



EXPLORATION

Creation

Readings



1. *Every Seed Carries a Secret*

by Angela Fischer

Every seed carries a secret.

We will never come to fully know this secret, because it belongs to the mystery of creation. Yet we can ...live with the secrets, ...use them as gifts, and ...honor them as a source of life on this planet.

The first step in learning to live with a secret is to listen.

When I was a young child, my mother gave me a seed of a bean. She showed me how to plant it into a pot filled with black soil and how to keep it warm and moist. And then I had to wait.

For a young child this took a very long time. Every morning I would visit my seed, invisible in the darkness of the soil, and because I could not see anything, I remember that instead I tried to hear something. It was around the same time that my mother was pregnant, and I used to put my ear to her belly to communicate with the baby I could not see or touch. So, I did the same with the invisible seed: I put my ears close to the soil and listened. I do not remember if I ever heard something, but I remember the listening.

...The seed is a symbol for the deepest mystery of creation, and at the same time it is the mystery. For thousands of years farmers have known how to listen to these mysteries, and so found ways how to grow and to harvest....

This goes back to ...ancient ... wisdom about the connection with the Earth.... Source: <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2127>

2. *The Earth Within Us*

by Valerie Andrews

...When I was seven, I roamed the hillsides and the meadows, aware that the world around me was engaged in an endless cycle of renewal. I went to my birch grove, certain that the land would accept all my loves and disappointments and receive my childhood joys and tragedies as it received all other living things. It was the earth that gave me my first sense of communion and I felt that my best, my truest self was connected to a few square miles of land.

When I was twelve, my family moved from the country to the crowded suburbs of New Jersey, and I felt we had done the unforgiveable.... There were no more rose bushes or rows of irises and hollyhocks. I could no longer pick apples from our yard or run down the road to get fresh eggs from the neighbor's farm.

Years later, I realized that the land is always with us. The world as we first knew it remains imprinted on the body and the brain like tiny fossils embedded in a piece of shale. As a child, one has that magical capacity... to see the land as an animal does; to experience the sky from the perspective of a flower or a bee; to feel the earth quiver and breathe beneath us; to know a hundred different smells of mud and listen un-self-consciously to the sighing of the trees. ...The whole earth lives within us, and in every moment, we are both its creators and discoverers.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/25235>

3. *Dark Green Religion*

by Bron Taylor

Dark green religion ...is unnamed and has no institutions officially devoted to its promotion; no single sacred text that its devotees can plant in hotel rooms in hopes of reaping a future harvest of souls; no identified religious hier-

archy or charismatic figure responsible for spreading the faith, ministering to the faithful, or practicing its rituals.

...It can be found in the minds and hearts of individuals who invent and are drawn to organizations that express its central convictions and moral commitments. It has charismatic figures and bureaucratic hierarchies devoted to its globalization. It is reinforced and spread through artistic forms that often resemble, and are sometimes explicitly designed, as religious rituals.

...Dark green religion—religion that considers nature to be sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and worthy of reverent care—has been spreading rapidly around the world. I label such religion 'dark' not only to emphasize the depth of its consideration for nature (a deep shade of green concern) but also to suggest that such religion may have a shadow side—it might mislead and deceive; it could even precipitate or exacerbate violence.

Whether beneficent, dangerous, or both, such religion is becoming increasingly important in global environmental politics. It motivates a wide array of individuals and movements that are engaged in some of the most trenchant environment-related struggles of our time. It increasingly shapes the worldviews and practices of grassroots social activists and the world's intelligentsia. It is already important in global environmental politics. It may even inspire the emergence of a global, civic, earth religion.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/reviews/excerpts/view/19659>

4. *Making Amends*

with Creation by Farley Mowat

When our forebears commenced their exploitation of this continent, they believed its animate resources were infi-

nite and inexhaustible. The vulnerability of the living fabric that clothes the world—the intricacy and fragility of its all-too-finite parts—was beyond their comprehension. ... They were mostly ignorant of the inevitable results of their dreadful depredations.

We who are alive today can claim no such exculpation for our biocidal actions and their dire consequences. Modern humanity now has every opportunity to be aware of the complexity and interrelationships of the living world. If ignorance is to serve now as an excuse, then it can only be willful, murderous ignorance.

The hideous results of five centuries of death dealing on this continent are not to be... [denied], but there are at least some indications that we ... are developing the will, and the conscience, to look beyond our own immediate gratification and desires. Belatedly, some part of humankind is trying to rejoin the community of living beings from which we have for so long been alienating ourselves—and of which we have for so long been the mortal enemy.

... My own hopes for a revival and continuance of life on Earth now turn to this newfound resolution to reassert our indivisibility with life, recognize the obligations incumbent upon us as the most powerful and deadly species ever to exist, and begin making amends for the havoc we have wrought. If we preserver in this new way, we may succeed in making humans humane ... at last.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/reviews/excerpts/view/21103>

5. *Extinction* by Richard Pearson

Only about one in a thousand of the species that have ever existed on Earth are still alive today. We can't possibly know the proportion precisely, but the fossil record reveals that the vast majority of life forms ... are long gone. The fossil record also reveals that many species went extinct during cataclysmic events scattered sporadically throughout Earth's history. Most famously, 65 million years ago something—most likely a massive meteorite smashing into the Earth—drove the dinosaurs to extinction, and there have been at least five other mass extinction events over the

last 600 million years....

... After each catastrophic event, it took evolution at least 10 million years to rebuild the former levels of diversity. ... The species alive today—however many millions there may be—are irreplaceable. ... The current diversity of life is all we will ever have.

... Climate clearly has a fundamental influence on nature, with species having adapted to live under certain conditions. For instance, emperor penguins have evolved a thick layer of blubber under their feathers to enable them to withstand some of the coldest temperatures on Earth, while their relatives, the Galapagos penguins, have been on an evolutionary diet to shed the insulation and survive in hot, equatorial climates.

... But these are extreme examples of how the climate affects species—differences between climates don't need to be so dramatic for us to see variation in species. Throughout nature, subtle differences in the climate have a major impact on the plants and animals that are found in a particular area.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/reviews/excerpts/view/21456>

6. *Trees May Save Us*

by Jean Shinoda Bolen

The tree is a powerful symbol. Trees appear in many creation stories, such as the World Ash or the Garden of Eden. Religions, especially the Druids, have revered trees. Buddha was enlightened sitting under a Bodhi tree. ... There are sacred trees throughout the world.

... To learn about trees is to appreciate them as a species. Beliefs about sacred trees and symbols of them have been part of many religions, and turned trees into casualties of religious conflicts. The unintended consequences of cutting down all the trees on Easter Island were disastrous, with applicable parallels to the fate of the planet. In Kenya, the Green Belt Movement engaged rural women to plant trees. When this became known through honoring the founder, Wangari Maathai, thirty million trees had been planted and, in 2004, she became the first African woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

... I learned that we wouldn't be here at all—we, the mammals and humans on this planet—if not for trees. Whether huge forests or a single specimen that is one of the oldest living things on Earth, trees continue to be cut down by corporations or individuals motivated by greed or poverty, who are ignorant of or indifferent to the consequences or meaning of what they do. I learned that reforestation was the difference between cultures that stayed in place and thrived, and those that cut down the trees and did not: these are very applicable object lessons for humanity now. It's possible to learn from past history and see what will befall us or how trees may save us.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/reviews/excerpts/view/21063>

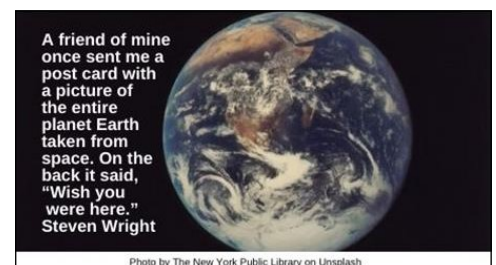
7. *Ark-Builders*

by Scott Russell Sanders

Ark-builders realize ... that nothing is gained by creating refuges in one place, if we behave in a way that contributes to the despoiling of land somewhere else. If we're going to build arks, we should do everything we can to avoid swelling the flood.

... The ark-builders understand the link between consumption and devastation: the more we consume—of gasoline, junk food, clothing, containers, electronic toys—the more the planet must be mined, bulldozed, clear-cut, and paved. Recognizing this, the ark-builders don't identify themselves as consumers but as conservers. Their aim in life is not to devour as much stuff as possible, but to savor the necessities of life. ... The ark-builders don't rush from one sensation to the next, as the media propose, but instead they relish the pleasures of an unhurried pace.

... None of this would have seemed strange to our grandparents. Thrift is normal; it is what sensible people have always practiced in every land.





...By protecting wild land, they are helping to preserve the biological heritage — the seed stock, the diversity of species, the intricate web of fertility — that we will need to replenish the earth after the flood recedes. By living simply, by meeting more and more of their own needs from local and renewable sources, they are conserving the skills, knowledge, and values that our descendants will need in order to live decent lives without impoverishing the planet. By forming alternative communities, they are creating islands of sanity and integrity from which a new civilization may spread.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/reviews/excerpts/view/18985>

Wisdom Story

The Big Bang Theory

In 1927, a Roman Catholic priest and scientist, Georges Lemaitre, proposed what later became known as the Big Bang theory of the origin of the Universe, based on work by Edwin Hubble who theorized and then proved that the Universe was getting bigger and bigger. Many scientists have discovered other evidence that confirms that the theory might be correct. They think that the Big Bang happened 13 to 15 billion years ago.

Big Bang theorists are called cosmologists, because they study the cosmos. They tell us that before the big bang, the entire Universe fit into a space that would make a grain of sand absolutely colossal. Everything that exists, from a blade of grass to Sirius, the Dog Star, all fit into a very, very tiny space, all compacted together.

Suddenly there was an explosion, and the Universe began to spread out. Expanding at the speed of light, which is 186,000 miles per second, the Universe continues to expand today, and no

one is sure when it might end, but it's estimated to be billions of years in the future.

The Big Bang theory does not explain how the Universe began, or where all of the “stuff” in it comes from, or how it was created. Scientists are certain that the Universe has a beginning, but are not certain what that was. Science does not and cannot explain or describe “the beginning,” only the general evolution of our Universe from a possible point in time.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/multigenerational/miracles/session-1/big-bang>

Snippets

“We rich nations, for that is what we are, have an obligation not only to the poor nations, but to all the grandchildren of the world, rich and poor. We have not inherited this earth from our parents to do with it what we will. We have borrowed it from our children and we must be careful to use it in their interests as well as our own. Anyone who fails to recognize the basic validity of the proposition put in different ways by increasing numbers of writers, from Malthus to The Club of Rome, is either ignorant, a fool, or evil.” *Moss Cass*

“It’s funny. When we were alive, we spent much of our time staring up at the cosmos and wondering what was out there. We were obsessed with the moon and whether we could one day visit it. The day we finally walked on it was celebrated worldwide as perhaps man’s greatest achievement. But it was while we were there, gathering rocks from the moon’s desolate landscape, that we looked up and caught a glimpse of just how incredible our own planet was. Its singular astonishing beauty. We called her Mother Earth. Because she gave birth to us, and then we sucked her dry.” *Jon Stewart*

“Wherever forests have not been mowed down, wherever the animal is recessed in their quiet protection, wherever the earth is not bereft of four-footed life—that to the white man is an ‘unbroken wilderness.’ But for us there

was no wilderness, nature was not dangerous but hospitable, not forbidding but friendly. Our faith sought the harmony of man with his surroundings; the other sought the dominance of surroundings. For us, the world was full of beauty; for the other, it was a place to be endured until he went to another world. But we were wise. We knew that man’s heart, away from nature, becomes hard.” *Chief Luther Standing Bear*

“Earth is ancient now, but all knowledge is stored up in her. She keeps a record of everything that has happened since time began. Of time before time, she says little, and in a language that no one has yet understood. Through time, her secret codes have gradually been broken. Her mud and lava is a message from the past. Of time to come, she says much, but who listens?” *Jeanette Winterson*

“We are the intelligent elite among animal life on earth and whatever our mistakes, [Earth] needs us. This may seem an odd statement after all that I have said about the way 20th century humans became almost a planetary disease organism. But it has taken [Earth] 2.5 billion years to evolve an animal that can think and communicate its thoughts. If we become extinct, she has little chance of evolving another.” *James Lovelock*

“We need the tonic of wildness.... At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, un-surveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature.” *Henry David Thoreau*

“People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don’t even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child—our own two eyes. All is a miracle.” *Thích Nhất Hạnh*



“We have become, by the power of a glorious evolutionary accident called intelligence, the stewards of life’s continuity on earth. We did not ask for this role, but we cannot abjure it. We may not be suited to it, but here we are.”
Stephen Jay Gould

“To reverse the effects of civilization would destroy the dreams of a lot of people. There’s no way around it. We can talk all we want about sustainability, but there’s a sense in which it doesn’t matter that these people’s dreams are based on, embedded in, intertwined with, and formed by an inherently destructive economic and social system. Their dreams are still their dreams. What right do I -- or does anyone else -- have to destroy them? At the same time, what right do they have to destroy the world?”
Derrick Jensen

“Saving the world requires saving democracy. That requires well-informed citizens. Conservation, environment, poverty, community, education, family, health, economy- these combine to make one quest: liberty and justice for all. Whether one’s special emphasis is global warming or child welfare, the cause is the same cause. And justice comes from the same place being human comes from: compassion.”
Carl Safina

Questions

The following questions are for your consideration.

1. In reading #1, Angela Fischer writes about the secret in each seed. She notes, “The first step in learning to live with a secret is to listen.” Why do so many of us refuse to listen to the earth? How do you listen to the earth? In what ways is the earth “speaking” about her distress?
2. Valerie Andrews, in reading #2,

lamented that at the age of 12 she lost the land that she loved when her family moved to a crowded suburb in New Jersey. It was only later that she discovered that her beloved land was within. As a child, what experiences made the land a part of you? How has your connection to the land been sustained, expanded, or diminished? How? Why?

3. In reading #3, Bron Taylor writes about a religion he calls “Dark Green” religion. What value does this religion have for people who care about the earth? In what ways is Unitarian Universalism a “Dark Green” religion?
4. In reading #4, Farley Mowat stresses the need for human beings to make amends with nature. He calls human beings the most powerful and dangerous species ever to exist. Do you agree? Why or why not? How strange that our species seems to be a pathogen capable of so harming our host, the earth, as to insure our own destruction. What awareness and actions do we need to live in symbiosis with earth?
5. In reading #5, Richard Pearson writes about extinction. He links prior mass extinctions to cataclysmic events. Is our current age, which has been called the Anthropocene Age, giving birth to another cataclysmic event? (It is notable that a characteristic of this age is the arrogance of our species.) While some care deeply about species going extinct, many seem cavalier about this. As Peterson notes, it has taken 10 million years to rebuild a former level of diversity following a global cataclysmic event. What will it take for human beings to realize the inexorable consequences of our behavior? (Consider these words by Maurice Maeterlinck from his 1901 book, *The Life of the Bee*, “If the bee disappeared off the face of the earth, man would only have four years left to live.”)
6. In reading #6, Jean Shinoda Bolen writes about the importance of trees. She notes, “I learned that we wouldn’t be here at all—we, the mammals and humans on this plan-

et—if not for trees.” For her, the cultural value of reforestation was and is determinative in the success of a country. This is why Wangari Maathai’s Green Belt Movement (GBM) in Kenya was so transformative. The movement continues (<http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/>) and has now planted over 51 million trees. What do trees mean to you? Why? Can trees help save the planet? How?

7. In reading #7, Scott Russell Sanders extols ark-builders. Writ large, ark-builders could be understood as those who understand that, ultimately, the earth is the ark. They work in their local area to create an “island of sanity.” What is required to help shift people from being consumers to conservers? What are the barriers that get in the way of making such a shift? How does the proliferation of “arks” help support the idea of conservation?
8. The wisdom story, *The Big Bang Theory*, makes it clear that there is so much about the creation of the universe that we don’t know. Cory Powell writes, “...it is absolutely certain that our understanding of the Big Bang is incomplete. ... Was there a time before the Big Bang? Will the universe expand forever? Will there be another Big Bang? Is the universe finite or infinite? Do other universes exist? These are all exciting, wide open questions.” What questions do you have about “creation?”

The following questions are related to the Snippets.

9. Moss Cass shifts the generational metaphor from “inheriting the earth from our parents” to “borrowing it from our children.” How can this shift cause more people to make the care of the earth more central to their lives? Are the deniers of this proposition ignorant, fools, evil, or something else? How? Why?
10. Jon Stewart suggests, indirectly, that the greatest human achievement was not walking on the moon. Rather it is walking on the earth with reverence and caring for her as our Mother. How do we make this shift



in consciousness where we value conservation and care for the planet as much as we value technical prowess?

11. Chief Luther Standing Bear (1868-1939) offered a compelling comparison of Native American sensibility with the Christian view of “dominion over creation.” He concludes, “We knew that man’s heart, away from nature, becomes hard.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
12. Like the sentiment expressed in reading #1, Jeanette Winterson writes about the earth’s secrets, especially of the time to come, but laments that too few people listen. What has the earth “said” about our future that at least some people have heard?
13. James Lovelock, who advanced the Gaia hypothesis, has been quite critical of the way humans treat the earth. Yet he writes that “[Earth needs us,]” inferring that there is no other “intelligent” life anywhere else in the universe. What purpose beyond its own survival and power has human intelligence contributed to the planet? Lovelock notes that it took 2.5 billion years to evolve our species. Still, the life of the sun has been estimated to be between 5 and 7.5 billion years, which mean that the Earth has time to evolve another species with intelligence like that of human beings. Do you agree that the earth needs our species? Why or why not?
14. Thoreau, who valued wildness/wilderness, wrote, “We can never have enough of nature?” Do you agree? Why or why not? Part of his argument is the importance of mystery. What value do you place on mystery? Why?
15. Thích Nhất Hạnh, similar to Jon Stewart (#9), says that better than walking on water or in thin air is walking on the earth surrounded by

countless miracles? What about earth do you find miraculous?

16. Paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould wrote that human beings are the stewards of life on earth. In what ways have we discharged this role? In what ways have we failed?
17. Derrick Jensen points to the challenge that we face as we try to balance individual dreams with planetary sustainability. What is required to circumscribe our dreams by the dictates of sustainability?
18. Carl Safina writes that, “Saving the world requires saving democracy.” Do you agree? Why or why not? For him, the cardinal virtue is compassion? What role can compassion play to make human beings better stewards of all creation?

