



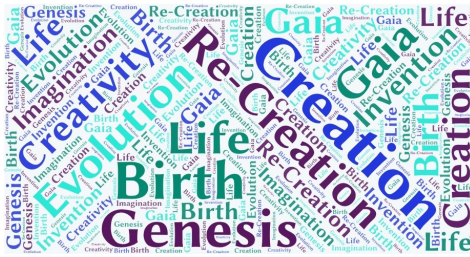
TOUCHSTONES

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Creation

Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

The creation account in Genesis is read in divergent ways. For some it is a literal, historical narrative. Closely related to this is Genesis as theology as it describes the origin of the earth and humanity in terms of God. More liberal approaches regard it as either ancient science representing the state of knowledge about the cosmos, both its origin and purpose, or as a mythic history that attempts to articulate a symbolic representation of historical time.

Given what we know about how the universe, the planet earth, and our own species came into being, the account of creation in Genesis is incredulous if we take it literally. But if we regard it as myth and allow for metaphor, it is com-

elling. The first shift in re-reading Genesis is to wonder whether time existed before the universe came into being and, materially, what existed, if anything, before the big bang. The phrase “without form and void” has been rendered in Greek as “unseen and unformed,” and this may reasonably describe the condition that existed before the big bang. That Greek term also parallels the Greek concept of chaos, and this may be an appropriate way of imagining the early stages of the big bang. The Genesis account becomes more plausible if we assume that each “day” in the account represents a variable and indeterminate length of time, instead of 24 hours. The reference to the “deep” represents the fact that almost 80% of the surface of the earth is covered with water. The firmament above, while not solid, did indeed emerge as galaxies formed and stars were born, the so-called luminaries. Finally, we human beings were created out of the stuff of this planet, whether we call

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Creation & Building Beloved Community

Like the Genesis account, Beloved Community is an act of creation that transforms the void, chaos, or mundane that precedes it. This act of creation requires imagination, intention, compassion, courage, discipline, and power. Beloved Community is sustained by ongoing re-creation, because human foibles and failings can always undermine it, either accidentally or intentionally. Organic in nature, Beloved Community is not a top-down enterprise. It is a tide that ebbs and flows, outward and inward, gathering energy from everyone and everything it touches. Its characteristics are fluid as it responds to the challenges and vagaries of life and circumstance, as well as to the collective creativity of its participants.

Touchstones is committed to exploring liberal theology. This journal is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations. For daily meditations, photos, and more visit/like Touchstones at <https://www.facebook.com/Touchpossibility/>

Grandmother Spider Brings the Light

a retelling of a story from the Cherokee

When the earth was first made, it was very dark, and the animals were afraid. One day Bear said, “I have seen light on the other side of the world, but the people will not share. Perhaps we could steal some for ourselves.”

The others thought this was a splendid idea, and started to discuss who should go.... “I’ll go,” said fox.

Fox went, and stole a piece of light in his mouth, but it was so hot it burned his mouth and he dropped it, and the fox still has a black mouth to this day.

Possum tried next. He wrapped the light in his tail, and tried to drag it back, but it was too hot, and he dropped it. That is why no possum has fur on its tail.

Crow said, “Let me try!” And he went off to steal the light, but when he got close, it singed all of his feathers, and he turned black. He was so afraid, he ran away.



Finally, Grandmother Spider said, “I will go.” When she reached the light, she

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Building Beloved Community

Warming the Land

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story** was surprised by how hot it was. She thought of a plan, and began to spin and spin with her silky web. Soon she had enough for a bag. She approached the light, and quick as a flash, tucked the light into her bag.

When she got back, the animals were triumphant! "Hooray for Grandmother Spider!" They all shouted.

Grandmother Spider was happy to give them the light. "We should hang the light in the sky, so all can be warmed by it," she said. The other animals thought that too was a good idea, but how to get it in the sky?

"I will go," said Vulture. He took the bag of light, and put it on his head. It was hot, but he could stand it. He flew higher and higher, and the bag got hotter and hotter. He climbed higher, and his feathers turned black. Still higher, and the feathers on his head burned off! Still higher, and his head turned red. At the last possible second, he threw the light into the sky as hard as he could, and the Sun hung bright and beautiful, warming all the land. Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/multigenerational/miracles/session-1/spider>



Note: Grandmother Spider or Spider woman figures prominently in Native American mythology, especially in the Southwest. The dreamcatcher design incorporates a spider web. According to Mary Ellen Snodgrass, "Alice Walker based her novel *Meridian* (1976) on the dynamism of Spider Woman. The themes refocus the value of woman from bearer of children to scared thinker and founder of culture. (For more about Alice Walker see Faith & Theology, p. 4)

Enjoy the Navajo actress and author Geri Keams read her book, *Grandmother Spider Brings the Sun* at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ok_b46A9hvE (10:00)

What Reverence?

What Song?

Rev. Victoria Safford

What if there were a universe, a cosmos, that began in shining blackness, out of nothing, out of fire, out of a single, silent breath, and into it came billions and billions of stars, stars beyond imagining, and near one of them a world, a blue-green world so beautiful that learned clergymen could not even speak about it cogently, and brilliant scientists in trying to describe it began to sound like poets, with their physics, with their mathematics, their empirical, impressionistic musing?

What if there were a universe in which a world was born out of a smallish star, and into that world (at some point) flew red-winged blackbirds, and into it swam sperm whales, and into it came crocuses, and wind to lift the tiniest hairs on naked arms in spring when you run out to the mailbox, and into it at some point came onions, out of soil, and came Mount Everest, and also the coyote we've been seeing in the woods about a mile from here, just after sunrise in these mornings when the moon is full? (The very scent of him makes his brother, our dog, insane with fear and joy and ancient inbred memory.) Into that world came animals and elements and plants, and imagination, the mind, and the mind's eye. If such a universe existed and you noticed it, what would you do? What song would come out of your mouth, what prayer, what praises, what sacred offering, what whirling dance, what religion, and what reverential gesture would you make to greet that world, every single day that you were in it?

Source: <http://archive.uuworld.org/2003/03/calltoworship.html>

Our Only Home

Pale Blue Dot

Carl Sagan

Look again at that dot [4 billion miles away] That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines ...every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena.

...Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.



The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known."

Source: <http://www.planetary.org/explore/space-topics/earth/pale-blue-dot.html>

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "In a time of destruction, create something."

Maxine Hong Kingston



Day 2: "To cherish

what remains of the Earth and to foster its renewal is our only legitimate hope of survival." Wendell Berry

Day 3: "Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life." Rachel Carson

Day 4: "You cannot help but learn more as you take the world into your hands. Take it up reverently, for it is an old piece of clay, with millions of thumbprints on it." John Updike

Day 5: "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." Native American Proverb

Day 6: "Responsibility is what awaits outside the Eden of Creativity." Nadine Gordimer

Day 7: "Because we all share this small planet earth, we have to learn to live in harmony and peace with each other and with nature. That is not just a dream, but a necessity." Dalai Lama

Day 8: "Creativity requires a state of grace. So many things are required for it to succeed." Magda Szabó

Day 9: "I would feel more optimistic about a bright future for man if he spent less time proving that he can outwit Nature and more time tasting her sweetness and respecting her seniority." E.B. White

Day 10: "There is hope if people will begin to awaken that spiritual part of themselves, that heartfelt knowledge that we are caretakers of this planet."

Brooke Medicine Eagle

Day 11: "To be of the Earth is to know / the restlessness of being a seed / the darkness of being planted / the struggle toward the light / the pain of growth into the light / the joy of bursting and bearing fruit / the love of being food for someone / the scattering of your seeds / the decay of the seasons / the mystery of death and / the miracle of birth." John Soos

Day 12: "The world is holy. We are holy. All life is holy. Daily prayers are delivered on the lips of breaking waves, the whisperings of grasses, the shimmering of leaves." Terry Tempest Williams

Day 13: "Creativity is an act of defiance." Twyla Tharp

Day 14: "With the moon walk, the religious myth that sustained these notions could no longer be held. With our view of earthrise, we could see that the earth and the heavens were no longer divided but that the earth is in the heavens." Joseph Campbell



Day 15: "...We must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it. We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. ...It is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it." Wendell Berry

Day 16: "Leave nothing but footprints, Take nothing but pictures, Kill nothing but time." Unknown

Day 17: "There is no ownership. There is only stewardship." LeeAnn Taylor

Day 18: "What keeps life fascinating is the constant creativity of the soul." Deepak Chopra

Day 19: "What's the use of a fine house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?" Henry David Thoreau

Day 20: "A friend of mine once sent me a post card with a picture of the entire planet Earth taken from space. On the back it said, 'Wish you were here.'" Steven Wright

Day 21: "The creative adult is the child who has survived." Ursula K. Le Guin

Day 22: "We are all butterflies. Earth is our chrysalis." LeeAnn Taylor

Day 23: "You are a guest of nature— behave." Friedensreich Hundert Wasser

Day 24: "Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties." Erich Fromm

Day 25: "Someday, I hope that we will all be patriots of our planet and not just of our respective nations." Zoe Weil

Day 26: "The love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only paradise we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need, if only we had the eyes to see." Edward Abbey

Day 27: "Creativity keeps the world alive." Nayyirah Waheed

Day 28: "It suddenly struck me that that tiny pea, pretty and blue, was the Earth. I put up my thumb and shut one eye, and my thumb blotted out the planet Earth. I didn't feel like a giant. I felt very, very small." Neil Armstrong

Day 29: "But unless we are creators, we are not fully alive. What do I mean by creators? Not only artists, whose acts of creation are the obvious ones of working with paint or clay or words. Creativity is a way of living life, no matter our vocation or how we earn our living." Madeleine L'Engle

Day 30: "How can we be so arrogant? The planet is, was, and always will be stronger than us. We can't destroy it; if we overstep the mark, the planet will simply erase us from its surface and carry on existing. Why don't they start talking about not letting the planet destroy us?" Paulo Coelho

Day 31: "Solitude is the soil in which genius is planted, creativity grows, and legends bloom; faith in oneself is the rain that cultivates a hero to endure the storm, and bare the genesis of a new world, a new forest." Mike Norton



Faith and Theology

The Gospel According to Shug

The eighth and youngest child of sharecroppers Willie Lee and Minnie Lou Grant Walker, Alice Walker grew up in Eatonton, Georgia. When she was eight her brother accidentally shot her in the eye while playing with a BB gun. It took days for her parents to get her treated. She lost her vision in that eye and the resulting scar tissue made her feel ugly. She became withdrawn. At the age of 14, she visited a brother in Boston and the scar tissue was removed. Still, she came to see the wound as a gift, in part because it led her to writing. She wrote, "On a spiritual level it's as though with my sighted eye I see what's before me, and with my unsighted eye I see what's hidden. It's illuminated life more than darkened it."

Walker graduated as the valedictorian from segregated Butler Baker High School in 1961 and was awarded a college scholarship by the state of Georgia. She attended Atlanta's Spelman College for two years, where she became a political activist, met Dr. Martin L. King, Jr., and participated in the 1963 March on Washington. Spelman did not appreciate her activism, so she transferred to Sarah Lawrence College. After her junior year, she spent the summer as an exchange student in Uganda.

A prolific writer, her first book of poetry, *Once*, was published in 1968. Walker's 1982 novel, *The Color of Purple*, resulted in her becoming the first African-American to win the *Pulitzer Prize for Fiction*. (African-American Gwendolyn Brooks won the *Pulitzer Prize for Poetry* in 1950.)

Alice Walker writes in *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting for: Inner Light in a Time of Darkness* (2006), "In my novel, *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), a 'romance' of the last five hundred thousand years, I follow the faint trail left by ancestral

human beings, when they were 'fantastic creatures' such as lions. It was important to me that I create a record that felt something

like the knowledge I carried in my cells, history books having failed to confirm much of what I guessed and little of what I 'knew.' I needed to understand and offer a new gospel, *The Gospel According to Shug*. Shug Avery, unrepentant wild woman and undomesticated blues singer, appeared in my earlier novel, *The Color of Purple*. She epitomizes the person of our time who, through immense suffering and struggle, accepts and affirms her own self as an expression of the Great Mystery; in her being she is a healing medicine to those around her, because in her there is achieved, at long last, balance, and the ability, as Virginia Woolf might have said, to consider things 'in

themselves;' not as other people might wish her to, but as they actually are. In other words, she is free."

In the following conversation, Shug explains some of her theology to Celie.

"God love all them feelings. That's some of the best stuff God did. And when you know God loves 'em you enjoys 'em a lot more. You can just relax, go with

everything that's going, and praise God by liking what you like."

"God don't think it dirty?" I ast.

"Naw," she say. "God made it. Listen, God love everything you love—and a mess of stuff you don't. But more than anything else, God love admiration."

"You saying God vain?" I ast.

"Naw," she say. "Not vain, just wanting to share a good thing. I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it."

In her work, Walker is committed "to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and triumphs of black women." She emphatically states that, "earth itself has become the nigger of the world" and warns "while the earth is poisoned and everything it supports is poisoned. While the earth is enslaved, none of us is free... while it is treated like dirt, so are we."



Walker notes in *The Gospel According to Shug* (<http://www.fantasymaps.com/stuff/shug.html>), "to bless is to help." The following 10 beatitudes from her list of 27 focus on our relationship to creation. As you read them, reflect on how you and creation would be "helped" if you lived by these.

...HELPEd are those who find something in Creation to admire each and every hour. Their days will overflow with beauty and the darkest dungeon will offer gifts.

HELPEd are those who receive only to give; always in their house will be the circular energy of generosity; and in their hearts a beginning of new age on Earth: when no keys will be needed to unlock the heart and no locks will be needed on the doors.

HELPEd are those who love the stranger; in this they reflect the heart of the Creator and that of the Mother.

...HELPEd are those who love the entire cosmos rather than their own tiny country, city, or farm, for to them will be shown the unbroken web of life and the meaning of infinity.

...HELPEd are those who create anything at all, for they shall relive the thrill of their own conception, and realize a partnership in the creation of the Universe that keeps them responsible and cheerful.

...HELPEd are those who love the Earth, their mother, and who willingly suffer that she may not die; in their grief over her pain they will weep rivers of blood, and in their joy in her lively response to love, they will converse with trees.

...HELPEd are those whose every act is a prayer for harmony in the Universe, for they are the restorers of balance to our planet. To them will be given the insight that every good act done anywhere in the cosmos welcomes the life of an animal or a child.

...HELPEd are those who are shown the existence of the Creator's magic in the Universe, they shall experience delight and astonishment without ceasing.

...HELPEd are those who find the courage to do at least one small thing each day to help the existence of another—plant, animal, river, or other human being. They shall be joined by a multitude of the timid.

...HELPEd are those who love and actively support the diversity of life; they shall be secure in their differentness.

Source: Touchstones

Fostering Creativity

Christine Carter, Ph.D.

1. **Provide the resources they need for creative expression.** The key resource here is time. Kids need a lot of time for unstructured, child-directed, imaginative play—unencumbered by adult direction, and that doesn't depend on a lot of commercial stuff. ...



2. **Make your home a Petri dish for creativity.** In addition to creative spaces, you need to foster a creative atmosphere. ... Encourage kids to make mistakes and fail. ... Celebrate innovation and creativity.
3. **Allow kids the freedom and autonomy to explore their ideas and do what they want.** ... External constraints—making them color within the lines, so to speak—can reduce flexibility in thinking. ...
4. **Encourage children to read for pleasure and participate in the arts.** Limit TV and other screen time in order to make room for creative activities....
5. **Give children the opportunity to express “divergent thought.”** Let them disagree with you. Encourage them to find more than



one route to a solution, and more than one solution to a problem. ...

6. **Don't reward children for exhibiting creativity.** Incentives interfere with the creative process, reducing the quality of their responses and the flexibility of their thought. Allow children to develop mastery of creative activities that they are intrinsically motivated to do....
7. **Try to stop caring what your kids achieve.** Emphasize process rather than product. One way you can do this is by asking questions about the process.... “What did you like about that activity?”

Source: http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising_happiness/post/7_ways_to_foster_creativity_in_your_kids

Family Activity: *Creativity in a Bag*

Go to an educational supply store with arts and crafts and various children's items. Purchase various things that can be used in a craft project and create a bag of supplies for each child and adult in the family. Give each person a bag and invite them to empty it and begin creating.



The Art of the Commonplace

Wendell Berry

We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. And this has been based on the even flimsier assumption that we could know with any certainty what was good even for us. We have fulfilled the danger of this by making our personal pride and greed the standard of our behavior toward the world—to the incalculable disadvantage of the world and every living thing in it. And now, perhaps very close to too late, our great error has become clear. It is not only our own creativity—our own capacity for life—that is stifled by our arrogant assumption; the creation itself is stifled.

We have been wrong. We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and to learn what is good for

it. We must learn to cooperate in its processes, and to yield to its limits. But even more important, we must learn to



acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it. We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence.

For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.

Source: *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays* by Wendell Berry

The Peace of Wild Things

Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me and I wake in the night at the least sound in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water. And I feel above me the day-blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Source: SLT #483

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to the Theme**
 it clay or star dust. Unitarian Universalist minister Ralph Helverson spoke of impassioned clay, by which he meant the clay of our humanity. He wrote, "Deep in ourselves resides the religious impulse./ Out of the passions of our clay it rises./ We have religion when we stop deluding ourselves that we are self-sufficient, self-sustaining, or self-derived."

An enduring symbol of the Genesis account is the Garden of Eden, which some have considered a womb-like paradise and others a prison. It represents a state of primordial innocence, one that humans never possessed, but surely have longed for throughout the ages. Dennis Potter is correct when he says that, "The loss of Eden is personally experienced by every one of us as we leave the wonder and magic and also the pains and terrors of childhood."

The spirit/nature split that arose in Western religion devalued this world in favor of a supernatural realm. The reality is that the earth is our origin and our destiny. In very radical ways, we are in this world and of this world. We do not need to go to the mountains or the ocean to get back to nature, because we are never apart from nature. More importantly, everything that we do touches the earth. Our touch is either an embrace that caresses the earth or an attack that violates it. The earth's future is our future. The question is, "What future will we have together?"

Thomas Berry wrote, in his 1988 book *The Dream of the Earth*, "Through human presence the forests of the earth are destroyed. Fertile soils become toxic and then wash away in the rain or blow away in the wind. Mountains of human-derived waste grow ever higher. Wetlands are filled in. Each year approximately ten thousand species disappear forever. Even the ozone layer above the earth is depleted." Ironically, the concern about the greenhouse effect and global warming is not recent. Svante Arrhenius, a Swedish scientist, claimed in 1896 that fossil fuel combustion may eventually

result in enhanced global warming because of a relationship between atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations and temperature.

Unitarian Universalist minister Jacob Trapp observed that the human species acts as if it alone is invincible, while other species are driven into extinction. Trapp wrote, "If we are to survive, we who are an endangered species, we shall have to



learn to walk in harmony with each other and with our natural environment. To respect the human by respecting the non-human." Trapp noted that the original sin was not the human transgression against God brought

about by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. "The fall of humanity," Trapp asserted, "is our alienation from nature, from other creatures and, thereby, from ourselves."

Creation did not end on the sixth day as the story in Genesis would have us believe. It is a continuous process and we have become co-creators with nature. Our appropriate role is not to dominate the earth, but to use our creativity to allow us to live human lives with dignity and meaning within the earth's ecological means. The first step in changing our relationship with the earth is to awaken in us and in all humanity a reverence for the earth. It is this sense of reverence that reminds us that the earth is a sacred place, that it is our home, our dwelling place.

If we take seriously our seventh principle, "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part," and our sixth source, "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," then Earth Day must become the holiest day of the year, and a symbol of our commitment to a spiritual practice of living as if the earth mattered. Better yet, every day should be Earth Day. If we take seriously these religious values, then we are called to be a blessing to this planet, our home, our only home, and not a

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Composing a Life

The theme of creation ultimately leads us to human creativity, an ability that can make us co-creators with creation.

When we consider creativity, the primary material that we have to work with is our own life. We begin our lives with endless possibilities. While not infinite in number, there are more possibilities than we could ever live into being.

Composing a life involves both self-invention, creating ourselves anew, and self-discovery, coming to know our own voice as we stride deeper and deeper into the world. Mary Catherine Bateson reminds us that the undiscovered self is often both an unexpected and powerful resource. The word compose

comes from the Latin and means to place (*com-*) together (*poser*).



We compose our lives by placing different things together, creating new possibilities. As Unitarian Universalist poet, ee cummings wrote, we compose by "...placing carefully there a strange thing and a known thing there...and without breaking anything." It is this juxtaposition of the familiar and the strange, the known and the unknown, that becomes the basis for composing our lives. The word "compose" has another Latin root, *pausa*, which means to pause. To compose our lives, we must pause from time to time and reflect on this self-creativity.

Erik Erickson articulated 8 developmental stages. The stages confront us with essential questions that prod, provoke, and perplex. For Erickson, questions that we must engage as we grow from a toddler to an elder are these: "Can I do things myself or must I always rely on others?" "Am I good or am I bad?" "Am I successful or worthless?" "Who am I and where am I going?" "Am I loved and wanted?" "Will I produce something of real value?" "Have I lived a full life?" Will I complete my life before it is ended by death?

Mary Catherine Bateson writes, "...I see the way people live their lives as, in itself, an artistic process. An artist takes ingredients that may seem incompatible, and organizes them into a whole that is not only

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Medium & Metaphor

(Continued from page 6) **Composing a Life** workable, but finally pleasing and true, even beautiful. As you get up in the morning, as you make decisions, as you spend money, make friends, make commitments, you are creating a piece of art called your life."

Clay is both a good medium and a good metaphor for the creative process. To speak of clay is to overgeneralize, for there are many kinds of clay, each with its special properties. One must also take care in working with clay. If it becomes too wet, it cannot hold a form. If it becomes too dry, it is no longer pliable enough to do the bidding of the potter's hands. If there is air in the clay or if there is a flaw or strain in the design, the piece might crack or shatter when it is fired in the furnace.

Marjory Zoet Bankson writes, "Made of stone, water, and organic slime, clay is the elemental mixture found everywhere in the world, offspring of the world itself. ...Working with clay wakes me up, calls me back to my senses, and gives my soul a tangible expression, a language with shape and size."

It is here that we intentionally undertake the task of forming and reforming ourselves. And eventually, transformation occurs as all of the elements merge into one: the clay, the potter's hands, the spinning wheel, the shape of the pot, which is a container for our lives and loves and learnings. Composing our life with skill, artistry, and wisdom we eventually realize that our outward form is not what is essential. Rather, we begin to attend to the space within, of our self to be sure, but more importantly to the space within others.

M.C. Richards, a potter, wrote, "It is not the pots we are forming, but ourselves." And Unitarian minister Arthur Graham offered, "Each of us is an artist/ Whose task it is to shape life/ Into some semblance of the pattern/ We dream about. The molding/ Is not of self alone, but of shared/ Tomorrows and times we shall never see./ So let us be about our task./ The materials are very precious/ and perishable."

Source: *Touchstones*

A Spiritual Fool

A Cosmos Full of Surprises

Matthew Fox

...The cosmos is not only full of surprises, but also full of jokes. Do all creatures play the role, unwittingly of course, of cosmic comics? Are we here to amuse one another as well as the gods and goddesses, the visible and the invisible?

...To attempt to live without humor, without awareness of paradox all around us and within us, without the ability to laugh even and especially at ourselves is to contradict the universe itself. Too much sobriety violates the laws of nature. What Eckhart calls "unself-consciousness" is often expressed in our ability to let go with cosmic laughter; it is a necessary dimension to common survival and therefore to our ethics. Erich Jantsch writes that "openness to novelty" is part of an evolving consciousness.

...Ken Feit, a "spiritual fool," ...challenged people to attempt to listen to "the sound of clouds bumping or a car clearing its throat or grass growing or a



leaf changing color."

One of his favorite acts was to liberate ice cubes: "Did you ever liberate an ice cube? An ice cube, after all, is water that's kept in prison to serve humans' needs by cooling their drinks and soothing their headaches. Well, I sometimes ransom bags of ice cubes from gas stations, take them to nearby ponds, and let them go so they can return to their water brothers and sisters." Is Ken Feit being foolish? Or wise? And what is he bringing out of us by his wisdom, or foolishness, or both? I believe the universe holds the answer.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/15047>

Reinvent the Dream

Re-Creation

James Conlon

...In our tears, we discover a reason to dream ...[of] the promise of a future filled with hope.



...Uncovering and reconnecting with our dreams enables us to confront the despair so deeply embedded in our cultural psyche. This eroded sense of worth envelops our collective soul as we face ... problems brought on by structures of oppression, whether related to race, sex, class, or ecological devastation. One predictable result of our cultural cynicism and despair is horizontal violence.... Injustice multiplies as the cycles accelerate. When we dream, we imagine how the world could be and take responsibility for bringing it about. When interest and imaginations are ignited by the dream, hope is possible. ...Our dreams make it possible for us to believe that tomorrow can be different from today. An inscription found on a church door in Essex, England gives voice to our hope: "A vision without a task is but a dream / "A task without a vision is drudgery / A vision and a task is the joy of the world."

The challenge of cultural rebirth is to heal the chasm between our dream of how life could be and how it currently is. Implementing our dream will involve struggle and pain. We must want the dream badly enough to undergo the effort necessary to go beyond what seem to be our limits.

...Thus, we must constantly reinvent the dream in the face of struggle.... In this way, we constantly engage in efforts of resurrection, liberation, revolution and rebirth.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/15046>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Creation

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: "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." *Jon Stewart*

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: "We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost's familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road—the one less traveled by—offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of the earth." *Rachel Carson*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. Have you fell in love with this home we call Earth? How old were you when it happened? How did it affect you?
2. Our sixth UU source is, "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." Are these teachings compelling to you? Why or why not?
3. Is nature a source of solace, inspiration, and/or meaning to you? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
4. A covenant is a promise. What promises has the earth made to you by the fact of its existence and structure?
5. What promises have you made to the earth? What promises do you want to make to the earth?
6. How will these promises change you, your actions, and your relationship to the earth?

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words: Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Creativity Needed

(Continued from page 6) **Intro to the Theme**

course. If we aspire to be the pinnacle of creation, the species through which the universe became aware of itself, then we need to use our intelligence to conserve, not just consume. If we are to conserve, then we must usher in an ecological age in which our technology is placed in service of the entire earth, and not just our species. If we are to usher in an ecological age, then we must demand of government two things that are currently very rare: leadership and courage.



This is where creation meets creativity. Given the reality of climate change and other planetary challenges, it is only human creativity that can save us as we create ways of living and being that heal the earth, and therefore, heal our alienation from the earth. In the end, the responsibility for the earth belongs to each one of us.

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