

Franciscan Ecological Spirituality

Workshop with Pam Wood, MA, ATR
at "Being Present" Spiritual Directors International Conference
Houston TX April 2009

Ecological Self

**Knowing that the earth is alive
and that we are an expression of its life and its capacity for
awareness and freedom**

is the most critical awakening we can have.

**It changes the core of the way we sow our fields, bake our
bread and spend our money.**

--Sr. Miriam Therese MacGillis, co-founder of Genesis Farm

**4.5 billion years ago, the Earth was molten rock,
now it sings opera!**

-- Brian Swimme, scientist, cosmologist, author

**But one day when I was quiet, it come to me: that feeling of
being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I
cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried
and I run all around the house.**

--in *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker

Gratitude

**If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, "thank
you," that would suffice.**

--Meister Eckhart

Gratitude is a culturally subversive act.

--Joanna Macy

Pain for the World

**The most important thing you can do is hear within yourself
the sound of the Earth crying.**

-- Thich Nhat Hanh

**May God break my heart so completely
that the whole world falls in.**

--Mother Teresa

**The truth that many people never understand until it is
too late is that the more you try to avoid suffering, the
more you suffer.**

--Thomas Merton

Creation and Incarnation

**God is creating the entire universe, fully and totally,
in the present now.**

--Meister Eckhart

**I believe a leaf of grass is
no less than the journeywork of the stars.**

-- Walt Whitman

**Christ has no body on earth but yours,
no hands but yours,
no feet but yours.**

**Yours are the eyes through which he pours out
compassion to the world.**

**Yours are the hands blessing me now
All praise to the One.**

--St. Teresa of Avila

With wisdom I have rightly put the universe in order.

**I, the fiery life of divine essence,
am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows,
I gleam in the waters,**

and I burn in the sun, moon, and stars.

**With every breeze, as with invisible life that contains
everything, I awaken everything to life.**

The air lives by turning green and being in blood.

The waters flow as if they were alive....

**And thus I remain hidden in every kind of reality
as a fiery power...**

**I breathe life into everything so that nothing
is mortal in respect to its species.**

For I am life.

--Hildegard of Bingen, 11th century saint/mystic

Ways to inhabit a universe: Ways to nurture our ecological self

*By virtue of the Creation
and, still more, of the Incarnation,
nothing here below is profane for those
who know how to see.
--Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ*

Next time you're watching the sunset...

- Hold in your mind, and let the experience reach a bodily and affective level, the fact that the Earth is rolling away from the sun...
"...to contemplate the solar system until you feel the great Earth turning away from the Sun and until you feel this immense planet being swung around its massive cosmic partner is to touch an ocean of wonder as you take a first step into inhabiting the actual universe and solar system and Earth." (inspired by Brian Swimme; in Uhl, pp. 19)
- Bring the simple model of the solar system to mind, and as you look at the setting Sun, recall that it is a million times the size of Earth (Uhl, pp 19)

Next time you're stargazing...

- As you lie on your back, it is natural to assume that you are looking "up" at the stars. But cosmologist Brian Swimme reminds us that "up" is just a cultural construct. Neither the earth nor the Milky Way have an "up" or "down." When we stand on the Earth, we are indeed not standing "up"; rather, we are sticking "out" into space. So as you lie on your back, instead of thinking of yourself as looking up, picture it so that you are on the "underside" of the earth looking down into the inky night sky. It may take awhile, but eventually you will experience all the stars as "way down there below you"; and you will be surprised that you are not falling down there to join them!
"As you lie there feeling yourself hovering within this gravitational bond while peering down at the billions of stars drifting in the infinite chasm of space, you will have entered an experience of the universe that is not just human and not just biological. You will have entered a relationship from a galactic perspective, becoming for a moment a part of the Milky Way Galaxy experiencing what it is like to be the Milky Way Galaxy..." (Uhl, pp 13)
- Take two pine needles/blades of grass. Hold them in a crossed position, defining a point within the Big Dipper's bowl. For ten days, the Hubble camera did just this—that is, it focused on a sky speck equivalent to that defined by the intersection of two pine needles held at arms length, all the while soaking up the faint light from distant galaxies. The result: an extraordinary photograph showing nearly 2000 galaxies—each galaxy with billions of stars, many of those with families of planets. *Looking at your own crossed needles, let your imagination drift away from the Earth into those yawning depths where galaxies whirl like snowflakes in a storm. From somewhere out there among the myriad galaxies, imagine looking back to the one dancing flake that is the billions of stars of our Milky Way. Galaxies as numerous as snowflakes in a storm. (pp 11)*

Source: Christopher Uhl, *Developing Ecological Consciousness: Path to a Sustainable World*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004.

Creation and Contemplation: Examining the Barriers to Ecological Conversion: Grief, Despair and Apathy

How can it be that in today's world, when we have all the information necessary to tell us what's really happening, and the know-how we need to change, we feel so immobilized and disempowered to act? What can we do to avoid shutting down to the overwhelming nature of these problems, so that we are available to be of service to Creation? (p. 151)

You can hold yourself back from the suffering of the world: this is something you are free to do...but perhaps precisely this holding back is the only suffering you might be able to avoid. –Franz Kafka

Apatheia=(Greek) for non-suffering, the inability or refusal to experience pain

What causes us to repress our pain for the world?

Internal	External
<input type="checkbox"/> Fear of falling apart or losing control <input type="checkbox"/> Fear that the despair will paralyze us and drain our lives of meaning <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of losing our faith or being seen as having inadequate faith <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of appearing morbid in our “cult of optimism” <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of exposing our ignorance of larger, complex crises facing us <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of individual/collective guilt => I/we are complicit <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of burdening our loved ones, especially our children <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of appearing unpatriotic, losing our competitive edge <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of appearing weak, emotional, unstable or unreliable <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of powerlessness <input type="checkbox"/> Belief in the separate self, pain is a sign of personal unresolved personal inner conflict rather than a natural, healthy response to the endangerment of our life support system	<input type="checkbox"/> Mass media, less accurate information comes through, blocking our pain for the world, and thus our ability to respond <input type="checkbox"/> Job and time pressures: little time or energy to learn about the fate of the world or let it sink in <input type="checkbox"/> Economic hardships generate frustration, which is projected onto the marginalized and most victimized of the global economy

Consequences of repression

- Not a local anesthetic, if we don't feel pain, we don't feel much else either. Through repression, we avoid pain but also lose our capacity for joy and flexibility.
- Psychic numbing

Common ailments which accompany psychic numbing:

- Fragmentation, alienation (cut off from our inner knowing and mutual support)
- Displacement activities
- Blaming and scapegoating, projection of the shadow
- Political passivity, idealization of government as invincible, strong, protective
- Avoidance of painful information, even vital feedback
- Diminished intellectual performance, clouded thoughts/perceptions, inability to process needed info
- Burnout, activists carry heavy burden but take no time to mourn, leaving us vulnerable to bitterness, depression, exhaustion, illness
- Sense of powerlessness, each act of denial relegates us more to the victim stance

Creation and Conversion: Sustainability and Solidarity

Mechanistic Paradigm	Living Systems Paradigm
<p>Universe=mechanical system, machine made of elementary building blocks</p> <p>Human body=machine</p> <p>Earth=dead rock we walk upon</p> <p>Metaphors: heavily armored knight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World a collection of OBJECTS, separate, discreet, w/ boundaries (relationships secondary) • Stuff is what you can see, feel, weigh, prompts us to take it apart • Parts (properties of whole can be predicted by sum of parts) • Objects have separate, tangible boundaries • Either/or, black and white thinking • Reductionism=understanding • Heirarchical vs. holonic • Matter is dead, inanimate • Independence • Things controlled from outside by outside observer • Power=noun, power over, win/lose, control over objects, exert will, be <i>invulnerable</i>, reduce choices • Defenses necessary to guard power (image of knight with heavy armor or thermostat w/thick box around it) • Closed feedback loops cannot self-correct, numbing/shutting down of defenses to avoid pain 	<p>Universe=web of inseparable relationships, embedded w/in another web, etc.</p> <p>Human body=many systems in one</p> <p>Earth=living organism</p> <p>Metaphors: thermostat, flame, mobile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RELATIONSHIPS are what is real, objects temporary patterns of relationships embedded in larger networks (i.e. flame emerges out of conditions of wax, wick, air, light sometimes a wave, other times a particle, hard to tell where one starts, other ends) • Whole (parts understood w/in context of larger whole) vs. parts • Both/and thinking (mech worldview NOT bad or wrong!) • Holonic thinking=things are both a whole and a part of a larger whole <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Person is a whole, but part of larger wholes, families, communities, etc ○ Smallest system gives shape to larger (Russian doll) • Systems are self-stabilizing, can self-regulate to compensate for environment (thermostat) • Interdependence • Observer is part of the observation • Power=verb, power with, win/win, lose/lose, synergy, rises as we work together, variety, resiliency, <i>vulnerability</i>, intelligence help systems evolve, opening of senses key (image of vulnerability of human skin, thermostat) • Open feedback loops necessary for learning, evolving, adapting to dangers

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[WiserEarth](http://www.wiserearth.org) is a community directory and networking forum for not for profit and non-governmental organizations addressing the central issues of our day: climate change, poverty, the environment, peace, water, hunger, social justice, conservation, human rights, and more. Content is created by people like you from around the world: www.wiserearth.org.

A Prayer for Peace

*Oh, God of all, at this time
of our gradual awakening to the dangers
we are imposing on our beautiful Earth,
open the hearts and minds of all your children,
that we may learn to nurture
rather than destroy our planet.*

Amen.

--Lorraine R. Schmit