular version of human culture instills in us.

That story survived through millennia because it served us well when the human species was relatively weak. Now that humans have become the dominant species on the planet, we urgently need a new story that affirms our kinship and solidarity with the rest of the life community. We need a new story that can evoke the psychic and spiritual energy required for the work ahead.

Modern life has shaped us into primarily goal-setting, thinking beings, separated from our deepest feelings, intuitions, and senses. We show our disconnection when for example we throw trash out the window of a car. The resulting loss of natural beauty and wholeness only perpetuates our loneliness, isolation, and despair.

Our alienation from nature cannot be healed by the kinds of technological developments and political and economic systems that led to our alienation in the first place. We need to identify the outdated spiritual beliefs and practices that may be barriers to our caring more deeply and speaking more effectively to the heart of our psychic and ecological self-destruction. By focusing on the *spiritual dimension* of the global ecological crisis we can learn once again to feel the deep cry from our heart and soul for new ways to see our planet and ourselves.



River Otter

Four centuries of scientific work has culminated in the stunning discovery of our common origin with Earth and the universe. Physicists are moving away from an objectified, predictable model of reality that was once thought to be completely explainable. Many scientists now approach reality as an energetic, interconnected, field of relationships. Although highly structured and enduring, what we consider "solid" matter is actually 99.99 percent "emptiness," a vast, non-visible creative realm out of which the physical world of atoms is born.

Scientists now know that Earth was formed 4.6 billion years ago from simple elements formed during the initial flaring forth of the universe, as well as from more complex elements forged in exploding stars. Earth's beautiful, balanced ecosystems, each with a multitude of species, are the fruits of a very long co-evolutionary process. Humans are a part of a diversified unity that includes everything from hippos to mushrooms, river otters to bacteria, butterflies to orchids, and coral reefs to redwoods.

THIS new awareness is bringing about a hopeful spiritual awakening. It is leading us to accept with humility our role in this exciting ongoing cosmic story. In this New Story we find a home for the heart. We see that everything is integral to an emerging sacred whole. We see that the Divine permeates and transfigures all of Creation.

Traditional stories teach us about wise balance, restraint, and the high price of arrogance and alienation. Many ancient myths and images embody knowledge of the rhythms of the seasons and inherited wisdom regarding birth, death, and regeneration. Supported by these powerful spiritual traditions, we come to know with awe, reverence, and gratitude the unifying, creative depth of the natural world.

The New Story prepares us for further evolution in human consciousness, to become active participants in the creative Earth process. We embrace its mysteries as part of our healing. We find in it a larger context for our individual gifts and wisdom. We learn from the New Story that love is more powerful than exploitation, that community works better than domination, and that out of despair can come empowerment and

hope. The New Story gives deeper spiritual roots to our ethical leadings. Friends processes of discernment and seeking the Light become part of the spiritual journey home.

WE may initially come into this deeper level of caring with the idea that we are “doing something” to heal Earth. As we grow into a restored sense of oneness, we become aware that we are also *receiving* something. This is our spiritual answer to the dismissive question, “So what?” When we come to care about the least of our fellow endangered Earthlings, including tropical tree frogs, we become part of what Thomas Berry called “the Great Work” that transforms us as it renews our hopes for the future.

Some spiritual practices that may help:

1. Slow down. Seek balance in action, thought, and reflection. Breathe.
2. Study. Seek wisdom. Find and share new visions.
3. Find a community that understands and supports your calling to be a healer and peace maker. Learn to laugh and sing and work together. Take time to care for a plant, a kitten, or a child.
4. Listen carefully for the work that is uniquely your leading.
5. Know that there are many others on this path. Not all the work is yours. There is much energy for healing that we see and much that we do not. Trust it all.

Illustrations by Mary C. Coelho.

Gratitude from the authors for editing by Louis Cox

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Resources

Books

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- Watson, Elizabeth G. *Healing Ourselves and the Earth*. Quaker Earthcare Witness, 2007.

DVD series

- The Powers of the Universe: A Positive, Life-Affirming Vision of Human Potential and Path to the Future*, with Brian Swimme, 2004.
- Journey of the Universe, The Epic Story of Cosmic, Earth, and Human Transformation*. Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, 2011.

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WE WORK to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God’s Creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring Earth’s ecological integrity.

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