

Eco-Spirituality:
a Path for Restoring Kindred Relationship with Mother Earth

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A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several fluid, connected strokes.

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Major Advisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, written in a cursive script that reads "Gyorgyi Szabo".

Gyorgyi Szabo, PhD

Dean of Graduate Studies

Abstract

This dissertation is an exploration of Eco-spirituality, Christian and Shamanic, as means of expanding consciousness and restoring a kindred relationship with Sacred Mother Earth. I conclude that Eco-spirituality provides pathways and practices which can facilitate the recovery of a participatory, wholistic consciousness among people embedded in our alienating post-modern culture. Eco-spirituality practices can dramatically assist re-establishing our inherent connectedness and kinship to Mother Earth, to be co-creators with Consciousness, to dream a new world into being.

Organic and grounded research methodology focuses on three areas: deepening understanding of eco-spirituality; exploring shamanic and scientific connections to the eco-field; and relating eco-spirituality to the care of both person and planet. Three related topics include myth and the power of narrative, the energetic relationship of the Sacred Feminine and Sacred Masculine, and characteristics and implications of our historical moment. All are intertwined through intention, language, and imagination.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my guides and teachers of these last many years, fellow travelers all, who have walked with me into the deep and wondrous realms of Spirit and our Sacred Mother Earth. Many thanks!

I also give thanks for the life of Will Star Heart Taegel, mentor, teacher, inspiring guiding light.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge here a few of the many people who have played a part in my journey of Restoring Kindred Relationship with Mother Earth, including my research and writing of this dissertation. First, my Advisor, Alexander Laszlo, thanks for hanging in there with me and for your insightful suggestions and prodding as needed. What you are up to in the world is inspiring, weaving marvelous threads into our garment of learning to human well. Mentors, instructors, and guides in the various programs and organizations in which I have participated during this time: Brian Stafford, Seminary of the Wild Clan mentor; Will Taegel (deceased), Wild Heart Quest mentor and Eco-Spiritual Mentor co-director with Lillie Rowden (deceased); Llyn “Cedar” Roberts and Stacey Gibbons, Shamanic Reiki Worldwide and Shamanic Reiki Master Teacher program; Juan-Carlos Safa, drum circle facilitator extraordinaire and Foundation for Shamanic Studies instructor; Reginah WaterSpirit for your faith in me and gifting some of Bear Heart’s sacred items; and my compassionate helping spirits and power animals! To those who read part or all of my dissertation drafts, Calen Rayne, Daniel Dale, Ana Gobledale a big thank you; and to my wife, Monique-Cheri Pierre, a huge, heart-felt thank you for both reading parts and for your total support and encouragement while I was writing this. Thank you also to Dean Gyorgyi Szabo, for your unwavering support and good cheer throughout my doctoral journey with Ubiquity University.

I wish to also acknowledge my fellow travelers in all the many groups and programs that have made up this leg of my journey. You are too many to name individually, so let me acknowledge you together. Seminary of the Wild Salmon Clan – thanks for sharing so intimately and providing each other amazing personal and group support throughout the year together. Earthtribe and Earth Wisdom Community members for holding sacred space for myself and other Wild Heart Questers. Fellow Drum Circle participants – deep thanks for helping to keep my practice alive and even more for nurturing my faith in developing and using such healing practices. Numerous Foundation for Shamanic Studies workshop participants and instructors. Those of you who traveled with me on Ubiquity University’s *Shamanic Journey* pilgrimage (July 2023) exploring the neolithic cave art in The Dordogne, France, and for the spirits and ancestors of that land who welcomed us home. Fellow pilgrims to Chartres, France (July 2023) with Ubiquity University’s *Chartres Academy*. Fellow pilgrims to Teotihuacan, Mexico, for ceremony over the summer solstice and dedication to the Mother’s message (June 2024, also with Ubiquity). Shamanic Reiki program participants and teaching staff for sharing and holding space for each of us throughout an amazing and powerful

year. Blessings one and all 

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Key Terms and Abbreviations:

Earth on Vision Quest (EVQ)

Earth Wisdom Academy (EWA)

Foundation for Shamanic Studies (FSS)

Gospel of the Beloved Companion (GBC)

personal communication (p.c.)

personal journey (p.j.)

Seminary of the Wild (SOW)

Shamanic Reiki Master Teacher (SRMT)

Shamanic Reiki Worldwide (SRW)

Shamanic State of Consciousness (SSC)

Society for Shamanic Practices (SSP)

Wild Heart Quest (WHQ)

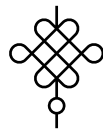
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Forward

As I do at the beginning of all my journeys, I call upon the compassionate spirits and helpers of the East, the South, the West, and the North. I call upon Mother Earth and Father Sun, and Great Spirit, to be with me in the writing of this paper and with those who subsequently read it, that our hearts may be open and nourished by the beauty, wonder, and abundance of your care and love.

Sitting on a rock outcropping overlooking the rocky, sage and pinon studded valley below and Chimney Rock above to my right, I marveled that no animals or even birds had appeared during the 20-odd minutes I had been there, quiet, observing. "Where are you birds?" I asked out loud. "It would be wonderful to have some ravens fly by..." Just as I expressed myself I heard a "whoosh, whoosh, whoosh," and looking, there directly over me flew two ravens, so low I heard their wings flapping. I could almost feel the air move against my body. I had been surveying the vista in front of me, I had been looking around, but I had no inkling of any birds. How had Raven appeared so suddenly as if out of nowhere? ... right above me! Had Raven been waiting for me to express my desire? Had Raven simply been waiting for me to show up?

"There is power in invoking ... out loud," we had been instructed before venturing out that afternoon. "The world, Nature, Mother Earth is waiting to be acknowledged. She wants to dance with you."

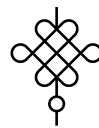
Walking back down the hill a bit later I was pleased to see three ravens flying overhead. I called out, "Thank you Ravens, thank you for showing up, for being here and blessing me with your presence. You are beautiful, amazing creatures flying through the air." ... or something to that effect. Two of the ravens continued on their way, but the third raven turned, looked, and flew back to me, circling directly overhead, once, twice, three times, and I marveled, appreciating Raven's gesture of acknowledgment. But Raven did not fly away, Raven continued spiraling upward, still directly over me, four, five, six... nine, ten, eleven times, as I am leaning back more and more to

keep Raven in sight, weight of daypack on my back, adjusting my footing to keep aright on rocky ground; and still spiraling upwards. I don't dare take my eyes off Raven, I am wide-eyed in awe, a drunken smile spread across my face ... 14, 15 ... still going ... 17, 18, 19 spirals and I call to Raven as I begin to stumble over backwards, "Sorry, I have to look where my feet are, so I don't fall..." Steadying myself in one move I look skyward only to see Raven flying off to the north, toward Chimney Rock. Stunned, I send thanks to Raven, watching until Raven blends into distant cliff face..² (Personal Journal, October 21, 2019)

Spiraling circles ... a central image and awareness from the very start of my dissertation journey, providing a pattern and framework for this exploration.



Kitchen Rock, Ghost Ranch



² My interaction with Raven took place at Ghost Ranch, a fabled Presbyterian retreat center in the high desert of northern New Mexico. The artist Georgia O'Keefe lived and worked there for many years (before the Presbyterians acquired the property). Her house is still there. It was October 2019, and I was participating in a five-day retreat introducing me to the tenor and practices of Seminary of the Wild.

CHAPTER 1. PREPARING THE PATHWAY

A. Introduction – Purpose

My Doctor of Ministry dissertation journey has been one of developing processes for the nurturance of self and others in a life connected with Spirit through eco-spirituality. This purpose is focused through three primary goals:

1. to deepen my understanding of eco-spirituality and its purpose.
2. to explore shamanic and scientific connections to the eco-field³.
3. to relate eco-spirituality to the care of the person and care of our planet, Mother Earth.

These areas of focus also provide a framework for organizing my dissertation; a flow as I move through and then from a general grounding and understanding of the subject matter (i.e., eco-spirituality) into two topics and areas, indeed, methods of inquiry and experience, of particular import to expanding our consciousness and recalibrating our perception (i.e., shamanic and scientific connections). How eco-spirituality impacts individuals and the global community (i.e., care of the person and care of the planet) is interwoven throughout, illumined at each stage, within each circle, through the various lenses encountered on this journey.

³ Eco-fields can be understood as a sort of subsection of what in the scientific community is known as “fields”. Dr. Will Taegel provides the following descriptions in his glossary of terms in *The Mother Tongue* (2012, p. 288): “Scientifically defined, a field is a region of non-material influence, such as the gravitational field...”, and “Eco-field is a space configuration consisting of meaning carriers and living under the epistemological umbrella of a specific-based landscape.”

I have chosen to use the term *Eco-Spirituality* as the title and general descriptor for my dissertation. It is related to but is not quite the same as what is called “Nature-based Spirituality” or “Earth-based Spirituality.” As important, powerful, and meaningful as those spiritualities are, I find that when considering spirituality we have to include forces and realities greater than “nature” and/or “earth.” To reduce a complex theological and philosophical issue to manageable terms, let me simply define this central term for my dissertation as follows: *spirituality* is that human striving for the transforming power present in life; it is that attraction and movement of the human person toward God or Consciousness,⁴ toward the divine.

I find the term eco-spirituality more inclusive than nature-based or earth-based. The Greek word "eco" comes from "oikos," which means house, household, or environment (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eco-). Combining eco with spirituality includes recognizing the sacredness of Nature and Mother Earth, that is, the relationship between Spirit and our home environment, where we live. It recognizes that we can find the transforming power present in life (i.e., Spirit) in nature here on Earth. But we are not limited to these places and spaces because Spirit has also to do with forces, energy, and reality inherent to the entire universe and cosmos. Spirit is both transcendent and imminent, Spirit is not

⁴ I differentiate throughout my dissertation between Consciousness and consciousness. Capitalized, *Consciousness* refers to the ultimate Source of Being and Reality, what many call God. Lower case, *consciousness* refers to the awareness of self and world.

bound by space and time. As such, while this dissertation is focused on spirituality related to Nature and Earth, it never loses sight of all-encompassing Spirit.

In my dissertation I inquire into the constituent elements utilized primarily in two program pathways (Seminary of the Wild and Wild Heart Quest of Earth Wisdom Academy) and the related philosophic and scientific underpinnings. While I have probed certain specific elements in the “Shamanic and Scientific Connections” chapter, those elements and others are considered in context within the chapters on each of the two programs. Exploring these elements beforehand in their own light provides a grounding and wider lens when encountering them as they arise in the chapters relating my experiences in the programs. The same is true for the subjects of the intervening “Three Linking Spirals” chapter. While I do not directly compare the two programs, I indicate shared perspectives and practices as well as differences.

Although I am articulating in this dissertation my personal explorations and experiences, the journey I have undertaken is not unique to me, nor is it confined to any exclusive group of people. Anyone venturing outside – down a tree-lined street, in a backyard garden, in a city park -- can learn to connect more intentionally with Nature, with Mother Earth. It is not necessary to backpack into a forested or mountainous wilderness area to experience “Nature.” As the saying goes, “a journey begins with the first step.” A journey, undertaken by individuals (such as yourself, reader) and ultimately by the human family at large, of intentionally connecting with Nature is crucial at this pivotal time of human history because doing so seems vital

to our continued existence. A fundamental position of this dissertation is that Mother Earth is crying out, sending numerous signals to us humans that we must amend our ways, which are destroying the very ecosystems by which we live.

What is needed today are pathways and practices to facilitate the recovery of a participatory, wholistic consciousness among people (so-called Westerners and non-Westerners alike) nested within the bounds of our alienating post-modern culture and consciousness. The shamanic and eco-spiritual practices offer a way for us to communicate, collaborate, and co-create with both beneficent and compassionate helping spirits and with Spirit⁵, for both personal and collective healing (S. Kerr, 2012). Understanding the underlying dynamics, relationships, and implications of eco-spirituality will facilitate myself and others in re-establishing our inherent connectedness to Mother Earth. It will provide fodder, material, and substance for the telling, writing, and birthing of our new (forgotten but now remembered) cultural and cosmological stories of the interconnected sacredness of all things.⁶

⁵ I use the word “spirits”, with a small ‘s’, in reference to those beneficent and compassionate helping spirits encountered in shamanic practices in what is often referred to as the non-ordinary world. I capitalize the word when I refer to the transforming power present in life; an integral aspect of the Great Spirit, God, Consciousness, Source.

⁶ While I don’t make use of metaphysical terminology, *per se*, the re-cognition of the interconnected sacredness of all things is a recognition of the metaphysical dimension as inherent in and completely intermingled (interpenetrated) with all that is. As author and scholar Kingsley Dennis has put it: “...the metaphysical impulse (or Fire/Light) is existent – *hidden within* – all states of existence, including our material realm. And this, for much of human history, has been a grand heresy.” (<https://kingsleydennis.substack.com/p/the-grand-heresy> , July 14, 2024, blog)

In the writing of my dissertation, I intertwine various strands and ideas, each and all impacting the others in a dance of complexity. Among those strands I will refer to my first-hand experiences of shamanic journeying -- interactions with my helping spirits and power animals⁷ -- and my engagement with shamanic practices. This is a weaving together of actions and ideas, matter and spirit, time and place, higher and lower, inner and outer. These intersections within my DMin dissertation bring together myth, narratives, and stories with shamanic practices and reciprocal relations with Nature. They also bring together imagination and invocation with language, ritual, and ceremony.

Of special interest is the way in which these various elements impact a person's ability to send and receive information from the eco-field or implicate order⁸ (Consciousness, Spirit, Earth's energetic forces). Two central questions appear to be, *what are some of the dynamics and elements involved in connecting and engaging with Consciousness*, and furthermore, the how, i.e. *what processes are involved in such*. One of the most intriguing concepts I encountered during my research is that of the Quechua term *Ayni*, the word for an indigenous South

⁷ Helping spirits and Power Animals are both encountered in the nonordinary world, that mode of consciousness entered in shamanic practices. Both will be explained in more detail in the chapter on Shamanic & Scientific Connections to the Eco-Field (see page 65). Briefly put they are entities supportive of shamanic practitioners with which practitioners interact during journeying, divining, and healing. Interacting with them helps people "begin to understand what it is to *live* shamanically, as opposed to practicing shamanism" (Lora Jansson, "Power Animal Retrieval", *Shamanism Annual*, Issue 25, December 2012, p. 30).

⁸ Described by physicist David Bohm as, "beyond the visible, tangible world there lies a deeper, implicate order of undivided wholeness." "David Bohm, Implicate Order and Holomovement", <https://www.scienceandnonduality.com/article/david-bohm-implicate-order-and-holomovement> See page 190, below, for a personal experience of such interacting.

American understanding of mutual exchange and support, of **sacred reciprocity**, harmony between all things.⁹ Our human interactions with Mother Earth are two-way, that is, it is not just us humans observing and interacting with animals and trees, it is also when “the other” becomes aware of us and interacts – such as my encounter with raven recounted in the *Forward* above.

Poet Gary Snyder comments in his book *The Old Ways* (1977),

‘Mankind has a rendezvous with destiny in Outer Space.’ Some say. We are already traveling through space. This is the galaxy, right here. The wisdom and skill of those who studied the universe first hand, by direct knowledge and experience, for millennia, both inside and outside themselves, is what we might call the Old Ways....

I take my place, with the research and writing of this dissertation, in joining

...Those who envision a possible future planet on which we continue that study, and where we live by the Green and the Sun, have no choice but to bring whatever science, imagination, strength, and political finesse they have to the support of the inhabitory people – native and peasants of the world. Entering such paths, we begin to learn a little of the Old Ways, which are outside of history, and forever new. (p.66)

My dissertation research is a way of engaging with the sentiment and query put forth by the Society for Shamanic Practices. “As our planet and all beings go through enormous change and transformation, each one of us has a choice to make. How will we participate in the great turning of our times? ... What will we

⁹ One definition of this intriguing term is from Heart of the Healer: “Ayni is the vital stabilizing force that fosters the ability to cultivate, build, strengthen and deepen relationship to all things personal, interpersonal and transpersonal and also to nature and cosmos.” (website: <https://heartofthehealer.org/sacred-relationship-living-in-ayni/#:~:text=Ayni%20is%20the%20vital%20stabilizing%20force%20that%20fosters%20the%20ability>)

dream into being for ourselves and future generations to come? What tools and practices can help us in this unique time?” (email, September 22, 2022)

Journeys by their nature are equally concerned with process as with outcome. Although all journeys have a beginning, experiences and waypoints along the way, and a destination or goal, each person’s journey will be unique to them. The various practices and means of engaging with Nature and Mother Earth experienced in my journey are accessible and applicable by others. The saying is very true: we make the road by walking. The practices and means of such a journey provide insight and direct experience of Sacred Mother Earth, of her energies and ways of engagement, of communicating and dialoguing in The Mother Tongue, with Mother Earth and her innumerable creatures and forms. If you have ever pondered the indigenous idea that everything is alive, a journey along these pathways will provide experiential answers not mere intellectual concepts; you will *know* not merely think or believe. If you have ever been curious about quantum physics and the claim that energy or consciousness is fundamental to the material world, these pathways will open windows for you into these dynamics. If you want to learn the language of the Earth, to be more alive, to be more human, learning the ways of Mother Earth is essential. Welcome to a journey that can change your life, and the life of the planet.



My work, like all work, stands on the shoulders of those who have come before. Exploring eco-spirituality I have respectfully woven threads and trajectories

from a variety of Christian and shamanic traditions. I received my academic training for Christian ministry with a double major in Religion and Society and the History and Phenomenology of Religion, in graduate school seminary, and then took an advanced master's degree in Spirituality. Over the last dozen years my training in shamanic practices has been primarily under the tutelage of two schools or lineages. First, The Foundation for Shamanic Studies and its program of *Core Shamanism*. As originated, researched, and developed by its founder Michael Harner, "Core Shamanism consists of the universal, near-universal, and common features of shamanism... the principles of Core Shamanism are not bound to any specific cultural group or perspective" (Foundation for Shamanic Studies, n.d.).

Second, Shamanic Reiki Worldwide incorporates Mayan, Siberian, and Tibetan shamanic influences, in addition to classical Reiki of the Usui lineage. In respect of these traditions, SRW states on its website: "*Shamanic Reiki Worldwide* "SRW" and its sister organization, the *Olympic Mountain EarthWisdom Circle* "OMEC" do not enact or convey indigenous derived practices or ceremonies for which they do not have permission to share" (Shamanic Reiki Worldwide, n.d.).

I give thanks that the helping spirits are welcoming to all who would do this work, that they do not judge by one's color or heritage but, rather, look at one's heart.

B. Research Questions

My initial question and starting point for delving into shamanic practices and then Seminary of the Wild and Earth Wisdom Academy was, “What is an appropriate, significant response to the cry of the Earth?” I had begun exploring shamanism, as one response, a few years before entering Ubiquity University’s doctoral program. A primary draw to shamanism for me was my growing alignment with the understanding that shamanism is the most fundamental (i.e., ancient) spiritual tradition or worldview and has much to offer the contemporary world in our calling and mandate to recover our lost connections with Nature/Earth. This draw to shamanism builds on my abiding respect for indigenous traditions.¹⁰ Shamanism is a key and ubiquitous indigenous expression (Harner, Ingerman, Mails, Roberts, Taegel, Villoldo).

Questions I was asking as I began my doctoral research and participation in these programs were, *what would I learn from participating in these two year-long programs? How would I grow? How would my ministry deepen? How would this help prepare me for elderhood and retirement? How would these experiences deepen my relationship to Earth (and to Spirit)? How would the programs facilitate exploring ways of reconnecting, reestablishing, remembering, and engaging an eco-spirituality (way of life)? Would my participation in these programs provide wisdom for living in*

¹⁰ One of my two boyhood heroes was Crazy (Spirited) Horse, and I have expressed since my earliest college days what to me is self-evident, that the indigenous or original peoples are keepers of the necessary wisdom for living as responsible stewards of the land, and hence the planet.

right relationship with the more-than-human.¹¹ world? How would this wisdom be embodied and storied?

Initially, I had anticipated an exploration of imagination, but as I engaged with Seminary of the Wild and Earth Wisdom Academy, I realized that as important as it is, it is not just imagination that is to be cultivated. Actually, the heart of what I am in pursuit is a reconnection with Mother Earth, Mother Earth as the bed or seat of the life you and I and every human experiences in the here and now. Imagination, although crucial and essential (Artress, 2020; Baring, 2020; Bedi, 2021; Casey, 2017; Cheetham, 2005; Haugen, 2014; Lachman, 2017; Larson, 1976; Meade, 2008, 2016, 2018; Meyer, 2017; Syrdal, 2020; Tarnas, 2019) and thus still to be included, is a vehicle or means. Each pathway expresses in one way or another the understanding that Earth has a deep wisdom (Roberts, 2007), which is open to our exploration and discovery, and with which we may participate intimately (by way of and through participatory consciousness). We do this through developing our innate capacity with practices, ceremonies, and rituals (Bear Heart, Harner, Ingerman, Plotkin, Roberts, Rysdyk, Taegel, Villoldo), all of which facilitate an intentional recalibration of our perception.¹² (our imagination) (Haugen, 2019).

¹¹ The phrase, 'more-than-human,' was first used by David Abram in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (1997), to refer to the whole of earthly nature.

¹² Such a change of perception is hugely significant, as stated by cellular biologist and author Bruce Lipton in his Foreword to Robert Williams' book *The Missing Piece Peace in Your Life!* (2004): "A radically new understanding emerging at the cutting edge of cell science recognizes that the environment, and more specifically, *our perception* of the environment, directly controls our behavior and the activity of our genes" (emphasis added).

Although I focus on my participation with the two aforementioned programs (SOW and EWA) I also include reflections and experiences from my participation in two other programs: workshops and training with the Foundation for Shamanic Studies (FSS)¹³ and the year-long Shamanic Reiki Master Teacher training with Shamanic Reiki Worldwide (SRW).¹⁴ Both of these latter programs immeasurably deepened my shamanic experiences and knowledge and facilitated a recalibration of my perception.

C. Literature Review

I had begun reading about and engaging in personal experiences with shamanism prior to enrolling in Ubiquity University's doctoral degree program. One of the most influential books piquing my curiosity about and interest in shamanism was Peter Kingsley's *A Story Waiting to Pierce You* (2010).¹⁵ As I moved into the doctoral program other readings and resources were both self-selected and assigned or recommended in the various programs.

¹³ I completed the *Online Shamanic Healing Training Certificate Program* with FSS in September 2022.

¹⁴ I received my certificate of completion for the Shamanic Reiki Healing Master Teacher and Life Empowerment program, December 31, 2023.

¹⁵ As well as the history of Western civilization, for with immense scholarship Kingsley manages to turn on their heads popular and scholarly assumptions about the sources of western culture, especially of Greek thought. In a graceful simplicity his book "traces the ancient threads that connect Mongolia, Tibet, and Native Americans to the very origins of western civilization." P. Kingsley, (2010). *A Story Waiting to Pierce You: Mongolia, Tibet and the Destiny of the Western World*. The Golden Sufi Center. I read this in January 2016.

My interest in learning more about Eco-Spirituality had drawn me to Shamanism, which I saw as an indigenous way of lived-spirituality, of being in relation to the Earth. In retrospect, I see that my desires and interests drew various manifestations and forms of energy and consciousness to me, to my energy field. One such manifestation was the Earthtribe¹⁶ and Earth Wisdom Academy (EWA), and subsequently, its Wild Heart Quest (WHQ). I had become aware of them through my long-standing interest in programs and courses of Wisdom University (which later morphed into a “school” of the newly formed Ubiquity University). Specifically, it was the “Earth Wisdom and the Primordial Mind” course description that caught my attention: “to orient the mentor within nature-based spirituality and purpose ... [to] explore shamanic and scientific connections to the eco-field” (Lillie Rowden and Will Taegel). This intention reflected the coming together of various streams of inquiry about which I had been both curious and actively pursuing over the last many years.

I came to see that my Wild Heart Quest with EWA had begun before I signed up for the quest proper. The WHQ is a practice dedicated to the further development of an in-depth connection with the natural order and its eco-fields, with the aim of deepening intimacy and compassion, and assisting in a “Great Return” of human

¹⁶ The Earthtribe consists of communities that practice Nature-based spirituality. “We also have integrated into our meditational practices the wisdom of the eight world religions, the guidance of contemporary psychology, and the maps of evolutionary science. In short, we are about an integral practice that expands our awareness of our connection with all creation with the aim of deepening intimacy and compassion. We are a spiritual community of The Center for Creative Resources, Inc. (CCR).” <https://www.earthtribe.com/>

beings to the original source of the natural order (Dr. Will Taegel, Earth on a Vision Quest presentation).

My participation in the Earth Wisdom Community's Eco-Spiritual Mentor certification program was to explore another avenue for enhancing both my personal reciprocal relationship with Mother Earth, and that available for my community, society, and world. Preparing for Eco-Spiritual Mentoring was by design a path of personal exploration as well as training to mentor others in their pursuits of such mutually enhancing relationships between themselves and Mother Earth. The various elements of my training provided experience in areas important for developing a vibrant ecospirituality. This being a relatively new area and field of training¹⁷, I appreciate the title Lillie Rowden gave her final book¹⁸: *Bridgewalkers to a New Era: A Guide for Eco-Spiritual Mentors* (2022). I think her naming the endeavor to be such a mentor and to provide eco-spiritual mentoring as that of bridgewalking strikes precisely the proper key – between the present how-it-is and the future-becoming new era.

A potential thread of interest arises between Bridgewalkers and Skywalkers, as some shaman have been called. “Skywalker is a direct translation of the word shaman out of the Tungusic, which is where Siberian shamanism comes from”

¹⁷ Eco-Spiritual Mentoring, as such, is a relatively recent field of training, however, the reality of people being aware of the reciprocal relationship between humanity and Mother Earth, and of the need for and capability of guiding or mentoring others in developing this awareness, is as old as indigenous wisdom on the planet.

¹⁸ Lillie F. Rowden, D.Min., passed away in the summer of 2023. Dr. Rowden was the co-director of the Eco-Spiritual Mentoring program, along with Dr. Taegel.

(Mckenna, 2016). Indeed, connecting eras and worlds and states of being Eco-Spiritual Bridgewalkers can be said to play with time and space. The same can be said about shaman or Skywalkers, who traverse altered states of consciousness, what Michael Harner and FSS refer to as a Shamanic State of Consciousness (SSC). Terence Mckenna¹⁹ tells us, “The shaman has access to a superhuman dimension and a superhuman condition,” and what is more, “by being able to do that he affirms the potential for transcendence in all people.” The shaman can thus be seen as an exemplar (Mckenna, 2016). So, too, I would argue, can Eco-Spiritual Bridgewalkers be seen as exemplars, pointing as they do to the potential for transcendence in all people.

As Dr. Will Taegel and the EWA proposed, we are all in the midst of the vision quest Mother Earth herself is undergoing. There is a tremendous need to develop awareness of this participation (Baring, 2013; EWA; Haugen, 2014; Taegel, 2010, 2012, 2017), whether or not one accepts the premise of the vision quest. As humanity moves from the industrial, extractive economic system of the last couple centuries to a more sustainable system, key to any such movement will be people accepting and developing their reciprocal relationships with Earth.²⁰ This is both a philosophical and an ethical imperative (Dowd, 2020; Kimmerer, 2017; Leopold, 1949; Lipton and Bhaerman, 2009; Meyer, 2017; Pitcher, 1993; Roberts, 2007, 2011;

¹⁹ Terence Kemp McKenna (1946-2000) was an American ethnobotanist and mystic who advocated for the responsible use of naturally occurring psychedelic plants. *Wikipedia*.

²⁰ “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” A. Leopold, (1949). *A Sand County Almanac*, p. viii.

Vaughan-Lee, 2016; Weber, 2017). People must perceive Earth as more than inert raw material solely to be extracted and used. There needs to be an understanding of care and stewardship for our planet, for our Mother (Earth). As Mary Evelyn Tucker of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology wrote, “...a vibrant ecospirituality is essential for creating new mutually enhancing human-Earth relations” (Tucker, 2024).

Another manifestation drawn to me from my desires and interests was Seminary of the Wild and their Eco-Ministry Certificate program. This program, like EWA, was about cultivating a sacred relationship with Earth through a program designed to facilitate participants developing “a new kind of consciousness.” In addition, SOW’s particular contribution to creating a vibrant eco-spirituality is in marrying the Christian tradition with nature-based spirituality. Some may see this as a radical move. SOW faculty recognized this by stating as one of their initial intentions during the opening intensive (Spring 2020): “... we are attempting to embrace a disruptive innovation in our western culture with both imagination and spiritual integrity.”

SOW subsequently incorporated **religious and theological language and perspectives** (Bourgeault, 2008; Delio, 2011; Fox, 1988, 1991, 2020; McLaren, 2020; Newell, 2008; Palmer, 2000; Rohr, 2016, 2019; Wallace, 2019; Weber, 2014), with **(eco-) psychology** (Haugen, 2014, 2018; Little, 2020; Macy, 2015, 2020; Plotkin, 2003, 2013, 2015, 2020), **mystical** (Bourgeault, 2008; Hafiz; O’Donahue; Starr, 2020; Whyte), **mythic** (Casey, 2017; Meade, 2014, 2016; Shaw, 2016, 2020;

Syrdal, 2020), and **scientific** (Dowd, 2020; Kimmerer, 2013, 2020; Weber, 2014) language and perspectives. Other subjects included literature, poetry, storytelling, and music (Harjo, 2015; Oliver; Silko, 2006; Snyder, 1990; Whyte), vocation and calling (Ferguson, 2021; McLaren, 2020; Meade, 2016, 2021; Palmer, 2000), dream-work, rituals, ceremonies, and *Terra Divina* or Wild Contemplation, which is related to *Lectio Divina*, a time-honored Christian spiritual practice of scriptural contemplation.

Coming to understand and explore the concept of Earth being Mother Earth and *Gaia*, a living, organic entity, and that she might be inviting me into a conversation or dialogue of intimacy and personal development was somewhat new and quite intriguing. Readings contributing to this exploration included Mails (2010), Ingberman & Roberts (2015), Roberts (2011), Rowden (2014), Taegel (2010, 2012, 2017), and Villoldo (2000).

Various strands of thinking and experiences converged into my doctoral studies and the research for this dissertation. The concept that consciousness is primary to material manifestation was not completely new to me. My studies and practices in comparative religion and spirituality and some 30 years in ministry were more than enough evidence to embed in me the knowledge (first-hand experience) that Consciousness or Spirit plays a central role in life (reality). However, the scientific theories supporting this understanding were new to me (new in that I had not read them before, not necessarily that I had never heard of them). I had also previously explored studies and practices of “new thought” such as spiritual mind

treatment, intentions, and related ideas (W. Dyer, E.& J. Hicks/Abraham, N. Hill, E. Holmes), playing with the idea of mind over matter and that thinking (our minds) can impact our physical bodies and the material world around us. It is an intriguing dynamic and portends many amazing possibilities. It was, however, the “scientific” studies in physics (especially Edward Close’s 1997, *Transcendental Physics*), biology (Bruce Lipton, 2005, revised 2008), psychology and energy medicine (Gregg Braden, 2017; Joe Dispenza, 2014, 2017; Gabor Mate, 2003), that grabbed my attention..²¹

I confess that I, too, as an inhabitant of the early 21st century consider “Science”²² to be an authenticator of an idea or theory. Not, it is important to add, the only authentication or proof, but surely one on which we can rely, or admit as witness. Our contemporary understanding or worldview is that if science says something is so, it is, we can count on it being so ... or, to the point, real or true. Science has become the language of authentication, indeed, of truth, even of things spiritual. Just because millennia of religious and spiritual traditions have said that Consciousness or Spirit is supreme or ultimate, does not make it so for the

²¹ It should be noted, the scientific studies that caught my attention are often not considered part of the mainstream of Western science, even if their authors originally hail from such. The authors I mention tend to operate in areas we can classify as trans-disciplinary or meta-disciplinary science. Being outside the rather strict bounds of traditional academic and scientific disciplines, their ideas and theories are not often met with immediate acclaim; especially if they challenge disciplinary orthodoxy and invite new paradigms into our understanding.

²² Although I refer primarily to Western science, other science could be included such as the meta-disciplinary sciences just noted. Another example being what is known as indigenous science, which “refers to the knowledge systems and practices of Indigenous peoples rooted in their cultural traditions and relationships to their environment.... It is a holistic field that integrates physical, social, mental, and cultural knowledge.” (Worldwide Indigenous Science Network. <https://wisn.org/about/what-is-indigenous-science/>)

contemporary person. But if science says it is so, then, by gosh, it must be (or at least it is much more likely to be true, and we should at least consider that possibility). Please note that while I play loose with this, stating it part tongue-in-cheek, there is a deep truth to it as well.

Nevertheless, while it is true that science is corroborating ancient, indigenous wisdom and spiritual traditions, science will not provide the necessary antidote, as it were. Spirit²³ is necessary if humanity is to transcend our current situation. Science is but one filter by which to view and understand reality. On the other hand, seeing through the eyes of Spirit or Consciousness is a way of seeing and understanding reality holographically in a manner of speaking, all of “it” together (physics and metaphysics, that which our senses can perceive and that which they cannot, the numinous and the mundane), intermingling and connecting mysteriously, which, in my perspective, is ultimately beyond the ken of human understanding, not to mention science.²⁴

In truth, the earliest descriptor or name for God that I remember using, and which I still use today, is that of Mystery, the Great Mystery. It was therefore gratifying and affirming to read from a Native American Episcopal bishop that this is

²³ Defined above (p. 13) as “the transforming power present in life.”

²⁴ Reality/Life is indeed the Great Mystery. Our humanness would seem to compel our exploration and inquiry into who we are and what we are doing here. We/humanity seem to grow in our understanding but surprisingly (or perhaps not) ... there is always more. The more we learn and understand the deeper the mystery of it all.

also “one of the most common names for God among Native American societies...”
(Charleston, 2015, p.124).

George MacDonald, a Scottish theologian of the late 1800s, intriguingly invites us – albeit using antiquated terminology -- to be God’s playfellows in the game of inquiry into God’s works through the cultivation and use (method) of imagination.²⁵

“The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of the king is to find it out,” says Solomon. “As if,” remarks Bacon on the passage, “according to the innocent play of children, the Divine Majesty took delight to hide his works, to the end to have them found out; and as if kings could not obtain a greater honour than to be God's playfellows in that game.” (MacDonald, 1867)

George MacDonald furthermore supports my contention that ultimately the nature of the universe (God’s works) is beyond human comprehension in his quoting the book of Ecclesiastes, “setting forth both the necessity we are under to imagine, and the comfort that our imagining cannot outstrip God's making. ‘I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made everything beautiful in his time; also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end’” (MacDonald, 1867).

²⁵ I will delve deeper into the subject of imagination later in my dissertation.

D. Precursor to Methodology

Before we move into an inquiry of methodology, it is important to qualify efforts at explaining and interpreting experiences of spirituality and shamanism, subjects which by their very nature are beyond “exact rational definitions and abstractions.” Rather, they work with what the 17th century French scientist and philosopher Blaise Pascal called the ‘spirit of finesse,’ that is, “with ideas and perceptions not capable of exact definition” (Lachman, 2017, p. 17; quoting historian Jacques Barzun and Barzun’s interpretation of Pascal).

For instance, everyone agrees about the definition of a right-angle triangle, but things like freedom, love, art “and other meaningful but less exact phenomena are not so well defined.” The human mind is capable of traveling/working/playing in both directions, the ‘spirit of geometry,’ to use Pascal’s term for the mathematical, rational reasoning, and the intuitive approach, which represents what Pascal famously wrote, “the heart has its reasons that reason does not know” (Lachman, 2017). For a doctoral dissertation on eco-spirituality and shamanism the intuitive approach is central, but I must endeavor to incorporate both approaches.

It also bears stating that I honor and respect shamanism not only as an expression of eco-spirituality but as one of the great wisdom traditions, traditions which are expressions of the sacred. I have endeavored to learn from this tradition incorporating its wisdom and practices into my own life experience, and thence into my dissertation.

E. Research Methodology

Based as my dissertation is on the study, description, and interpretation of the essence of my own lived experiences with these program pathways, I have pursued my research and writing making use of a combination of approaches, primarily those of Phenomenology, Organic Inquiry (Clemens, et al, StoriesareMedicine.com; Guillen, 2019), and Grounded Theory (Delve, Ho, & Limpaecher, 2021). The phenomenon of my research (i.e., my experiences with the pathways) is not something that can readily be quantified, if at all. Furthermore, it is part of a significant whole (eco-spirituality) and its analysis requires a wholistic approach involving more than “only intellectual and analytical frameworks” (Clemens, et al). I am undertaking the experiences and practices of shamanism and eco-spirituality as well as articulating them in writing. My research and dissertation writing can be called "organic" because I understand it as a dynamic, living process that values transformation as much as information. Indeed, it is a journey, a journey of opening my heart, expanding my consciousness and being, moving ever more fully into a fluid and powerful harmony with Nature, Mother Earth, Spirit, the eco-Field, Consciousness, God, Universal Life Force Energy. My intention is for my journey to be a pathway for Restoring a Kindred Relationship with Mother Earth.

The explanation of organic inquiry on the *Stories are Medicine* web site was fruitful because it articulates what I have been doing research-wise the last five years with my participation in SOW, WHQ, FSS, and SRMT/SRW. It provides a three-

part repeated process integrating experience into research. 1) *Preparation* (among other things, “adopting a state of curious ignorance”), 2) *Inspiration* (“accessing and engaging information beyond the conscious mind by such means as meditation, shamanic journeys, and active imagination”), and 3) *Integration* (“translating liminal insight into deeper understanding ... examining what was uncovered through a rational lens”) (Stories are Medicine, n.d.). Engaging in this cyclical and continual process has provided a structure for pursuing my research and a way to put together my notes and journal writings from these years and programs.

I especially appreciate how the five women²⁶ who innovated this method, use an image of a growing tree to express five cumulative principal characteristics of organic inquiry, thus establishing a relationship with the natural world for this organic method:

Sacred: Preparing the Soil
 Personal: Planting the Seed
 Chthonic: The Roots Emerge
 Related: The Tree Grows
 Transformative: Fruit is Harvested

These five women have named the sacred as part of the process and that is important to me because I understand my entire dissertation research as engaging the sacred. Indeed, I understand Reality to be sacred, the Sacred. As breath is to humans so the sacred is to reality – all pervasive. The title of the article states the

²⁶ Jennifer Clements, Dorothy Ettling, Lisa Shields, Nora Taylor, and Dianne Jenett.

case: “Organic Inquiry: Approaching Research as a Sacred Endeavor.” That is what I am striving to do. I am seeking a deeper and more informed sensitivity for “how to human well,” to use Alexander Laszlo’s wonderful phrase. I would have my dissertation play its part in sacralizing the human experience in connection with nature (Mother Earth) and “the deeper narratives of life that all wisdom cultures tap into” (Aleander Laszlo, p.c., 3/21/2025).

Complimentary to my Organic Inquiry is an approach known as Grounded Theory (Delve, 2021). The cyclical nature of my research inquiry grounded it: I was analyzing my “data” while collecting it, learning from my analysis, and continuing to “collect” more data. I was following what emerged from the data itself. As mentioned above, I began with questions about imagination. My research (data analysis) led me to re-evaluate the primary focus of my research, which was reconnecting to Mother Earth, with imagination as one means of doing so.

I did not recruit participants (as often is the case with grounded theory) but, rather, continued engaging the programs in which I was participating, bringing my expanding awareness with me as I moved into new dimensions. That is, I was ‘analyzing’ the ‘data’ of my experiences and the teachings and practices of the programs through the lens of my freshly acquired information and arising perspectives. The outline or direction of my data collection was predetermined by the programs – there were set but flexible curriculums. Within those parameters I was free to select areas of interest and chose topics and items to emphasize.

As a means of reflecting on thoughts and experiences I kept journals of my participation in each program pathway. SOW – a large notebook and binder with notes, dream work, drawings, photographs, collages, etc., recording my reflections and experiences. EWA – notes from conversations with my mentor Will Taegel and recording my reflections and experiences with other EWA and WHQ events. I also kept a journal of my shamanic journeying, and another journal of my overall doctoral journey -- ideas, readings, quotes, etc. Additional journals I kept included those from my workshops with FSS and my year-long SRMT training program with SRW. These notes and journals tracked my journey, my thought process, and promoted my reflexivity.

My purpose in undertaking this research was not to develop theories, per se, but rather to analyze the value of particular eco-spirituality pathways, to document in a reflexive manner my personal development and expanding consciousness, and to assess the potential value to others and for ministry (eco-ministry).

Throughout my doctoral research and dissertation writing I have engaged the different iterations of eco-spirituality and various shamanic practices in a process and from a perspective of desiring to help “shape the contours of the future” (Gergen, 2020). It was never my intention to merely attempt describing the world “as it is” in a strictly intellectual, analytical fashion. In the words of my initial dissertation subtitle, I was pursuing “a modality for dreaming a new world into being.”

There is a certain pragmatism implied in any spirituality: the ways and means of transformation, of engaging with Spirit and undergoing change. This is especially so with eco-spirituality, the very premise of which is to develop an embodied connection with Nature, with Mother Earth. Of needs be, a reflectiveness is entailed in any spiritual endeavor. This was very much the case for me. I was engaging these practices in a very personal, experiential manner, and it was necessary for me to continually reflect upon my experiences, upon my practices. I did so observing my experiences in light of readings and theories presented in the eco-spirituality and shamanic programs in which I participated (see literature review), as well as from my own life-experience, including my career in ministry and my transdisciplinary readings and degrees over the years.²⁷ My reflections fed into my experiences which in turn led to more reflections, spiraling inwardly and outwardly in deeper and expanding circles of awareness, bringing me ever homeward on my journey.

F. Coming Home – Spiraling the Circle

The research and writing of my dissertation has been a journey of learning the Mother Tongue (Taegel, 2012), of listening to and connecting with Mother Earth (Gaia), of Restoring Kindred Relationship with the Sacred Earth (Ingerman &

²⁷ All my academic degrees have been transdisciplinary in nature. BA in Photography/Communications; professional 3-year Master of Divinity (MDiv) with double major (Religion and Society, and History and Phenomenology of Religion); Master of Sacred Theology (STM), thesis on Spirituality and Work; MA in Sociology (Globalization and the intersection of Economy and Society).

Roberts, 2015; Nasr, 1968 & 1976 (2nd ed.); SOW, 2020; Vaughan-Lee, 2016; Wallace, 2019). It is a journey of opening my heart, expanding my consciousness and being, moving ever more fully into a fluid and powerful harmony with Nature and Mother Earth, with Spirit, Consciousness, God. So, too, with the sharing of my journey (this dissertation) others will have the opportunity to avail themselves of such possibilities.

A query expressed brilliantly by Dr. Geneen Marie Haugen,²⁸ articulated my growing awareness and path as I prepared to embark on my research for the UU doctoral degree: “Perhaps we need help from intelligence that is older and far more than human. What if we could thin the membrane between the planetary psyche and human imagination, to allow for Earth to press its own longings into our human awareness – both as individual persons, and as a species?” Subsequent courses, workshops, and personal practices were undertaken in order to “...engage similar practices with the additional intention of turning our wild antennae toward honouring, hearing, sensing, receiving, and expressing the longings of the intelligent organism called Earth: the body/psyche in which we are entwined” (Haugen, 2022).

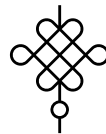


²⁸ “Geneen Marie Haugen, PhD, grew up a little wild, with a run-amok imagination. A content creator and guide to the intertwined mysteries of nature and psyche with the Animas Valley Institute, she has been on the faculty of the Esalen Institute and Schumacher College. Her writing appears in *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*; *Parabola Journal*; *Thomas Berry: Dreamer of the Earth*, and numerous other publications.” (Compilation of Bios posted on various websites.)

The following chapter, *Eco-Spirituality*, in addition to a brief inquiry into the nature of eco-spirituality, includes some but not all of the elements and dynamics encountered during my research. Those included are the ones that arose in importance because of the role they play and the place they hold in exploring the fundamental makeup of an eco-spirituality. More particularly, of their significance in the changing of any cultural paradigms, which are keys to a change of perception of our relationship to Mother Earth. Additional dynamics, elements, tools, and practices appear in Chapter Five, the heart of my research and dissertation, relating my participation in the two program pathways (SOW and EWA/WHQ).

Laying the ground work for the review, exploration, and encounter with my personal experiences, I have explained the more significant foundations, guide-posts, and intriguing possibilities related to these programs and my research in the intervening Chapters Three (Shamanic and Scientific Connections to the Eco-Field) and Four (Three Linking Spirals). Those chapters provide a bigger picture, as it were; under-lying and over-lapping themes of the deepening and expanding circles of awareness I encountered. Eco-spirituality is not a neatly categorized or compartmentalized entity or phenomenon, it is broad-based and multi-tendrilled much like a tree with roots and branches reaching into many areas, both giving and receiving insight and nourishment. The two sub-sections of Chapter Five are presented as I experienced SOW and EWA/WHQ, that is chronologically, in the organic and grounded manner my research journey unfolded. Each has an inherent developmental process.

My theme of spiraling circles²⁹ comes from what is for me an intriguing synchronicity. My experience with Raven shared above in the Forward was a raw and wondrous encounter with Mother Earth before I had many words or images by which to describe such, and prior even to my entering the doctoral program. Raven was circling in ever ascending spirals, as if pointing out my path before I was conscious of it. In the course of my research and writing the idea came to me that what I was doing could be thought of as interconnecting circles. Topping it off, the name I was given by my Earthtribe mentor and elder after my Wild Heart Quest, without his knowledge of the above, was *Spiraling Circle*. This is a name I proudly claim for this stage of my journey.



²⁹ I am aware that from a systems perspective circles and spirals are distinct patterns and symbols. In my usage the two are intimately linked. Expanding circles, as holders of my expanding awareness, can be understood symbolically as spiraling movement, evolving from a certain awareness into another, greater awareness. While circles represent a certain continuity or pattern repetition (such as seasons), spirals represent a transcendence from one form or awareness to another. Spirals are not circles, however, they generally take a circular form, moving beyond a circle into something new and different. As with Raven flying higher, Raven was spiraling ever higher in circular patterns, not in squares or triangles. For me, spiraling circles are circles taken to another level, evolving from what was into something new. For example our inquiry into the role of language expands and evolves with each turn, that is, with each spiraling circle, with each encounter throughout this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2. ECO-SPIRITUALITY

In this chapter I inquire into the nature of eco-spirituality. What is it, and how might we define it? What are the distinguishing characteristics and qualities of an eco-spirituality? From my research and experience, indigenous peoples around the world contribute an essential perspective for understanding and embracing an eco-spirituality. I thus include a brief overview of some key indigenous concepts.

Another building block of our worldviews is language, so in this chapter we have our first encounter with some dynamics of language. The last section of this chapter looks at what I call “The Split,” that is, how humanity has become disconnected from Nature, and then reflects on the role of Imagination and language in re-connecting us.

Just what is Eco-spirituality and Nature-based or Earth-based spirituality? Considering the words themselves, we observe the connections between “nature” (Earth, Creation), and those processes, practices, and ways of being that point to and unite us with Spirit (God, Source, Being, Creator).

An eco- or nature-based spirituality is a way to connect with the Divine (with the ground and source of all-that-is), with the universal life energy that permeates and animates all of nature (the natural world) on our planet Earth.³⁰ In the broadest

³⁰ A significant question can be raised at this point: is “Nature” Earth-bound, or must we include objects and subjects throughout the solar system and perhaps the Universe or even Cosmos? This is an open question as there are various ways of getting at it, and to adequately address the vastness which opening it poses is well beyond the parameters of this dissertation. In short, what I will say is that it could include the solar system and/or universe, it would depend upon one’s intent or query. In

sense the term applies to the ways and means of connecting, crossing, or co-mingling – and there are no doubt other terms we could use to describe this – the divine/holy/sacred with the earthy/physical/body. One could say it is those ways we humans get to Spirit via nature.

Nature as a location for Spirit, indeed, as a revelation of Spirit (of the divine), is a prism through which much of the (at least pre-modern) Christian tradition views creation. Creation is understood as God’s first revelation, the Hebrew and Christian Testaments or Scriptures (collectively known as *The Bible*) being a secondary revelation.³¹ The goodness and especially the beauty of nature mark it as “a divine epiphany,” as intellectual historian James C. Ungureanu, Ph.D., called it in his *Credo Magazine* article, *Retrieving an Ancient Sacramental Ecology* (Part 1, May 28, 2021). Unfortunately, many modern-day Christians seem to have forgotten this central teaching. But as Ungureanu suggests, “We would do well to listen to those who came before. When it comes to our current ecological crisis, the early church encouraged a view where man and nature are in harmony. This holistic view towards God, nature, and humanity was preached widely.”

addressing an Eco-spirituality I aim to include it All, however I will be focusing on the earthy/physical/body encounter with the divine/holy/sacred.

³¹ Two references: A contemporary theologian, Matthew Fox, reminds us that Jesus comes from the wisdom tradition of Israel, i.e., don’t use books but rather use nature as source, as scripture (SOW lecture September 22, 2020). From Franciscan priest Richard Rohr of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, we hear, “The first act of divine revelation is creation itself. The first Bible is the Bible of nature” (“Respecting Creation as the First Bible,” Daily Meditation, Sunday, February 28, 2016). cac.org/daily-meditations

If nature is a location and revelation of Spirit, Spirit resides and reveals itself³² in nature; all of nature, not just in humans or any one thing or creature. All of nature is holy and sacred and imbued with the Divine. “The divine energies are ‘within everything and outside everything.’ All creation is the manifestation of God's energies. Vladimir Lossky says in the *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*: ‘These divine rays penetrate the whole created universe and are the cause of its existence’” (Papademetriou, online essay).

Combining the two words “nature” and “spirituality” holds together the material and the spiritual, the outer and inner, the “more-than-human” and human. For many people today this type of spirituality can be a window into a new, grander, and more expansive world and universe. It may push boundaries and levels of comfort for some, while at the same time, for others, open exciting pathways for growth and development.

Again, the Christian tradition provides an example of this unity. According to many of the early Church thinkers (and continuing in Orthodox traditions, through their understanding of the incarnation³³), matter is infused by Spirit. That is to say, Spirit and matter are together, they are not at war with each other, it is not like

³² The very term is an oxymoron in that Spirit is not an “it” or a “self.”

³³ The incarnation of God becoming human or taking on human form in Jesus of Nazareth, “the Christ,” “the Messiah,” “the Anointed.”

matter is on one side and Spirit on another, indeed, they are in a co-creation with each other.³⁴

Another aspect to consider is the notion of “grounding” one’s spirituality. This could include connecting one’s spirituality with one’s body, with the incredible vessel in which each person journeys through their life on earth. In my experience, people tend to forget that without their body they would not be able to experience Spirit, let alone nature. This is where the slightly clichéd phrase, “we are one”, actually comes in play. Indeed, we are body *and* spirit, and the journey/practice/pilgrimage of realizing or embodying this integral reality is at the heart of spirituality, nature-based or otherwise.

Yes, how to be in touch or connected -- physically, emotionally, spiritually -- with Mother Earth, at, in, and with a place within ourselves beyond or deeper than that which is encased in ‘self’ from our culture (our “learned” or domesticated, civilized way of being) is the question of this historical moment, the task before us humans. *How do we engage with Mother Earth recognizing that we are an integral part and parcel of Mother Earth, not separate observers?*

³⁴“In any dialogue between theology and science, there is one basic truth which as Christians we must keep continually in view. *Spirit and matter are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they are interdependent; they interpenetrate and interact.* ... This conviction that matter is not inert «stuff» but dynamic energy is something that the natural sciences share with the mystical theology of the Orthodox Church.” (Emphasis added.) *The unity of the human person: The body-soul relationship in Orthodox Theology*, by Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia.
https://apostoliki-diakonia.gr/en_main/catechism/theologia_zoi/themata.asp?cat=dogma&contents=contents.asp&main=technology&file=Kallistos.htm

The rub is in one's understanding of the type of relationship one has with Earth. With what we now know (from scientific exploration), we can, realistically, no longer have a subject-object relationship with Earth, it has to be subject-subject, for we are Earth (each of us and all of us), that is what it means to understand our connectedness with Mother Earth. As such, our questing and visions are Earth questing and visioning; they are vehicles in the quest to articulate and image (envision) a way forward, into the unknown future.

Almost 50 years ago, the American poet Gary Snyder reflected that the impact of the photograph of the earth from outer space by a satellite made us (humans) aware of this globe we live on in a new way, that it is a system with certain limits. From that he drew ethical and moral lessons that still today form the core of what we call spiritual ecology or eco-spirituality.

The ethics or morality of this is far more subtle than merely being nice to squirrels. The biological-ecological sciences have been laying out (implicitly) a spiritual dimension. We must find our way to seeing the mineral cycles, the water cycles, air cycles, nutrient cycles, as sacramental – and we must incorporate that insight into our own personal spiritual quest and integrate it with all the wisdom teachings we have received from the nearer past. The expression of it is simple: gratitude to it all, taking responsibility for your own acts; keeping contact with the sources of the energy that flows into your own life (i.e. dirt, water, flesh). (Snyder, 1977, p. 63)



A. Indigenous Perspectives

As we seek to develop a vibrant eco-spirituality and a way forward into the future, it would behoove those of us enculturated into the modern Western world to listen to our sisters and brothers who have not lost their connection to Mother Earth. Indigenous or original peoples throughout the planet carry an inherent understanding of this oneness with Nature, of the intimate connection between Spirit and Creation.³⁵

“...[A] sacred virtual circle of allies who believe that earth-honoring Indigenous wisdom is key to navigating our collective crises and forging a path of depth, beauty, and meaning in the modern world...” This quote from a promotion for Grandmother Flordemayo’s³⁶ Shift Network course about using the Mayan calendar (2022) speaks to and articulates part of what I am seeing and believing, and endeavoring to express with my dissertation. Earth-honoring indigenous wisdom plays a major role in our “navigating our collective crisis,” and more important, of “forging a path of depth, beauty, and meaning in the modern world.” This is our way through the crisis to create a new world.

³⁵ The treasure of indigenous, original peoples’ wisdom is vast, as vast as Mother Earth herself. The few gems I highlight in this dissertation are those that surfaced in my research and which I find important for my personal journey. They also hold a generalized or universal importance for a cultural paradigm shift embracing this new (ancient) story, in the creation of a new world.

³⁶ Flordemayo® is a Curandera Espiritu, or a healer of divine spirit. She was born in highlands of Central America, specifically Nicaragua and was the youngest of 15 children. In the Mayan astrology she has the seed sign. She is a founding member of the Confederation of Indigenous Elders of the America (1995 – 2000), Institute of Natural and Traditional Knowledge (2003 – 2007), Church of the Spiritual Path (1998, 2008 – 2014), and the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers (2004 – 2014). <https://www.grandmotherflordemayo.com/bio/>

Our spiritual, nonphysical relationship and our living, physical relationship with earth are associated with Grandmother Earth. So, in the Lakota way, when we refer to either our Grandmother or our Mother, there's an unsaid understanding that we're honoring our sacred relationship with the earth.

Each of us is a unique child and a direct living descendant of Grandmother Earth. Each of us represents a living thread of humanity that's interwoven with the spiritual realm and the physical world of Grandmother Earth. All of us together, gathered under this understanding, make up this fabric of existence. We all share the same mother; we are all related, and we are all one nation. (Good Feather, 2021, p. 98)

These words are representative of a Lakota perspective, which Doug Good Feather articulates brilliantly in his 2021 book, *Think Indigenous*. Thinking indigenous is a way of harmony and connection, incorporating all of life, all of this planet (and more) into a holistic and sacred web of relationships. Take a moment and settle into this way of thinking and being as further expressed by Doug Good Feather.

The jungles and forests are the lungs of Grandmother Earth. The wind is moved by the ocean gyres and is the breath of Grandmother Earth. The creeks, rivers, and oceans are the vascular system of Grandmother Earth. The water that runs through them is the blood of Grandmother Earth. And the land under our feet is the flesh of Grandmother Earth. In every way that matters, the earth has its own physiology. (p. 97)

This indigenous *seeing in a sacred manner* means, among other things, perceiving interspecies links. It is the fundamental cultural study and perception of the interconnections of the entire ecosystem, as opposed to the analytical fragmentation of life resulting from our modern educational system. One example of the depth of inculturation of such interconnectedness is the Lakota word for prayer,

wacekiye, which means “to claim relationship with” or “to seek connection to” (Erdoes, 2009, p. xiv).

To the Lakota people, the cosmos is one family. To live well within the cosmos, one must assume responsibility for everything with which one shares the universe. There are familial obligations toward water, plants, minerals. Any harm done to the slightest of these relatives has devastating consequences for the whole ecosystem. Therefore, they monitor their surroundings attentively for the slightest change in the environment. The merest hint suffices as a warning of eco-cataclysm.³⁷

Having been taught that matter is dead and inert, we of the modern Western world “are blinded to these subtle signs” (Erdoes, *ibid.*, p. xv).

Author Tony Hillerman’s fictional character Navaho Policeman Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn shares a teaching he learned from his grandfather, Hosteen Nashibitti, about *the Blessing Way*; “... the only goal for man was beauty, and that beauty was found only in harmony, and that harmony of nature was a matter of dazzling complexity.” Leaphorn continues:

“When the dung beetle moves,” Hosteen Nashibitti had told him, “Know that something has moved it. And know that its movement affects the flight of the sparrow, and that the raven deflects the eagle in the sky, and that the eagle’s stiff wing bends the will of the Wind People, and know that all of this affects you and me, and the flea on the prairie dog and the leaf on the cottonwood.” That had always been the point of the lesson. Interdependency of nature. Every cause has its effect. Every action its reaction. A reason for everything. In all things a pattern, and in this pattern, the beauty of harmony. ... And thus one learned, gradually and methodically, if one was lucky, to always “go in beauty,” to always look for the pattern, and to find it. (Hillerman, 1973. Pp. 76-77)

³⁷ *Ibid.* – Note: a case in point in which indigenous people acted in the face of such a warning is the recent (2016-17) world-wide “Water is Life” protests led by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in the state of North Dakota to protect sacred lands and water sources from the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).

Indigenous scholar and researcher Shawn Wilson has an entire chapter in his book *Research is Ceremony* (2008) on the relationship of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. He uses the circle to illustrate this interrelated relationship, all parts being equal flowing into each other and affecting each other. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and in this regard we could say that what makes it greater is not only the sum of the parts but the addition of all their relations, the seen as well as the unseen, the knowable and the ineffable. In viewing research as ceremony Shawn Wilson states that it can and should be a “means of raising our consciousness” (Wilson, 2008, pp. 69-70). This is a good example of spiraling the circle: a circle lays the foundation of relatedness and equality and with that very totality of parts and relations it becomes greater, raising our consciousness.

How Shawn Wilson describes indigenous knowledge is what I am learning in my shamanic training, as well as in the SOW and especially with Will Taegel and my WHQ. A profound possibility presents itself: Am I learning to think (to be) indigenous in this regard, that is, how I think about and relate to the world, to reality, to life? Everything is related, everything is alive, and so we respect everything, acknowledging the reciprocity inherent in the world.

If we engage life as ceremony, we need “to be ready to step beyond the everyday and to accept a raised state of consciousness,” because the constituent

parts of ceremony “are designed to get the participants into a state of mind that will allow for the extraordinary to take place” (Wilson, *ibid.*, p. 69).



Ceremonial items used by Bear Heart

Reginah WaterSpirit’s³⁸ sharing during one of EWA’s *Earth on a Vision Quest* online gatherings (November 1, 2020) is a helpful and sobering commentary as we move into this unknown future, striving and stretching into our new old way of being. Regarding our use of language, WaterSpirit reminded us that humanity tends to think of our movement into the future as *evolving*, which implies getting better. But for Earth, it is not a getting better it is just more change.

³⁸ Reginah WaterSpirit was Marcellus “Bear Heart” William’s medicine helper and late-life spouse of 23 years. She co-authored *The Bear is My Father* (2021), a legacy book sharing “the profound teachings of a renowned multi-tribal Muscogee Creek medicine man,” as the book’s back cover synopsis puts it. Reginah WaterSpirit gifted me the items pictured.

Upon reflection, I realized that personally I am not tied to the sense of evolving as necessarily “getting better.” Change, yes, in the sense of “when something evolves, it changes, or develops over time, like your taste in music and clothes, which evolve as you get older” (Google dictionary). But not a value-laden sense as in better or improvement or progress. That said, I agree with WaterSpirit that most people today equate evolving with getting better.

I like the descriptive image provided in the Google dictionary: “Evolve comes from the Latin word *ēvolvere*, ‘to unroll.’” That works better for me, Earth is changing or unrolling as Earth moves through time. We humans do not have to get “hung up” in the sense of improving life on earth. Becoming more in harmony with life on Earth, yes. Even becoming more in tune with the complexity of life on Earth, yes; even, I would say, helping that complexity to manifest, thereby becoming more aligned with “life on Earth.” Just let us humans refrain from patting ourselves on the back in the vain attempt to congratulate ourselves on making Earth’s life better.

Our indigenous brothers and sisters offer us harmonious and integrated ways of being and living connected to Mother Earth, to a kindred relationship with our sacred Earth Mother.³⁹ Yet today we find ourselves very much disconnected, in fact, in an alienated, confused, and chaotic world seemingly set on self-destruction. What happened? Why this split?

³⁹ More of these ways will be explored below in the chapter on Shamanic and Scientific Connections to the Eco-Field.



B. The Split – Human disconnect from Nature, and the Role of Imagination and Language in Re-Connecting

Sandra Ingerman, a contemporary Western shamanic practitioner, teacher, and author has written numerous books on interpreting shamanism for the Western reader. Her works on ceremony and imagination especially echo my thinking and experience. In her book, *Medicine for the Earth*, she writes that a major cause of our human disconnect from Nature is intimately tied to the nature of our perceptions of the world; to our mis-guided thinking and dreaming. If we accept the indigenous and shamanic reality of connection and relatedness, we can say that our disconnect is due to our living in “the illusions that we are separate from nature, separate from the spiritual realms, and victims of our life and environment.” Furthermore, “these illusions are seeds that grow into plants of fear, anger, hate, despair, and darkness.” Sandra Ingerman states it is time to “weed out these plants of illusion,” and, since we have the power (even if forgotten) to dream and to vision, let us dream a different dream, one that will “once again link [us] with the spiritual forces that create magic and meaning in our lives” (Ingerman, 2000, p. 10).

“Many shamans say that we are dreaming the wrong dream.” In fact, “we are dreaming our world into existence all the time. [but] What we don’t realize is that by not taking an active role in visioning our lives we end up manifesting chaos from our confused and troubled thoughts” (Ingerman, *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 111). This is where the

power and uniqueness of **imagination** comes into play. As vividly expressed by astrologer and author Caroline Casey, “Imagination lays the tracks for the reality train to follow” (Casey, 1999, p. 14).

“There is something in the very origin of modernity that is drying out our very relationship to imagination, the unruly wild, even the divine.”

(Martin Shaw, 11/13/2022, *House of Beasts and Vine Podcast*)

"I'm enough of an artist to draw freely on my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited; imagination encircles the world."

(Albert Einstein, Quoted in interview by G.S. Viereck, October 26, 1929. Reprinted in *Glimpses of the Great* (1930).

“...[W]hat is missing [in the modern world] in most cases is not simply a lack of the resources needed to change things, but a tragic lack of the imagination required to awaken to a greater, more inclusive visions of reality.”

(Michael Meade, November 2023, *Living Myth Podcast*)

“Imagination is the essential human capacity that grants us entry to the magic that lies behind the veil of our ordinary ways of perceiving and experiencing.”

(Magdelene & Marsden, 2021)

Scientists such as Albert Einstein, astrologers such as Caroline Casey, contemporary shamanic practitioners such as Sandra Ingerman, storytellers such as Michael Meade and Martin Shaw, and wilderness guides such as Mary Marsden & Sage Magdalene of Animus Valley Institute, understand the importance of imagination. Unfortunately, over the last many centuries imagination has lost its place in the hierarchy of human sensibility and means of perception and knowledge. Fortunately, that is changing as imagination slowly but surely makes its way back into prominence. Later in this chapter I inquire further into the nature of imagination

and what is known as the imaginal realm. It is important to note however, that in agreement with religious philosopher Henry Corbin, I differentiate between the word ‘imaginary’ (i.e., something which is equated with the unreal, something outside of the framework of being and existing) and imagination as an *organ of perception*, what Henry Corbin called the “imaginal realm,” which mediates between the sensible world and the world of the intellect (Corbin, 1971). It is also worthy to note that my incorporation of the imaginal *realm* does not correspond with the notion of the imaginal *domain* from such areas of science as embryogenesis and morphogenesis.

A few examples illustrating the recent resurgence of interest in imagination are the following four authors, each approaching imagination from the lens of their respective field. Evelyn Rysdyk, an internationally recognized shamanic practitioner, in her 2022 book *Shamanic Creativity*, presents rituals, energy work, and spirit journeying as ways to “Free the Imagination,” as her subtitle states. Independent scholar, Tom Cheetham, explores the connections of psychology, cosmology, philosophy, and the arts in his 2015 book, *Imaginal Love: The Meaning of Imagination in Henry Corbin and James Hillman*. A leading force in the Labyrinth movement, the Reverend Dr. Lauren Artress (Canon Emeritus of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco) states it is “through the imagination that self-reflection and raw experiences of the Holy occur,” in her 2020 book, *The Path of the Holy Fool: How the Labyrinth Ignites Our Visionary Powers*. Environmentalist and author Rob Hopkins, PhD, is a co-founder of Transition Town Totnes and Transition Network. His 2019

book *From What Is to What If* addresses the power of imagination “to create the future we want,” as stated in his subtitle.

Scholar and author Gary Lachman references extensively the British author and historian of language, Owen Barfield⁴⁰ in his (Lachman’s) discussions of language, metaphor, imagination, evolution of consciousness, and the cultural split between inside and outside, subjective and objective, literal and poetic or figurative (Lachman, 2017). As Gary Lachman explores the historical antecedents of our contemporary split and heavily over-weighted preference for the logical, outside, literal, left-brain realm of the ruling world view he points the finger (to use a metaphor) at Scientism.⁴¹ Referencing Owen Barfield and others, he illustrates how language was once, originally, poetic and figurative. Indeed, the original figurative character of language was to those who spoke it, ‘normal,’ it was not contrived or artificial, it was not ‘made,’ but rather, ‘matter-of-fact’. Owen Barfield points out that what to us may seem ‘imaginative,’ was to the people experiencing it normal (p. 46).

What is of significance for my argument, and the point that Owen Barfield and Gary Lachman are making is that *the world used to be experienced differently than it is now*. Apparently, there was a unity and connectedness between humans and nature, between the perceiver and the perceived. More to the point, Owen

⁴⁰ Owen Barfield was also a member of the Inklings, the group of scholars and authors who met regularly in an Oxford pub, among other places, to share their work and to discuss literature, philosophy, mythology during the 1930s and 1940s. In addition to Barfield, the Inklings included C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams.

⁴¹ Lachman quotes historian Jacques Barzun in defining Scientism as “the fallacy of believing that the method of science must be used on all forms of experience and, given time, will settle every issue.” 2017, p. 15.

Barfield wrote, “There must have been a kind of *participation* between perceiver and perceived, between man and nature” (quoted by Lachman, *ibid.*, p. 47, emphasis added). The strict separation that we experience today between subjective and objective, living and dead, inside and outside, fact and imagination was apparently not the case in an earlier time. Our imagination, however, gives us the possibility of experiencing this participatory state, such as through the creativity and imagination of some modern painters or poets, or as Gary Lachman points out with the use of certain substances, which, however, may not be as long lasting as with poetry and art (Lachman, pp. 47-48).

Gary Lachman’s use of Owen Barfield to illustrate how language came about from this participation of humans and nature parallels and supports my contention that shamanism provides a key means of making possible such participatory experiences and awareness for people today. My experiences in my WHQ, with SOW, SRMT, and with FSS, all have provided practices and experiences that have expanded my consciousness and helped me realize that my experiences with and reflections about nature were not so much me speaking about nature, but rather about nature speaking through me.⁴²

Of course, we cannot go back to such a primordial time, but I would argue we can remember such a time and way of being, we can adopt, as it were, such a perspective and move toward re-balancing these disparate parts of our humanness,

⁴² Just as Owen Barfield describes language at its beginning as “nature speaking through man, rather than man speaking about nature” (Barfield 1976, quoted by Lachman, p. 48).

parts essential to our being human. And in our re-membering, we now have the opportunity to not only re-embrace this lost participation, to “re-story (restore) our co-authorship in the great hoops of life” (Alexander Laszlo, personal correspondence), but to “couple [it] with the awareness of self that was gained by its loss.” Gary Lachman tells us this new awareness was central to Owen Barfield’s thinking, for now “He ‘participated’ but he also *knew* that he did” (Lachman, *ibid.*, p. 49).

... the flash of ‘meaning’ that lyric poetry produces, is not so much a plunge back into our earlier unconscious participation, but a conscious grasp of it – a conscious *experience* of it – brought about by ‘mental activity’, that of the poet and the reader; that is, through their imagination. (Lachman, pp. 49-50)

Gary Lachman tells us, again via Owen Barfield, that “We can regain a sense of participation today, but it costs a certain effort. Barfield tells us, cannot be conveyed directly from one person to another; ‘words’, he says, ‘are not bottles.’ But we can intuit meaning for ourselves, if we make a certain kind of effort, what Barfield calls a ‘special exertion’ of the imagination” (Lachman, p. 51).

The ability to look into the world, to see into the ‘inside’ of the world, as the ancient Egyptians, for instance, were able with their symbolic worldview,⁴³ to see it from the inside, “is a central theme in the knowledge of imagination. It recurs repeatedly throughout its history, appearing in many forms” (Lachman, pp. 52-53).

⁴³ See Egyptologist and alchemist, Rene Schwaller de Lubicz’s works, especially *Nature Word* (1985), and *Symbol and the Symbolic* (1949, 1978 English translation).

This ability to see into the inside of the world is what shamans have done for tens of thousands of years. It is their ability “to look into the world” that has enabled shamans to heal and divine. Shamans and shamanic practitioners do ‘participate’ in and with nature. In their practice they unify (overcome) the dualistic split between subject and object, between perceiver and perceived as they merge with their helping spirits and with the rocks, trees, waters, and other elements of Earth. And yet, in light of my own experience and that of my fellow practitioners, there is, too, the *awareness* of this participation, of being myself while merged, thus exhibiting, it would seem, a state similar to what Barfield called “final participation” (Lachman, p. 49). Significantly, for Gary Lachman and Owen Barfield, and myself, this is not a step back into some earlier unconscious participation but, rather, an ‘expansion’ of meaning and of consciousness (pp. 49-50).



1. Imagination

Imagination being central in embracing and adopting any eco-spirituality, indeed any spirituality, any new way of thinking and experiencing, it is imperative we dive a bit deeper into this unique human attribute (Haugen, Baring, Lachman, Corbin). For this inquiry I follow Gary Lachman’s reflections on the history of imagination’s demise.

For the German poet Johann Wolfgang Goethe and the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge the imagination was not “the setting free of uncontrolled fancy – as the Enlightenment regarded it”, but rather “a cognitive power that obeyed its own rules and disciplines,” as Gary Lachman succinctly puts it. What sets apart these rules and disciplines of “the imaginative method,” which were just as rigorous and demanding, from the analytical reasoning associated with science was the essential “way in which phenomena ... were observed” (Lachman, *Ibid.*, p. 62).

This special way of observing Goethe called “active seeing,” and it required effort, a special effort of imagination quite similar to that of Owen Barfield’s conscious ‘participation’ experiences. This similarity leads Gary Lachman to conclude that “in essence Goethe and Barfield are speaking of the same thing: *using imagination as a means of knowledge*” (Lachman, p. 63, emphasis added).

Gary Lachman then distinguishes Goethe’s “primal plant” and phenomena from both Plato’s “Forms” and Carl Gustav Jung’s archetypes in that Goethe’s primal phenomena can be experienced and, as such, “they exist in what philosopher and religious scholar Henry Corbin called ‘the Imaginal’...” (Lachman, p. 64; see above, page 53).

Henry Corbin’s “*Mundus Imaginalis* or The Imaginary and the Imaginal” (1964/1972), is his major treatment of this subject. I would summarize Henry Corbin’s article as an effort to support or prove the veracity of spiritual experience, of visions and interior meditative experiences. To do so, Henry Corbin illuminates as

his central piece, the “organ which perceives it, i.e., imaginative consciousness, cognitive Imagination...” (Corbin, p. 2). It is with the *Mundus Imaginalis* or the Imaginal, that such experiences of the more than external, sensate world are perceived. Henry Corbin argues that such experiences are not only real but more real than our perceptions of the world with our five senses. It is the Imaginal or the Active Imagination which enables access to, realization of, and ability to articulate and reflect upon “the penetration into the *mundus imaginalis*...” It is the organ “that makes possible a transmutation of inner spiritual states into outer states, into vision-events symbolizing with these inner states” (p. 9).

It is in this sense that I, too, use the words imagination and imaginal.⁴⁴ The imaginal world or domain is that which enables access to, realization of, and the ability to articulate and reflect upon the world of dreams, visions, and images, of inner spiritual states, of shamanic non-ordinary reality; the world of Spirit. It refers, as author and scholar Becca Tarnas puts it, “to activities of the imagination that express a certain quality of truth and reality” (Tarnas, 2019, p. xiii). What we experience in the imaginal realm – which we access through the faculty of the imagination -- is real, it is not imaginary, not made up, not what the modern world calls fantasy. In this sense, the imaginal realm “is a world that is not simply made

⁴⁴ Apparently, the word imaginal is also used in the field of evolutionary biology, but that appears to be a very specific type of phenomena and it is not how I, or the other scholars I mention, use the word.

up or invented, but rather discovered through imagining perception or active imagination” (Tarnas, *ibid.*).

Further explanation of this beguiling and often misunderstood terminology – the *imaginal realm* – is provided by scholar Cynthia Bourgeault. In a more mystical and metaphysical vein, she writes in her book *Eye of the Heart* (2020):

The term itself [“imaginal”] has its immediate provenance in Islamic mysticism, where it denotes a subtle and fluid ‘intermediate’ realm suspended midway between form and formlessness. ... It is called ‘imaginal’ because, while it is invisible to the physical eye, it is still clearly perceptible through the eye of the heart, which is in fact what the word *imagination* specifically implies in its original Islamic context: *direct perception through the eye of the heart, not through mental reflection or fantasy* (p. 15).

The imaginal is that quality of aliveness moving through this realm, interpenetrating, cohering, filling things with the fragrance of implicit meaning whose lines do not converge in this world alone but at a point beyond (p. 18).

Cynthia Bourgeault states clearly so there can be no misunderstanding, “I cannot emphasize strongly enough that the word *imaginal* does not mean “imaginary.” For emphasis she states, while “[t]o our modern Western ears, the word *imaginal* may indeed seem to suggest some private or subjective inner landscape, “make believe” or fanciful by nature... the imaginal is always understood within traditional metaphysics to be *objectively real*...” (p. 19). Indeed, “Imaginal reality is a valid construction which, by changing consciousness in its inner ground, changes the nature of reality in the outer world” (p. 20).

After connecting Goethe’s primal phenomena with the Imaginal, Gary Lachman moves into the interconnected and inseparable realm of observer and

observed, and Goethe's anticipation of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, the recognition that the observer through his or her observation alters the observed. As Lachman reflects, "Goethe had grasped this central truth, that 'the phenomenon is not detached from the observer, but intertwined and involved with him,' well before Werner Heisenberg" (p. 65). The direction science took lead to dissecting smaller and smaller bits and pieces of what lay behind or beneath phenomena, but this lead in the opposite direction from what Goethe believed was the true subject of science (p. 66), the participation of the human and Nature not their separation.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe's understanding of Nature is akin to the shamanic understanding in that "the truth of the world is given immediately" (p. 66). That is to say, Nature's secrets are there to be seen or found, if we know how to look for them. One commentator observed, "what is within and what is without are for Goethe merely poles of one and the same thing" (Erich Heller, quoted by Lachman, p. 66). Again, akin to shamanism, everything is alive, and we are all connected; our inner world and outer world are not separate. Not only that, but "our attitude toward what we are observing will determine what we see" (Ibid., p. 66).

One of the introductory SOW handouts, "Suggestions for Saying YES to the SOW Invitations," included a section on Imagination. In line with my personal perspective, it states that imagination is "perhaps our most potent and most human faculty." Also, there is the understanding that Earth herself (Mother Earth, Gaia) is a conscious entity/being/creation and therefore "dreams" and has, I say, an active

imagination. The Suggestions for Saying YES invited us to “Fall into the imagination/dream of the Earth.”

Wilderness guide and author Geenen Marie Haugen, PhD, speaks of human imagination in relationship to Earth and Cosmos. She asks the question, “Had my imagination been seeded by a planetary entity? The Earth itself?” and poses the possibility that Earth is expressing her longing through receptive human imagination. That, indeed, Earth is speaking to us ... all the time. Where indeed are our dreams and visions and creative works of art, music, poetry coming from? From the imaginal world. In the modern world we have split the world into two, mind and spirit, previously they were held together, seen as integral. Paraphrasing Goethe, Geenen Marie Haugen argues that “Imagination is a sense organ” (talk at SOW Ghost Ranch retreat, October 2019).

For me, involvement with Seminary of the Wild and with Earth Wisdom Community are two vehicles for exploring ways of reconnecting, reestablishing, and remembering such a spirituality (way of life). They each use imagination as integral elements. SOW with its direct descendancy from Animus Valley Institute’s use of “Deep Imagination” and deep imaginal journeying. Earth Wisdom Community with its vision questing and blending of indigenous ways and new sciences.



2. Language

We engage one circle of the significance of Language here. It is also explored below, in relation to story (p. 117f.) and in the SOW sections “Wild Earth” (p. 158f.) and Wild Christ (p. 166f.). Language is a key ingredient and dynamic. It plays a role in many dimensions explored in this dissertation, which is to say it is a generative factor in virtually all the spiraling circles.

“The world speaks itself,” writes philosopher and biologist Andreas Weber in his book *Matter and Desire: An Erotic Ecology* (2017) in which he explores transformation with a special emphasis and focus on language, specifically poetry and “the poetic mode of perception.” Not only do words have power, the use of and capacity for language partakes of the same process of life. That is, of the ever transforming, ever creative tension holding life and death together, inherent in the very phenomenal, biological erotic ecology of all life, of reality on Earth in the universe. In the act of perceiving and reflecting and putting experiences into words “the world speaks itself”; the words are “part of the body of the world” (Weber, pp. 88-89).

As the world “we have both embodied and genuinely creative experiences.” Furthermore, “we express these experiences with imagination, creativity, and freedom.” These attributes reflect our human reality, and language is an instrument for expressing our experience(s). Indeed, language exhibits all three qualities (creativity, freedom, and imagination) and is thus a prime vehicle for human

participation in transforming the world. Language expresses our relationship with the world, and any and every relationship is transformative in that both myself and the world are changed by an encounter (Weber, pp. 89, 79-80).

As with Andreas Weber, Robin Wall Kimmerer⁴⁵ locates language as a key ingredient in her 2013 book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Reflecting on how we have arrived at our present predicament, with our objectification of nature, it is important to remember that language affects and influences not only how we think but how we relate to, and hence, act in the world. For example, how we make policy; moral exclusion becomes possible because, as we say, “it is just stuff,” it is so easy to just take it. Part of the solution Robin Wall Kimmerer says is learning the grammar of animacy, which is indigenous, a verb-based language, as opposed to English, which is noun-based. One example illustrating the potential of such a shift, from Robin Wall Kimmerer’s native tongue: *Ki* is singular for Earth being, *Kin* is plural.

Another thought leader whose thinking regarding language reflects mine is Dr. Joe Dispenza.⁴⁶ Dr. Dispenza’s research has shown that language is essential to teach transformation, indeed “we use the language of our own transformative experience to teach it to others who also want to change” (Dispenza, 2023, online

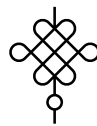
⁴⁵Robin Wall Kimmerer (b.1953), mother, scientist, American Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental and Forest Biology, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation.

⁴⁶ Dr. Joe Dispenza is an international lecturer, researcher, educator, and author of *Becoming Supernatural* (2017), *You are the Placebo: Making Your Mind Matter* (2014), and *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself* (2013).

transcript). Intriguing that he, pursuing psychological and scientific research, has also found, like Robin Wall Kimmerer, that the verb tense of language is significant.

Language is but one avenue bringing together in contemporary life the fields of science, ancient and indigenous wisdom, consciousness studies, and methods of human transformation. We engage a number of these intersecting avenues or circles in the next chapter.

In this chapter I have briefly explained the nature of eco-spirituality, including important contributions from original peoples' living ancestral wisdom and inherent connections to Mother Earth (land, water, air, animals, plants, et al) which have most impacted me on this journey. I also explored the significance of both language and imagination in world-making, in constructing the stories and narratives we tell ourselves about who we are and the world in which we live. We move next to an exposition of additional components and aspects of eco-spirituality rooted in scientific and shamanic spheres.



CHAPTER 3. SHAMANIC AND SCIENTIFIC CONNECTIONS TO THE ECO-FIELD

In this chapter I survey some of the main shamanic and scientific elements and dynamics which have presented themselves in the course of my research. Included here is a general overview of the inter-relatedness of intention, reciprocity, invocation, blessing, non-locality, generosity, gratitude, participatory consciousness, relationship, ceremony, initiation and rites of passage. Each could be the subject of an entire chapter or dissertation. I do not attempt to analyze or dissect these elements, I do, however, attempt to articulate what I see as their significant power in providing connections to the world around us. I report them because they have made themselves known throughout my research and are thus of significance. They can be understood as Mother Earth presenting material to me on this journey. I highlight them here to indicate the broad scope and thus potential richness of engaging an eco-spirituality, and to illustrate similarities and cross-fertilizations between shamanism and science. We circle back to many of these in Chapter Five, as they appear in the context of my participation in the SOW and WHQ programs. As we will see, reciprocity and relationship are key dynamics of Mother Earth's constitution, and thus play major roles in how we may connect to the eco-field. Ceremony gets special attention as it can be a carrier or holder of all the other elements and dynamics.



(Photo: Society for Shamanic Practice website)

To begin with, reiterating from footnote #2, **Eco-fields** can be understood as a sort of subsection of what in the scientific community is known as “fields.” Dr. Will Taegel provides the following descriptions in his glossary of terms in *The Mother Tongue* (2012, p. 288): “Scientifically defined, a field is a region of non-material influence, such as the gravitational field...”, and “Eco-field is a space configuration consisting of meaning carriers and living under the epistemological umbrella of a specific-based landscape.” Such meaning carriers can be ideas, what might be considered thought-energies, as well as objects or specific living functions or organisms as is often the case in ecological scientific usage. These carriers, through their interaction (or intra-action, as we will see below) with the surrounding environment, alter the “spatial configuration” or eco-field. For instance, on one level, “a meadow is perceived as a foraging eco-field by an owl when a large insect moves through the meadow and the sound made by the insect's movements signals the owl to the presence of prey” (Pizzolotto, 2009, p. 142). On another level,

incorporated by Will Taegel and EWA, ideas, intentions, and ceremonies interact with the surrounding environment (physically and non-physically) and thus alter the eco-field. The shamanic and scientific elements and dynamics here reviewed compose ways of interacting and connecting, with the possibility therefore of changing our perceptions.



First, we need to speak of **helping spirits and power animals** because both are key players within shamanic experience. While reviewing literature on shamanism and “spirits” an article came across my purview by anthropologist Edith Turner addressing “The Reality of Spirits” (Turner, 1997). Edith Turner tackled head on the academic orthodoxy of dealing with “spirits” in a so-called objective, positivistic manner with an occasional nod toward the metaphorical. This was as recent as 1997. She asserted that spirits are not only real but the only way for anthropologists (and any other researcher) to understand and truthfully speak of them is to engage in the various practices with an openness to experiencing such spirits first hand, without seeking to distance oneself as a mere observer or to explain them away as, for instance, an intellectual imagining. I share Edith Turner’s perspective. My research approach throughout has been organic. I engage shamanism as a participant, as a student willing and wanting to learn. My research is not a distanced, dissecting analysis judging its veracity, but rather, an inquiry into the nature and experience of shamanism. I accept shamanic reality as it presents

itself, as it has come to me in the traditions to which I have been drawn and in my personal experiences.⁴⁷ I seek the value of shamanism (and eco-spiritualities); how can it help and serve a hurting humanity, a world in crisis?

That said, it is incumbent upon us to say a few words about the nature of compassionate helping spirits and power animals because they are so important. With the help of power animals and helping spirits, shamans and shamanic practitioners experience a direct connection with the powers of Nature and with Mother Earth herself, thus impacting the eco-field in ways both visible and invisible.

A personal illustration of this direct connection impacting the eco-field is a conversation I had with my spirit helper in which he shared the following:

Shamanism is like the heart or essence of indigenous or eco-spirituality/way of being/life. Like all religious traditions it was seers or mystics who had visions (insights, experiences,) which they shared, and which became scriptures or other types of sacred remembrances, that is, the sacred outlooks or worldviews of a people, a culture. So, shamans may be healers but also much more, such as visionaries, such as go-betweens or messengers between the sacred or divine and humanity. They were and are the holy man or holy woman, the ones who see beyond ordinary reality into non-ordinary reality. The altered states of consciousness to which shamans go is or may be that realm in which they receive knowledge/insight/wisdom, but they bring back for the community that which they “find”, whether that be healing of trauma or directions from Spirit on ways of being and living (which, over the long run become myth, scripture, etc.). Through shamanism (the shaman) the non-ordinary is brought into the ordinary, thus transforming the ordinary (persons, groups, cultures). Thus, as it were, dreaming a new world into being. (Personal shamanic journey, September 24, 2023)

⁴⁷ I primarily share my personal experiences in chapter five, when addressing my participation in SOW and WHQ. Personal encounters with helping spirits and power animals have included conversations, guidance in healing and divination, travel through space and time; things beyond my psychological and experiential world.

For a shaman to perform his or her work they depend “on special, personal power, which is usually supplied by [their] guardian and helping spirits.” Often, according to Michael Harner,⁴⁸ the guardian spirit is a **power animal**, which he describes as “a spiritual being that not only protects and serves the shaman, but becomes another identity or alter ego for him” (Harner, 1980, p. 43). While a power animal is individualized as it were for each shamanic practitioner – the power animals show up as a particular bear, eagle, or elk -- each represents the entire species. So, not only *a* bear, *an* eagle, *an* elk, but Bear, Eagle, Elk. Therefore, a person with, say, a raven as their power animal can draw upon the spiritual power of not just a raven, but of Raven, the entire species.

In unity with their power animal shamans experience a connectedness with the animal world, with the forces of Nature and Mother Earth, that is basic to shamanism, indeed that enables them “to participate in the power of that world” (Harner, pg. 58). In the altered state of consciousness in which shamans work and journey (the shamanic state of consciousness), shamans and shamanic practitioners “resume the lost ability to communicate with the (other) animals” as in ancient myths and legends. Michael Harner states categorically, “While the mythical paradise of animal-human unity is lost in ordinary reality, it still remains accessible in nonordinary reality to the shaman and vision-seeker. ... For the

⁴⁸ Micheal Harner is considered by many one of the, if not *the*, primary pioneer of the modern shamanic renaissance. An anthropologist, he founded the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, and was the prime developer of their concept of Core Shamanism.

shaman in the altered state of consciousness, the mythical past is immediately accessible”⁴⁹ (ibid., pp. 57-58).

Power animals are able to transcend the nature of an ordinary animal, they are bearers of power. They can speak to humans, sometimes manifest in human form, and when possessed by a shaman (“merged” is the term I learned and practiced with both FSS and SRW, and in my subsequent personal journeying and practices) the power animal imparts the power of transformation, “and especially the power of transformation *from* human to the power animal, as well as back again” (Harner, pg. 59).

At the end of his chapter on power animals Michael Harner reminds his readers of a key dynamic not to be forgotten: “guardian spirits are *always* beneficial. They never harm their possessors.... the power animal is a purely beneficial spirit...” (ibid., p. 68).

One way to think about **helping spirits** is as intermediaries between the source of all life (called by many names: God, Great Spirit, Consciousness, Source, Light, Love) and humans. Sandra Ingerman describes them as “the conduits of the power of the universe.” Her discussion of helping or compassionate spirits is quite clear and pithy. “In shamanism the belief is that we all have helping spirits to whom we can go for the purpose of divining information and for healing.... Taking the form of animals and humans, they are intermediaries who help us with our own life,

⁴⁹ If for no other reason, this points to the importance of including the world of myth in my dissertation. See Chapter Four, Spiraling Link of Story and Mythic Dimensions.

healing, and spiritual practice” (Ingerman, 2000, p. 27). Continuing, she expresses a certain intimacy, “...helping spirits have personalities and essences [she] can relate to.”

Helping spirits are essential to shamanism because it is not the person using his or her energy that does the healing or divination, rather it is a work in partnership with the spirits. “The shaman is the hands and heart that the spirits work through” (Ingerman, p. 27). When doing shamanic healing work, the practitioner merges with their helping spirits and calls upon them for insight and any healing to be done. The success of any healing is dependent upon the expansion of consciousness and the practitioner stepping out of the way of spirit, “eliminating egoistic concerns” as Sandra Ingerman puts it; becoming as some shamanic traditions say, “a hollow reed.”



A. Intention and Reciprocity

A central term and dynamic as we dig into the realm of eco-spirituality is that of **intention**. Bringing intention to any and all activities, dreaming, journeying, ceremonies and rituals, artistic endeavors, etc., adds a powerful energy with a certain reciprocity between oneself and Universal Life Force (Spirit/God/Sacred). This **reciprocity** is fascinating to me. I experienced it profoundly, especially my

encounters with Raven at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico at the introduction to SOW retreat (see Forward).

The field of neuroscience is providing corroboration to our understandings of these dynamics. Jim Hickman of Ubiquity University⁵⁰ addressed how the field of neuroscience has opened to us the dynamic of neuroplasticity, that we can develop the ability to access all kinds of information, energy, and frequencies. In doing so attention and intention are key. As such, the question arises, how then do we use our imagination? Since the brain does not distinguish between an imagined event and a “real” material event, we must learn how to harness Imagination so we can help create the new. There is an underlying Consciousness to all of this. Science and the mystical realm are no longer separated.

One aspect of this is the important concept from quantum physics and neuroscience of **Entanglement, the dynamic of non-locality** which stipulates that there is no distance separation in all this, that space is not necessarily a determining factor. Not only that, there is the awareness that time does not exist, we created it, it is a matter of our perspective. As Dr. Taegel put it in his book, *Walking with Bears* (2017), “Quantum physics’ discovery of nonlocality describes a contextual domain for communication and transfer of information outside time and

⁵⁰ J. Hickman, who passed away suddenly in 2025, facilitated Ubiquity University’s monthly call on the applications of neuroscience. These comments of his were made on UU’s daily webinar program *Humanity Rising*, December 3, 2020, “Magic at Work – Engaging the Invisible Realms.”

space.” Indeed, “Many newer scientific discoveries make room for energy forms from a parallel reality or even another universe to visit us” (p. 3).

Authors Ede Frecska, M.D., PhD., Mihály Hoppál, and Luis E. Luna help us understand the connections between intention, entanglement, and non-locality in their article on non-locality and the shamanic state of consciousness (Freckska, et al, 2016, p. 160). “Perhaps, strangely enough,” they observe, “the role of intentionality may come to the rescue” in explaining the intimate connection between the observer (subject) and the observed (object) in what is known as the “quantum measurement problem”, which they claim, “is the profound enigma of quantum physics!” The quantum enigma tells us, “that physical reality is created by observation, and it has ‘spooky actions’ instantaneously influencing events far from each other – without any physical force involved” (Ibid., quoting Rosenblum and Kuttner, 2011, p. xi).

Furthermore, observations (the decisions, choices, or intents of the observer, such as the intent of a shamanic practitioner in our case), “not only *disturb* what is to be measured, observations actually *produce* the measured result” (ibid p. 129, quoting Pascal Jordan, one of the founders of quantum theory). In other words, we could say intention (of the purpose for a healing or a journey) sets up the necessary conditions for the healing, divination, or journey. Indeed, the intent, decision, or choice affects not only the physical situation but “the *prior* physical situation” (ibid. p. 129). The implication the authors draw from this is that intuition, consciousness, and nonlocality are interwoven in such a manner that the objective

and subjective realms are eventually united in shamanic consciousness and practice.

During a discussion of my WHQ stake ceremony (discussed in chapter five) my DMin advisor, Alexander Laszlo asked: Do you feel this impacted the field (source/implicate order/Akasha) in any way? Did the lack of the physical presence of an incarnate community in the ritual impact any aspect of the WHQ (individually, collectively, spiritually)? (Alexander Laszlo, p.c. Feb. 22, 2024).

A very good question. I am aware from my drum circle gatherings over some four years (online via Zoom) and my many FSS classes (nine, all but one on-line) as well as my year with Shamanic Reiki training (all online), that the energy and connections are *not* impaired when people are not physically present with each other. This healing, spiritual, shamanic, reiki work is not constrained by time and space. I have been on both the sending or giving and the receiving ends of this, and have personally experienced the efficacy of such healing and energy connections with people from a variety of places, such as the U.S. East Coast (I am located on the West Coast), California, Arizona, Texas, Minnesota, England.⁵¹ Our intentions, consciousness, and imaginings create the bond(s) for energetic transmissions.

⁵¹ It is an interesting phenomenon that with the COVID pandemic many organizations were forced to begin teaching online, virtual workshops and courses. Also interesting that the technology to make such teaching and gatherings possible appeared or had only recently developed to a necessary level at this time. These online, distance experiences confirmed what such shamanic organizations believed and practiced: Time and space are not determining factors.

That said, I believe there does exist a dynamic or energy present in the physical proximity of a group of people. Being physically present gives each person the opportunity to see, feel, smell, or intuit for themselves rather than rely on the interpretation provided by a presenter. For example, with my stake ceremony, watching a video I provided of the ceremony. That video brings people into the circle, but it shows only what the camera is pointed at, which in turn reflects my selection of point of view which I had relayed to my wife who in turn operated the camera. In that regard there may have been an impact on the community, in that individuals might have experienced a somewhat less-than-whole or limited perspective on the ceremony. This, however, I do not believe substantially impacts community members engaging with the circle and ceremony. My ceremony and that of others was no less powerful. Again, it has to do with intention and consciousness.

Franciscan priest Richard Rohr speaks to how science is corroborating ancient mystical wisdom.

Science is now able to affirm what were for centuries the highly suspect intuitions of the mystics. We now take it for granted, and even provable, that everything in the universe is deeply connected and in foundational relationship, even and most especially light itself, which interestingly is the first act of creation (Genesis 1:3). The entire known universe is in orbit and in cycle with something else. There's no such thing in the whole universe as autonomy. It doesn't exist. That's the illusion of the modern, individualistic West, which tries to imagine that the autonomous self is the basic building block and the true Seer. In fact, all holy ones seem to say that the independent self sees everything *incorrectly*. Parts can only see parts and thus divide things even further. Whole people see things in their wholeness and thus create wholeness ("holiness") wherever they go and wherever they gaze. Holy people will find God in nature and everywhere else too. Heady

people will only find God in books and words, and finally not even there. (R. Rohr, 2016, online daily meditation)

Given the implications of these scientific dynamics, curiosity would seem to be a key attribute and condition for our inquiry, for reading, as it were, the information coming to us (in life). Dr. Calen Rayne⁵² has commented that everyone has the key to the invisible realm, it is just a matter that you have to believe, and then use it. As Calen Rayne states on his Sacred Landscapes website, “Where intention goes, energy flows.”

But to set your intention, remembering in shamanism once you set your intention, that’s what directs the energy, so you don’t have to track your journey during that. You simply set the intention and create the circumstance of how you’re going to go into this experience in a protected place, and call in your spirit guides, and then it’s spirit that directs that from that point, so anything can unfold in that. (Roberts, 2019, p. 14)



B. Invocation and Blessing

Another shamanic connection was introduced in an SOW “Writing & Wander Practice” on the theme of Sacred Poetics,⁵³ addressing the power of language and

⁵² Calen Rayne, DMin, MFA, Ubiquity University faculty, co-founder of Sacred Landscapes, <https://sacredlandscapes.com/>, and of Earth Shamans, <https://www.earthshamans.com/>. His comments were on *Humanity Rising*, December 3, 2020, “Magic at Work – Engaging the Invisible Realms.”

⁵³ Sacred Poetics is poetry, hymn or psalm that has a religious or spiritual intent and content, that points toward the sacred, the numinous, to a deeper longing at the heart of being human.

praise. “The language of praise evokes the deeper reality that the whole world is ‘anointed’ (*mesiach*, in Hebrew) with divine presence, and that we are a part of a great and cosmic chorus. ... To be ‘anointed’ in this way is to belong to the grand array, the liturgy of the universe” (October 6, 2020, Council).

Invoking Spirit, praising Spirit and its manifold manifestations (for instance, Raven, Eagle, Redwood, Iris, Honey Bee, Hummingbird) immediately connects one with... well, with everything, but specifically and most powerfully with that which one is invoking and/or praising. It is as if our relatives or relations (plants, animals, earth, water, sun, etc.) are just waiting for us human two-legged ones to “see” them, to recognize them, to acknowledge them, to connect with them. And, then when we do, they respond ten-fold! They dance, twirl, gust, shine in acknowledgement and celebration: “Wow, can you believe it, this human is waking up?! Hello, my long-lost friend and companion!”

Seminary of the Wild teaches that the powers of both praise and invocation are enhanced through speaking out loud, through engagement and interacting with the more-than-human, including Earth herself. Here we have an example of moving from words but no language, to language but no words, mentioned at the transition to SOW module on Wild Earth. Although there is power in our thinking, in putting a thought forward in connection to our more-than-human relations, there seems to be additional power when verbalizing such thoughts. By doing so we get out of our heads, as it were, and manifest our thought by speaking into the physical world.

This was my experience, and it was shared in the teachings and preparations for wandering at the Ghost Ranch retreat.

Corroborating this understanding of the power of speech, of speaking out loud, is an intriguing report by independent researcher Michael Tellinger in which he addresses “Speaking into Existence: The Power of Vowels and the Science of Attraction.”⁵⁴ Following the thinking of Serbian-American engineer, futurist, and inventor Nikolas Tesla (1856-1943), Tellinger argues that sound, vibration, and frequencies are the prime creative force of the universe. While there is no direct, established connection between vowels and toroidal fields in mainstream science (according to Google search artificial intelligence), Michael Tellinger argues that vowel sounds can produce distinct toroidal fields which are energy patterns that resemble a donut shape. Toroidal fields are “considered [by some] a fundamental structure underlying the fabric of reality itself.” The implication is, therefore, “that language in its essence, is not merely a tool for communication but a conduit through which we interact with the energetic fabric of the universe.” Indeed, “Each word becomes an energetic ripple that spreads instantaneously carrying the essence of our intentions and influencing the unfolding dance of creation” (Tellinger, *ibid.*).

⁵⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lj8T1QCPY7I> . Another resource complimenting Tellinger’s work is found at <https://cymascope.com> This is a site for the emergent science of cymatics, the science of sound made visible. One resource at this site is the CymaScope which is the first scientific instrument that can provide an analog image of sound and vibration. The once invisible world of sound is revealed in a myriad of geometric patterns.

Delving deeper Michael Tellinger finds that “These toroidal fields created by different sounds and letters become carriers of information and energy and when they interact with the cosmic energy of the universe undergo a transformation culminating in the emergence of scalar waves.”⁵⁵ This is significant because it is through these scalar waves, apparently, that “our intentions and the vibrational essence of our words permeate the interconnected web of creation influencing it instantaneously.” This instantaneous propagation of scalar waves “implies a *non-locality of influence* where the thoughts and words we express possess the potential to shape reality beyond the confines of space and time” (emphasis added); “our intentions and vibrations extend beyond the limitations of our immediate surroundings.” These findings point to the interconnectedness of all existence, they reinforce the understanding that “we are not separate from the universe but deeply intertwined with it” (Tellinger, *ibid.*, YouTube).

Mystics of many traditions have spoken of their experiences with such fields of interconnectedness. Among them the 14th century, Persian mystic and poet Hafiz, who writes of the power of sound breaking forth into light from the utterance of even common words in his poem “Saints Bowing in the Mountains.”

⁵⁵ *Scalar waves* are a theoretical concept that are said to have properties that defy the laws of space and time. They are often linked to the work of Nikola Tesla. Unlike conventional electromagnetic waves, scalar waves are believed to be non-Hertzian, meaning they do not travel through space in the same way as traditional electromagnetic waves. Scalar waves are often described as standing waves, meaning they do not move through space but exist as stationary patterns of energy, in other words they are believed to have zero frequency. (Google search)

“I see saints bowing in the mountains/ Hundreds of miles away/ To the wonder of sounds/ That break into light/ From your most common words”
(Landinsky, 2006, p. 18).



Russian River, Sonoma County, California

A personal experience of such a reciprocal interaction took place on a wander of mine at the Russian River. I was undertaking what SOW called a Ceremony of Anointing, when the cottonwood trees on the opposite bank began to sway and swish about, rustling their leaves, waving and dancing in the sunlight and breeze in response to my verbal acknowledgment and praise of them and the flowing water. In my understanding (experience), they were thanking me for recognizing them, for connecting and honoring them and that place (SOW Journal, November 29, 2020). The anointing ceremony assisted me in awakening to a deeper sense of ecological belonging, in which I understood my communal belonging to the wild nature of the more-than-human world itself. I was struck, once again, by the

subtle force of the implicit order (Spirit) bringing me information, and welcoming that interaction as part of a spiraling circle of sacred reciprocity. In coming to embrace the dynamic of **sacred reciprocity** I appreciate psychologist and phenomenologist Robert Romanyshyn's imaginal approach to research which "suggests that *the researcher and the work are mutually informing*" (Romanyshyn, 2013, Online webpage. Emphasis added).

I base my understanding of sacred reciprocity on the concept of *Ayni*, a Quechua word for an indigenous South American understanding of mutual exchange and support, of *sacred reciprocity*, of harmony between all things (see Introduction, p. 15). However, it bears a striking similarity to the concept of *Sympoiesis*, a theory proposed by American scientist and scholar, Donna Haraway, PhD, which I find conducive to my argument. Meaning 'making-with' or 'becoming-with,' *Sympoiesis* is a concept introduced by Donna Haraway to describe the interconnectedness and collaborative nature of all things. "*Sympoiesis is a simple word; it means "making-with." Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing. In the words of the Inupiat computer "world game," earthlings are never alone. That is the radical implication of sympoiesis. Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company*" (Haraway, 2016, p. 58).

Priest and social psychologist, Diarmuid O'Murchu, who has written a number of books addressing the intersection of quantum physics and spirituality, speaks of this interconnectedness as follows: "In modern physics, the image of

the universe as a machine has been transcended by the alternative perception of an indivisible, dynamic whole whose parts are essentially interrelated and can be understood only as patterns of a cosmic process” (O’Murchu, 2004).

Caroline Casey, American astrologer and social activist, reminds us that the intrinsic nature of the universe is that “we’re all in this story together, [and the fact that] we’re all in this dream together is reciprocal blessing.” Echoing the medieval Christian mystic Julian of Norwich, Caroline Casey closed a teaching session with the power of blessing: “May it go well for you and may it go well for you.”⁵⁶



C. Generosity and Reciprocity

We see the continuing thread of reciprocity as we look at another shamanic connection, that of generosity. Indigenous virtues associated with Mother Earth include Generosity and Reciprocity. As Doug Good Feather expresses in the Lakota way, there is a deep and profound simplicity to the role of generosity. “The *meaning* of life is to discover our passions, and once they are discovered and developed, the *purpose* of life is to give our gift away” (Good Feather, 2021, p. 100). Easy to say, but how do we give our gift away? According to Doug Good Feather, we do so “...by integrating that gift with how we walk in this world and how we support ourselves –

⁵⁶ Caroline Casey, “Liberating Citizen Trickster,” module 1 transcript, pgs. 15-16. “All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well” is a phrase from the writings of Julian of Norwich, a 14th-century English mystic and theologian.

not just financially, but also by how we support our spirits and our walk on the Red Road”⁵⁷ (p. 100).

This idea and the phenomenon of gifting or giving away was brilliantly explored as it relates to art and creativity and the relation of gift-giving cultures to our contemporary commodity-based society, by Lewis Hyde in his 1979 book, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*. Doug Good Feather gets directly to the point in stating the vast difference with regard to gift-giving between the indigenous way, the Red Road, and that of Western culture. “On the Red Road, when we give something away, we never feel that anything is owed back. Ownership of things is not a concept we understand – even ownership of ideas and knowledge” (p. 100).

There is a direct relationship or link between generosity and reciprocity, “an echo” as Doug Good Feather says (p. 101). Indeed, “Whatever we put out into the world will come back to us multiplied – which is why reciprocity is both the primary cause of our personal suffering and the secret to abundance.” Given the right relationship in the right environment, such a reciprocal exchange of spiritual energy can result in “a state of divine equilibrium” (p. 101).

Dr. Geneen Haugen also speaks about reciprocity or “participatory consciousness”⁵⁸ (Haugen, 2014, p.9) between humans and our relations, those

⁵⁷ Good Feather uses the term “the Red Road” as another way to speak of “the indigenous way.”

⁵⁸ “... a heightened, world-reshaping awareness of participation with the visible and invisible; embodied and numinous; past, present and future beings, relationships and energies among whom we dwell.”

more-than-human, such as animals, plants, water, and air. A reciprocity of presence, witness, and praise. This participatory consciousness, Dr. Haugen writes, is a “...porous consciousness, a felt-sense of interpenetration and reciprocity; a psychic and somatic openness to the Others and to the mysterious terrain of imagination and dream.” For an example: the cottonwood tree at Ghost Ranch (and my backyard redwood tree) is reveling in our presence. This is the cosmos reveling in our presence – we are being witnessed. The trees, and stars, the moon, the planets, and animals, are just waiting to be seen by us, to be heard by us, and for us to respond, to praise them.

A possible debate arises at this point: are the plants, water, air, and animals conscious and/or sentient? How would we distinguish? If consciousness includes “the quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself ... of being conscious of an external object, state, or fact” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consciousness>), which of these more-than-humans are conscious? “In 2012, the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness crystallised a scientific consensus that humans are not the only conscious beings and that 'non-human animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses' possess neurological substrates complex enough to support conscious experiences” (Birch, Schnell, and Clayton, 2020).

On another and perhaps more remarkable level, bacterial researchers such as former theoretical and experimental physicist at Tel Aviv University, Eshel Ben Jacob’s (1952-2015) pioneering work on bacterial collective behavior (El Baidouri,

2024), and University of Chicago professor James Shapiro's forty years' experience as a bacterial geneticist, have led them to conclude that "bacteria are indeed sentient beings and they work together to solve the problems facing them" (Buhner, 2014, p. 102-103). As James Shapiro states: "This remarkable series of observations [over his 40 years' experience] requires us to revise basic ideas about biological information processing and recognize that even the smallest cells are sentient beings" (Shapiro, 2007).

There have been many studies regarding plants' interactions with human thoughts and emotions as well as with environmental factors.⁵⁹ There have also been amazing results from similar studies with water. I'm unaware of any such studies regarding air. While at present we do not seem able to determine if some of these more-than-human relations are aware of their own thoughts, or even if they have "thoughts," per se, they do seem very aware of their environment and of their place within it. I offer my experience with the trees and the wind on the bank of the Russian River. The question seems to be did the trees and wind merely *feel* electromagnetic impulses (or something else) between us or were they "aware" and thus respond as they did? For me, it is part of the great Mystery, in which we all participate. For further intriguing connections see my reflections regarding Karen Barad in the next section, "Conversation and Relationship."

⁵⁹ One such fascinating study (insightful and pertinent) is Stephen Harrod Buhner's 2014 book, *Plant Intelligence and the Imaginal Realm: Beyond the Doors of Perception Into the Dreaming of Earth*. Bear and Company.



1. Conversation and Relationship

Another lens into the dynamic of sacred reciprocity is revealed through **conversation and relationship.**

"In the beginning was the Conversation.
 And the Conversation was with God.
 And the Conversation was God.
 ...Through this Conversation, all things were made.
 Nothing that is made was made without Conversation."
 The Gospel According to John 1:1,3

The Greek word, *Logos*, in these first verses of the Gospel of John is nearly always translated into Latin and then English as "Word." But apparently this is not the original translation. Until the 4th Century, *Logos* was nearly always translated as the word meaning Conversation.⁶⁰ "In the beginning was the *Conversation*..." (John 1a). We explored this in SOW and were offered opportunities to enter into deeper relationship with these others...through Conversation; to develop a sacred "I-Thou" reciprocal relationship.

Quantum scientists suggest that in the center of all things is not a noun like a teeny tiny atom THING, but more like an ACTION, a dynamic relationship. They literally use the word "conversation," a noun describing a relationship, to describe it. Conversation is a core, relational action that holds together friendships and families

⁶⁰ As relayed in SOW teachings and module materials.

and nations and forests and atmospheres and rivers; and not only all things, but all phenomena. One example is theoretical physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad, who posits a fundamental *intra-action* between all things (including humans and phenomena) in which it is the *relationships* themselves that are the generative factor in creation's complexity. In other words, things exist *in* their relationship with other things and phenomena, not as independent entities but as interdependent, mutually entangled complex inter-weavings; "...a dynamism of forces (Barad, 2007, p. 141) in which all designated 'things' are constantly exchanging and diffracting, influencing and working inseparably" (Stark, 2016). Karen Barad's theory of intra-action challenges the traditional idea of "interaction" in which separate, pre-existing entities interact with each other. It moves beyond the traditional Cartesian dualism, shifting to a non-dualistic view of the world. "Intra-action also means that cause does not precede effect. Instead, cause and effect are mutually constituted through intra-action, which holds them together and separates them at the same time" (Murriss and Bozalek, 2024). Not only does intra-action move us beyond cause and effect, it also takes us beyond the notion of individual agency and subject-object dichotomy (Kerr et al, 2014).

I find the theory of intra-action conducive with my understanding of the relationality and reciprocity of humans and our more-than-human relations. It appears to be another example of the newer sciences corroborating ancient indigenous wisdom. We are all related. Therefore, as Shawn Wilson argues (2008) regarding indigenous research, relationships don't just shape Indigenous reality,

they are our reality. In fact, he states, “Indigenous research is the ceremony of maintaining accountability to these relationships.” Imbedded in multi-tiered relationships (forces, dynamics) that we are, we cannot escape our accountability and responsibility for contributing to the conversation(s), that is, to the reciprocal nature of our lives.

Another example comes from poet, philosopher, public intellectual, and author of two books, Bayo Akómoláfé, PhD. He asks, “What would change if we took seriously the consideration that the world is alive, that we derive our being from a never-static, ever-changing field of entanglements, and that we are not the center of the universe?” Indeed, seeming to have imbibed and taken Karen Barad to a new level, Bayo Akómoláfé uses her notion of intra-action, recognizing and incorporating the total relatedness of everything. This leads him to ask a further question regarding the many dilemmas facing the contemporary world, “What if the ways we respond to the crisis is part of the crisis?” (Akómoláfé, 2022). Through his work, Bayo Akómoláfé “hopes to inspire a diffractive [a term Karen Barad uses] network of sharing – a slowing down, an ethic of entanglement, an activism of inquiry, a ‘politics of surprise’ ... one that does not treat the crises of our times as exterior to ‘us’ or the ‘solutions’ that conventional activism offers as discrete or separate from the problems that we seek to nullify” (Akómoláfé, 2022).

In his mythopoetic and grounded writings, Bayo Akómoláfé incorporates terminology and ideas from both Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, making them his own and applying their philosophical thoughts in a practical manner – at least as I

see it -- for inspired daily living. For instance, these reflections on “The Edges in the Middle,” in which I italicize terms from Karen Barad and Donna Haraway.

In a sense, we are always in the middle – in the thickness of many *intra-acting agencies*, ... We are a palimpsest of many scripts, ... This is what it means to be entangled: it is to see that we are not complete, removed, or boundaried. We are not independent. ... To come to the edge is thus to come to the curdling middle, where wild meets wild, where we *meet the universe halfway* in acknowledgment of our *intra-dependence* and *co-emergence* with ‘movements’ we cannot control or assuage. ... As such, all the qualities we think of as unique to humans – thought, agency, will, intentionality, creativity, subjectivity – are *performative qualities* of a larger field in *constant flux*. ... A hope that situates us as part of a tapestry of *sympoietic emergence*, whose logic is always in the making. (Akómoláfé, January 6, 2017, emphasis added)

Eco-philosopher, Andreas Weber writes in his book *Matter and Desire* (2014):

“Being in the world is primarily an erotic encounter, an encounter of meaning through contact, an encounter of being oneself through the significance of others.”

Relationship is a key ontological and epistemological ingredient. Indeed, “We are a riot of relationships. We are not separate. We are part of a larger story” (Jenkins, 2024). Or, as Bayo Akomolafe puts it, “...the world is not a collection of things but a festival of relationships” (2016).

In such an entangled world,⁶¹ these riotous festivals of relationships rule out the notion of lone saviors, because the very concept of independent actions

⁶¹ Perhaps a better term is American sociologist Theodor Holm Nelson’s “intertwined”, which he coined in his 1974 book, *Computer Lib/Dream Machines*. The term conjoins “intermingled” and “intertwined” (Strupa and Dechow, 2015, source on Wikipedia), “to indicate a state of deep, complex, and joyful connectedness and interpenetration (Alexander Laszlo, p.c. 6/28/25). As Laszlo points out “It may be more appropriate to the macro-scalar world of human affairs than to the micro-scalar world of the quantum where entanglement is most relevant” (Ibid.). In this particular case I use entanglement because Bayo Akómoláfé uses that term in his remarks, but elsewhere in my dissertation I make use of intertwine when referring to the macro-scalar.

somehow unfamiliar to the “supposedly perfunctory motions of nature” (Akomolafe, 2016) merely maintains our misplaced ideas of separation from the complex whole of nature. In truth, Bayo Akómoláfé argues, “we are a companion species, inseparable from the entangling ecologies that sustain us. When ‘we’ act, it is the whole that is acting – not the ‘human’. An irrepressible vibrancy of agencies, of fauna, of rock, of story, is implied in the seemingly isolated instance of choice. The wave does not crash ashore, the ocean does” (2016). Unfortunately, as we continue making choices from the perspective of separate, autonomous actors we tend to compound dilemmas and crisis in our efforts to “solve” them. As Bayo Akómoláfé states elsewhere,

“And when things don’t pan out, we throw more money, more methodologies, and more men at the problem – hoping it would go away. But it doesn’t, because ‘we’ are the crisis – ‘we’, the entanglement of ‘human’ and ‘non-human’, are the trouble that touches itself perversely. The crisis is not an interruption of our humanity, or something wrong we can throw solutions at. It is the whole re-considering itself” (2015).

Part of the solution is recognizing “that we are not in the world, but [rather] what the world is doing” (2016).



In our contemporary world are many *principalities and powers* – to use the biblical term from the Apostle Paul -- which have materialized as energetic forces tearing apart our social and ecological fabric, breaking our sense of kinship with fellow humans and other-than-humans alike. From an indigenous brother, Bishop Steven Charleston, we hear:

Racism destroys kinship. Sexism destroys kinship. Classism destroys kinship. Homophobia destroys kinship. When human beings exile other human beings from the circle of life, they are breaking the hoop of the human nation, tearing apart what God created. The sin of humanity is not a life time stain inherited from mythic ancestors who disobeyed a rule, but a daily choice made by all of us in the here and now, in living relationships that embody our kinship. (Charleston, 2015, p. 158)

We have the choice to rejoin, as it were, to participate in the on-going conversation of Mother Earth, to recognize the reciprocal nature of reality, and to re-establish our broken relationships. This relational connectedness is taught by many traditions. I appreciate Calen Rayne's reminder of this *cosmic dance* from within the Jewish tradition. "A central theme in the Zohar is that everything in the universe is connected to everything else and that every part of creation is in constant interaction and interplay with every other part" (Rayne, *By Means of Beginning*).

Circling back to the beginning of this section, we recall the scriptural passage from the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Conversation. ...Through this Conversation, all things were made" (John 1:1,3). From Karen Barad and Bayo Akómoláfé we have learned that conversations are intra-active, they occur between and amidst fluid players, human and more-than-human. Embracing the generative capacity of conversational intra-action, we can say with John, that all things were made through conversation. Things and phenomenon come into existence through relationship, in other words, through the reciprocal nature of conversation. As a full translation of John 1:1 has it, "By means of beginning was a conversation" (Rayne).

Linking other circles, we could say that practices of the shamanic world partake in intra-action with both the implicate and the explicate worlds simultaneously, thereby facilitating a scintillating dynamic conversation. Such a conversation might connect a shaman(ic) practitioner with the very seeds, source, or “means of beginning” of that which they are engaging. Shamans and shamanic practitioners deal with spirits and the spiritual nature of ailments and phenomena. In their intra-acting/conversations therefore, we could say they connect with or enter a state of consciousness of wholeness, even, perhaps, of that *before* any rupture, brokenness, or separation.⁶²

A wonderful story about the power of reciprocating love, which we can understand as a conversation, is that of *The Three Sisters: Corn, Beans, and Squash*; “One of the oldest stories on Turtle Island” (Good Feather, 2021, p. 102). This rendition is Doug Good Feather telling it.

The oldest sister is tall and strong, with graceful green leaves and wisps of golden, silky hair that flow out of her wrapped fruit. Her name is Corn. The middle sister is wild and vivacious, with curly vines that climb up and around her sister, Corn, which helps make Corn steadfast in the wind and protected from the elements. Her name is Beans. The little sister is curious and playful, quickly crawling and exploring all over the ground. She has wide leaves and loves to make people smile by showing them her happy yellow flower blossoms. Her name is Squash.

The three sisters love each other in that magical way that only sisters understand. When planted together, their lives are intertwined in ways that reciprocate the love they share for one another – and the abundance of that

⁶² I am indebted to Dr. Calen Rayne for the seed idea of this potential.

sisterhood benefits the world around them. Sister Corn not only provides fruit and grain but offers her sturdy form for Sister Beans to climb up and reach the sun that she needs to grow her ample fruit to feed the people of the land. The roots of Sister Beans offer nitrogen to the soil below, and her tendrils stabilize Sister Corn above the ground. Their little sister, Sister Squash, grows at the feet of Sister Corn and Sister Beans, where she shades the ground with her broad leaves to help hold moisture in the soil and protect against aggressive weeds. The bounty of their harvest provides the indigenous people with necessary energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals.

The Three Sisters teach us the power of reciprocating love in the most grounded way possible. (2021, pp. 102-03)



A key realization that has come to me during the course of my research journey is that *Mother Earth communicates with us*, inviting us into a conversation, an intimacy (Taegel, 2021; Weber, 2014; Ingerman & Roberts, 2015; Abram, 1996), a **participatory consciousness** (G. Haugen, 2024, 2019; SOW; Barry, 1988). Indeed, a profound awareness that has arisen during my research is that Earth⁶³ as an organic system has a vested interest in me as a representative of the human species, and through that vested interest is sending me information that may help the greater system (Earth). My task in this process is to listen and open and engage with *everything* that comes to me, good and not so good; paying particular attention to what in me is not from culture (Will Taegel, p.c.; EWA).

⁶³ And not only Earth, we could just as well say the Cosmos or the Universe.



D. Ceremony



Seaside Altar at gathering of church clergy

Ceremony is a key element joining all of the connections just discussed.

Ceremony is a means of putting these connections together and acting them out, as it were; of manifesting them in a unified whole. “Ceremony brings the sacred into ordinary life. For tens of thousands of years, ceremonies have been universally used to help communities navigate change and welcome in new cycles. Performing ceremonies creates a bridge between the material world we live in and the world of the unseen, the divine, the power of the universe” (Ingerman, 2018, p. 16).

An important tool for any journey, for any life, ceremony is a way, a tool, a technique of marking time and space, and significant events. Ceremony and ritual help us humans connect to that which is important, to our stories, myths, and cultural-historical context. SOW, WHQ, and SRMT incorporated many ceremonies throughout my programs with them.



A word first on the distinction between ceremony and ritual. There is an apparently never-ending debate or disagreement about what determines a ritual and what determines a ceremony. What some people attribute to ritual others attribute to ceremony, and vice versa. Both ceremonies and rituals are significant phenomena and each of the differing parties are correct in their assertions of the distinguishing characteristics of the two. A major distinction seems to be that one is more spontaneous, the other more set. Some people think ritual is more spontaneous, more open to being different each time, and that ceremony is set and more precise in practice. Other people think just the opposite. Both understandings are true and respected. It is not a matter of one being right and the other wrong. It is simply, in my mind (although some from one or the other camp may very well dispute this “simply” descriptor), a matter of seeing similar things from different angles. Or, perhaps, a matter of rhetorical perspective and/or choice. However, a choice must be made for the writing of this dissertation, and my inclination is to favor the understanding that rituals are more specific and defined, and perhaps a repeated practice, whereas ceremonies are more open ended, shall we say. Both, however, intend to create healing, to make whole (an individual, a community), and share the vital role of keeping humans in touch with the sacred.

Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson is helpful in this regard. “You could say that the specific rituals that make up the ceremony are designed to get the

participants into a state of mind that will allow for the extraordinary to take place” (Wilson, 2008, pg. 69). This is almost exactly how one of my FSS instructors described the difference: first you do rituals, to prepare yourself, to get us into the right mindset (for ceremony) (Juan-Carlos Safa, p.c., March 23, 2025). Similarly, the great Sioux medicine man, Fools Crow understood ritual as the getting ready for ceremony, a part of ceremony but not ceremony per se. For him ritual sets the stage for ceremony.⁶⁴ For example, ritual parts within the Wild Heart Quest were tying the 401 prayer ties and preparing the circle and my altar for my stake ceremony, as we shall see below. Another example is the various things done in preparation for shamanic healing: cleansing space with sage or incense, singing soul song, calling helping spirits, setting strong intention.



Ceremonies usually incorporate similar elements from one to another, but each ceremony tends to be unique. While there are many descriptions of the elements that make up ceremony there is a general agreement as to the basic elements. One such description is provided by shamanic practitioner, teacher, and author Brooke Medicine Eagle (p.c., June 1, 2025):

Welcoming/Setting the Tone—cultivating a stance of fearlessness with our intentions and magnifying them through our presence.

- **Movement**—incorporating energy, dynamism, and drama, as physical sensation is language of ancient brain, where wisdom lives.

⁶⁴ As relayed to me by Dr. Lillie Rowden in personal council, 4/13/2022.

- **An Altar-ed Experience**—creating sacred space and moving away from ordinary reality, over the threshold into high-level energy, where magic is possible.
- **Invocation**—inviting a ceremony by calling forth the most loving version of our ancestors and the powers of the Great Spirit to help us via a “Calling Spirit” song or with prayers.
- **Rites/Actions**—stepping into the circle of power through ritual and stories representing our intention, which is the mold out of which form manifests.
- **Offering/Commitment**—committing resources to give of ourselves and step up on behalf the desired outcome.
- **Dedication**—giving gratitude, dedicating the energy gathered during ceremony, and releasing it powerfully.
- **The Power of Words**—understanding the importance of how we frame things and where the focus is, as in ceremony *everything* can be purposeful—words, actions, and the journey itself.

Many people do not perceive the liturgy (worship) of Christian churches as ceremony. Yet, because one of my primary research programs (SOW) is Christian-based it seems appropriate to briefly note the similarities. The language and various expressions may be somewhat different, as are some of the understandings, but Christians from liturgical traditions, at least, will notice the similarity to the Christian liturgy or worship service. There is the **Welcome**, which sets the tone. **Movement** may or may not be present, but there is usually, at the least, standing, sitting, and sometimes kneeling throughout the service. **An Altar-ed Experience** – the Christian liturgy is about creating sacred space, about stepping out of “ordinary reality”, even if not all have that consciousness and hence experience. Always, there is an altar, situated at the heart of the worship space. **Invocations** are near universal, calling forth the powers of God (Creator, Christ/Redeemer, Holy Spirit) through song and prayer. **Rites and Actions** – rituals and stories including the

eucharist/communion, scripture, and sermons. **Offering/Commitment** –

“committing resources to give of ourselves and step up on behalf of the desired outcome.” Just so, and flowing out of the rites and actions. **Dedication** – prayers and acknowledgments of gratitude and thanksgiving.

It is unfortunate that many Christians seem to have forgotten (if they ever knew) the profound metaphysical, symbolic, and spiritual, not to mention psychological and sociological dynamics of their liturgy. It can easily become a rote ritual.

From a shamanic perspective, on the other hand,⁶⁵ the use of altars and various symbols are powerful precisely because of their aliveness, how they are “physical reference points for spiritual forces,” and at least for altars, they are “an energetic vortex.” Reflecting an element from the first part of this chapter, it is our *intention* and presence as we engage our altars that matters. For working with an altar is about creating relationship - with it and with the sacred items, which in the shamanic world are “physical representations of real spiritual beings and energies, including the elements, that live on your Altar” (SRMT, “Altar Creation” handout).

Ceremony and ritual are important in helping us, humans, “actively engage in our lives and intimately participate in the mysterious workings of the universe” (Little, Online article). Ceremony helps us reclaim our direct experience with Spirit or God and with the transformative experiences and moments of our lives. We

⁶⁵ And there is no reason this could not also be the case for Christians and their worship practices.

literally plant our intent into the world outside and within through ceremony.

Ceremony and ritual take us deeper into our lives, into the warp and woof of our living, giving meaning and structure to the ambivalence and sometimes seemingly chaotic nature of walking this earth. With ceremony “We do not run after the MYSTERY,” as SRMT puts it, “but [rather] create the conditions for it.... [as we] open ourselves and allow it [MYSTERY] space to reveal itself from the ‘edges’ of ordinary reality” (SRMT Manual).

There is an interaction that happens with ceremony, between the person(s) involved in creating and enacting the ceremony and Life, that is, the forces of Nature, Mother Earth, Spirit, that is put into motion through ceremony. Spirit and Mother Earth are responsive; we are part of them, not separate, as the entire SOW, WHQ, SRMT, and FSS programs repeatedly emphasized. The very fact and act of engaging in ceremony (movements, voicing, intentions, etc.) sets energy into motion in the universe. And one must be ready for that. A dualistic mindset⁶⁶ deflates the possibilities of ceremony, at minimum such a mentality is not receptive and probably not sensitive to the energies let loose, for the understanding of and belief in such an interaction is beyond the imagination of those thinking they are separate from Spirit and Mother Earth.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ The very notion of a “mind set” is fixed and inflexible, whether held by dualistic thinkers or others.

⁶⁷ Although, such is not entirely impossible. I have spoken with former dualistic believers who have experienced profound transformations due to their direct experiences of such ‘interaction,’ (or more precisely, “intra-action”), experiences they could not deny.

However, as the shamanic outlook tells us, “The Earth is deeply wise, and she loves us. As we ARE the Earth, we can awaken secret inner wisdom channels, mostly long forgotten and suppressed (although readily available) within us that assist our ability to listen to and be guided by her.” Furthermore, “...nature and the elements are not only tools, they are living beings. Each element ... is alive, sentient, and waiting to be communicated with” (SRMT Hand Guide, page 7).

My thesis is that shamanic practices and worldview illustrate and precisely provide that, that is, these two points from SRMT just quoted; a way to realize our oneness with Earth and to develop our innate capacity to communicate with Earth’s various elements and beings; to bring wholeness, health, and harmony to ourselves and those around us.

Poet John O’Donahue says, “What you encounter, recognize or discover depends to a large degree on the quality of your approach... When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us” (O’Donahue, *Beauty*). Indeed, “Reverence bestow dignity and it is only in the light of dignity that the beauty and mystery of a person or a tree or a place will become visible” (O’Donahue, *On Being*). My Wild Heart Quest instilled in me the understanding that Ceremony can be everything we do when we consider everything as sacred. Ceremony, whenever we intentionally connect with the sacredness of the world, experiencing the imminent presence of the holy, the sacred, Spirit.

The following statement is popularly ascribed to Chief Seattle of the Duwamish Tribe, but there is no firm historical evidence that he actually said these words. I include it because of the message's clarity and substance.

For all things share the same breath – the beasts, the trees, and man. The white man does not seem to notice the air he breathes. ... We know this: the earth does not belong to man. Man belongs to the earth. Man has not woven the net of life: he is just a thread in it. Everything he does to this net he does to himself. What befalls the earth will befall the sons of the earth. We know this: All things are bound up in each other like the blood that binds the family. (Quoted in Seminary of the Wild weekly Invitation)



F. Initiation and Rites of Passage

As we continue spiraling into shamanic and scientific elements that connect us with the eco-field, we recall the reciprocal relationship of intention, invocation, praise, and generosity. Furthermore, we have seen how they all impinge upon ceremony. One particular type of ceremony that calls for a more thorough examination is that of **initiation**, for initiation has a direct bearing on expanding consciousness, and in our spiraling movement we find it connected throughout this dissertation. In truth, we can say that the intention of initiation is the transformation of life.

According to mythologist Michael Meade,⁶⁸ what we are witnessing with contemporary societal unraveling is the Deep Self attempting to assert itself, that is to reveal itself, to become more conscious. This coincides with the Old World understanding related to the cosmos. We are going through not only cultural transformation but cosmological transformation, and we are having to reimagine the role of humanity.

One example of where Michael Meade sees a challenge in such reimagining is in the environmental movement. For example, some in that movement are saying something like “well perhaps Nature is through with the human experiment.” He considers that to be like saying, after the insurrection at the United States capital (which occurred on January 6, 2021, only a week prior to his lecture), that perhaps the United States is done with the experiment of democracy. He thinks both are bad ideas. Human beings are frail, and we are tiny compared to extension of the cosmos, but the understanding of the soul, especially the uniqueness of the soul, means that the human is essential to the cosmos. Not, Michael Meade cautions, the manifest destiny confusion where people think humans are supposed to dominate nature, that, he says, is a negative inflation, but rather, the idea that it could all go on without humans is a loss of imagination. Humans are essential links in the chain of being, and it is the uniqueness of soul that makes the person

⁶⁸ In this examination my major reference has been Micheal Meade’s online lecture for the New York City Carl Jung Center’s seminar on Imagination, “A Time of Transformation on Earth.” January 15, 2021. -- Michael Meade, D.H.L. (b. 1944), a renowned storyteller, author, and scholar of mythology, anthropology, and psychology.

important in the project of life. It is the uniqueness of the soul that is the essence of the uniqueness that we each have to give. Furthermore, it seems to Michael Meade, and this is a mystical idea he noted, that the quickest way to the universal is through the unique.

Michael Meade reiterates that the understanding of the uniqueness of each soul is fundamental to understanding that humans are essential to the cosmos, to the unfolding of life and of the universe. Furthermore, the awakening of the unique soul, that is, the becoming conscious of one's own uniqueness, is also the extension from individual to universal (or the Cosmos, the Deep Self, or the Atman, etc.).

The emphasis on the uniqueness of each soul is reminiscent of what the great modern dancer Martha Graham once said, and I paraphrase: "God has given each of us a special, unique gift, and it is incumbent upon each of us to discover and nurture that gift, otherwise creation will be incomplete."⁶⁹

Micheal Meade's exposition on the idea that we, humanity, are undergoing a **collective rite of passage** dovetails with Will Taegel's idea of Mother Earth undergoing a vision quest (which we explore below). Michael Meade notes that formal rites of passage have mostly stopped functioning in society. They do not exist as conscious practices but, since they are archetypal, they (rites) are still around, they are still present albeit underground. For example, people have an event such as

⁶⁹ I used this saying of Graham's in a sermon over thirty years ago. I did not reference where I came across it.

death, but they think they are all alone. However, the collective psyche thinks, “oh, we’re having an initiation,” but there is no follow through, and we lose the dynamic. What with all of us isolated (during the Covid pandemic), the Collective psyche thinks we are in a collective rite of passage.

Rite of passage offers a theory of transformation that can serve both the individual and the collective (Meade, 2021 February 28, Online lecture). In initiation, Michael Meade points out, there is no going back, the return is ahead of us. So, it is in direct contrast to the idea that we could go back to normal, and anyway, normal is not even a place we want to be, he states – we have souls, we have imagination. The soul is longing to be in extraordinary place or position, not normal. The main idea here is that once an initiation starts there is no going back. Being in a collective rite of passage, we as a culture and as a society, cannot go back to “how it was.”

There is an old saying, “Initiation took me deeper into life than I ever would have gone on my own.” Another way to say that is, with another old saying, “Before the journey begins, you own the journey, but once the journey starts, the journey owns you” (both sayings shared by Michael Meade, 2021 lecture). We are in the journey, and many do not even know it. Now the journey owns us. Following C.G. Jung’s ideas (Meade, February 28, 2021, lecture), if we allow the journey to take us, we can go with it, deeper and deeper, to transformation. If we allow it to take us, it can lead to renewal.

What to do when one does not know what is going to happen next? And how to proceed in such a situation with the knowledge that whatever you do will affect what comes next? Such is the liminal⁷⁰ time in which we find ourselves today, all of us, whether one knows it or not. We find ourselves in a time on the “threshold, in between what was and what will be” (Jean Bolen, 2021). “Old life passes away, new life has not yet begun; in that in between time... (the liminal),” this is where we find ourselves today (Connie Zweig, 2021). “What is the boundary between the familiar, known world (Ego) and the unknown, unfamiliar world?” Indeed, “To cross the threshold, this boundary, is everything” (Bolen). We find ourselves (individually and collectively) undergoing an initiation as we cross the liminal threshold from what has been to ... the unknown future.

There are **three stages or steps in initiation**: separation, transition, and return. These are also the three steps in a vision quest. **Separation** is any kind of departure, descent, or loss. This step is especially challenging in these times because rituals (of any kind) are basically missing in today’s world (at least in the United States and what is known as “the West”). As a result, most people do not have any ritualized way to acknowledge loss. This is crucial because in order to move to the creative side (of dealing with personal and collective disruption or loss) we need to be clear what we have lost, *and* to ritualize that reality, to mark and recognize it. Separation is stepping over a threshold (symbolic or real), leaving the

⁷⁰ Liminal: in between time; the unknown between what has been and what is to come; pregnant with possibility.

known. **Transition** occurs in a time and/or place of liminality, betwixt and between, darkness, the unknown. In consideration of the collective, the stage of transition can be a preparation for *communitas*⁷¹, in which case it is to be pulled by something so deep, it pulls people together, “we are in this together”, and opens the possibility of genuine community. We could say, as does Michael Meade, the rugged individual has become the ragged individual. Transition is what occurs in the midst of initiation. **Return**, the third step of initiation, refers not to regression, going back to the way things were, but rather, to real community, respecting⁷² each individual. We return to our life but we are now different.

The dynamic of liminality in this collective rite of passage illuminates both the loss and source of societal structure(s). The chaos we witness in the world today is both destructive but also precedes creation.⁷³ As in the book of Genesis in the Bible, there was chaos and then God created the world. This seeming contradiction requires an awareness of irony. Liminality is a place of pure possibility and potential ... and thus of new relationships. In ritual imagination the center is both beginning and end. The center gets us back to beginning, and beginning is always trying to happen again. The Deep Self wants to renew all the time. So, getting to the center, to the Deep Self, gives us the possibility for renewal. “At the center, life can renew itself

⁷¹ *Communitas* comes from the Latin word *communis*, which means "community" or "fellowship." It is used commonly referring either to an unstructured community in which people are equal, or to the very spirit of community, the spirit of coming together in solidarity, of sharing a common experience.

⁷² Re-spect: to look or see again.

⁷³ It needs to be stated that there is no guarantee such passages will be smooth, direct, or timely.

and new solutions can be found amidst the great dissolutions that turn everything upside down” (Meade, 2008, p. 105).

Liminal conditions create conditions in which people can be both radically younger or older; elders can tap into the new and young can tap into wise experience. Indeed, we can say with Michael Meade that a true Elder is someone who experiences eternal youth inside, they are someone who is in touch with the dream of one’s life. Likewise, rites of passage can facilitate young ones awakening the sage in their hearts. One of our tasks today, according to Michael Meade, is to find ways to keep renewing and revitalizing our unique soul, our unique self.

From where can such ways come, how can we access such visions and possibilities of the new, of renewal? Michael Meade gives us a clue; he says that such vision(s) for the new come from imagination, from the Divine trying to enter the world. The Divine has to come through people, and outsiders, those who are unconventional are the most receptive to imagination, to the Divine entering the world. Mythologist that he is, Michael Meade reminds us that it is the youngest ones in stories of brothers and sisters who deliver imagination and the new. In that regard, our job, no matter our age, is to stay connected to youngest brother or sister – the strange, weird, dreamiest -- and to spontaneity. Initiation then is also about generating full spontaneity in a person’s life.

Our task, as ones who would expand our consciousness as well as the collective consciousness, is to facilitate rites of passage which open the eyes of

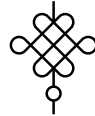
initiates (ourselves and others). Just as at birth an infant opens biological eyes and sees the world, lets the world in as it were, so, too, what initiation does is to open another set of eyes, inner eyes of the soul, thus enabling one to see the world in a new way.

Again, Michael Meade refers us to the old or ancient understanding of these dynamics. Once the inner eyes are opened, those eyes walked a person through the world in tune with the uniqueness of their soul (the person). It was as though the vision was walking the person through the world. Indeed, if we are to have a new world view, it will come through those new eyes of the soul. Then we are not waiting for something to happen, we are following some vision that the soul naturally has, something that is unique and true to ourselves (Meade, January 5, 2021, lecture).



In this chapter we have reviewed some of the main shamanic and scientific elements and dynamics influential in our connecting with the eco-field. Among them, the inter- (or intra-) relatedness of intention, reciprocity, invocation, blessing, non-locality, generosity, gratitude, participatory consciousness, relationship, ceremony, initiation and rites of passage. I have not attempted to analyze or dissect these elements, they are included because they have “shown up” throughout my research. I understand them as Mother Earth presenting material to me (to us) on my journey, thus their significance. They illustrate the broad scope and potential richness of engaging an eco-spirituality. As we have seen, reciprocity and

relationship are key dynamics of Mother Earth's constitution. Such relationships and reciprocity also play out in archetypal fashion between the feminine and the masculine, as the next chapter illustrates.



CHAPTER 4. THREE LINKING SPIRALS

A. Dance of the Sacred Feminine and Masculine – The Sacred Marriage



Vigeland Sculpture Park, Oslo, Norway

One of the aspects of shamanism I appreciate is the unambiguous and continual reference of *both* Mother Earth and Father Sun or Sky. Both the mother and the father, the feminine and the masculine are acknowledged, called upon, and honored. Both are active and participatory actors and dynamics within the shamanic imagination and cosmology. Shamanic practitioners, that I know of, do not appear to struggle with a need to emphasize one over the other, there does not appear to be the need to “re-claim” the feminine, at least within the active practice. *They never lost it.* There may be, however, and often is, a recognition that Western culture is very much in need of reclaiming the feminine, of learning to find a balance between the masculine and the feminine, given the centuries of patriarchal dominance. Rightly so. What I want to point out is that within the practice of shamanism both the feminine and the masculine are called upon and are recognized and honored: Mother Earth and Father Sky, the moon and the sun, feminine and masculine.

One of my primary insights during my WHQ circle-sit was the realization and reminder that all the trees, bushes, and plants of the forest required *both* the verdant Earth and the light energy of the Sun.⁷⁴; they were equal factors in the growth of life, it is not only Mother Earth who gives life. The bare tree branches and bushes, with a few beginning buds and leaves in mid-March, were a dance up out of Earth *and* up into the light of Sun. The play of the two, the nutrients of soil and of light/sun,

⁷⁴ Archetypal and mythological symbology holds the Sun and Sky as masculine and the Earth and the Moon as feminine.

was the dance I saw as branches and trunks above ground and the knowledge and awareness of roots below. There was the “pull” downward into the earth, and the “pull” upwards into the air/sky. Even the play of the branches and trunks in the air, weaving patterns of delight and beauty, embracing life as the marriage of these forces and elements.

Exploring this dynamic theme, one example of not necessarily opposites,⁷⁵ but, rather, more of multipolarities, harmoniously joining together is expressed in the third Gospel text used for the Feast of Epiphany,⁷⁶ the wedding at Cana (John 2: 1-11). Understood from a mystical, inner perspective, this story text is built on “the idea that there are six vessels at this wedding that hold water [and] six in Judaism stands for the sixth day of creation in which [in the creation story] male and female, yin and yang are formed”⁷⁷ (Shaia, 2022, module 7, p. 12). Each one of us, each person, is made up of the energies of both yin and yang, of feminine and masculine energies. Spiritual director and psychologist Alexander John Shaia reminds us that “when opposites join, we see radiance manifest” (Shaia, p. 13).

⁷⁵ These two human forces, energies, or archetypes, the masculine and the feminine, while considered opposites are not opposed to each other, more like two sides of the same coin. They can be considered complimentary, together they make a whole. Moreover, if we recognize there is more than one way of being or exhibiting feminine and/or masculine we might better consider these two archetypal forces as multidimensional; they have multiple aspects, dimensions, or features.

⁷⁶ The Feast of Epiphany commemorates the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child, the baptism of Jesus, and the wedding at Cana. The traditional date for the Feast of Epiphany is January 6th. The season of Epiphany is the period of the Christian liturgical year following the Christmas season or Christmastide -- commonly called the Twelve Days of Christmas, which lasts 12 days, from 25 December to 5 January -- and preceding Ash Wednesday and Lent. The length of the season can vary from four to nine weeks, depending on the date of Easter.

⁷⁷ Yin and Yang are terms from Chinese philosophic and spiritual traditions for the two “opposites” of archetypal and energetic forces within Nature.

The connection of these two multidimensional energies (feminine and masculine) with Epiphany is clear as epiphany means radiance made manifest. By the time of Epiphany, which is 13 days after Christmas, a bit more than two weeks past the winter solstice, the increasing physical radiance of the sun is manifest. This physical sensation becomes the symbolic keynote to celebrating the inner and outer truth that the Christ's fresh radiance in us emerges from our times in the deepest dark. As we pursue our spiritual personal development, as we walk these qualities in ourselves -- recognizing that we are co-creating with the Divine, with Consciousness -- we participate in creating and increasing radiance in our world. The joining together of masculine and feminine and thus becoming wholly human would in truth be a glorious radiance upon the face of the earth.

From the indigenous perspective, Doug Good Feather reminds us of an important dynamic within the great mystery of being. He states, "... what we do know is that we are made of stardust. Basically, we're just water and stardust held together by a song from the universe. Each of us carries star medicine and whatever sacred force animates the stars also has a hand in our fate as Star Seeds. The Great Mystery may be incomprehensible, but the ancestors tell us that it's in perfect harmony" (Good Feather, 2021, p. 86). Doug Good Feather further expounds on this perfect harmony addressing the distinction and relationship of masculine and feminine:

The spiritual concept of masculinity has very little to do with being male. Certain concepts and beings, such as heaven, fire, hunting, and planting, are

energetically rooted in the masculine. And certain concepts and beings, including earth, water, gathering, and harvesting, are energetically rooted in the feminine. Almost no concept or being is fully masculine or feminine all the time – sometimes we're connecting with our feminine energy and sometimes we're in connection with our masculine energy. Each of us has a natural resting point somewhere on the masculine-feminine scale. (p. 87)

An honest re-balancing of the masculine and feminine, however, demands a truthful acknowledgment of the harsh dismissal (ignoring, banishment...) of the feminine over the last few thousand years. Present day efforts to reclaim the feminine are important movements in this regard, indeed they are essential.

Grandmother Earth represent the spiritual energy of the feminine and she holds the sacred spaces for the things that make us human. ...The energy of the feminine is the spiritual womb that holds the life force of the earth and everything upon her. The power of the feminine is incalculable – and that's why the power structures of patriarchy have desperately done everything in their power to suppress the Truth of the Feminine for thousands of years. But the feminine is too powerful to be suppressed forever and we're now moving into the human era of masculine energy giving way to the energy of the feminine. (Good Feather, pp. 98-99)



Despite the tragedies of the solar era,⁷⁸ author and Jungian psychoanalyst Anne Baring sees hope in the contemporary world. The second half of her book, *The*

⁷⁸ According to Anne Baring (*The Dream of the Cosmos*, p. 109), the solar era is equated with the rise of civilization, from around 2000 BC. It is a change of focus in the evolution of human consciousness from a lunar to a solar mythology. It "reflects a complete eclipse of the participatory experience of the lunar era, taking over many of the older lunar myths and stories and setting them in a new solar context.... The primary theme of lunar mythology is a cyclical process of birth, death and regeneration. The primary theme of solar mythology is a great battle between light and darkness, good and evil. Whereas the focus of lunar culture is on an ensouled cosmos and mythic participation in the life of a Sacred Order, the focus of solar culture is on the conquest and mastery of nature, the

Dream of the Cosmos: A Quest for the Soul (2013), addresses the recovery of the connection to the Soul and the possibility of incorporating a new vision of reality. The new vision or narrative of reality she sees includes findings from scientific research which she calls a metaphysical revolution; they lead to an understanding that the universe is conscious. The new vision leads also to a new image of God. In short, the many findings and arenas expanding our understandings of how reality operates and is put together are pushing and pulling us (humanity) toward a new consciousness, a new worldview, a new vision of reality.

The transformation we are experiencing must be a fully participatory one. As I illustrated in the previous chapter, not only does Mother Earth invite us to engage in an intimate conversation with all manner of things and phenomena, but the very nature of being is that of participation in the mutual ebb and flow (intertwinglement) of everything intra-acting with everything else. If we desire to consciously change our form, as it were, (individually or collectively) we must wake up from the culturally contrived agreements and our subsequent personal attachments (Ruiz Jr., 2013) that have brought us to our current situation. Otherwise, we will continue to be carried along in the unconscious flow of “this is just how it is” thinking. To fully participate in the transformation we are experiencing calls not only for remembering our intimate connectedness in this beautiful and wondrously complex world/cosmos/reality in which we live, but, crucially, then

development of the rational mind, and the differentiation of the outstanding individual from the tribal group.” There is also a shift in the image of deity from Great Mother to Great Father.

acting accordingly. This participatory transformation is inclusive of how we perceive and act in the world, involving therefore, our ontology, epistemology, and ethics.

One of the things I most admire about and agree with in Anne Baring's thinking as expounded in her book is that she calls for a *marriage* of the lunar and solar, of the masculine and the feminine. For her, a resurgence of reclaiming the feminine is not only to reclaim our feminine side and cultural aspects, but to transform our human experience into a new consciousness and era; one that balances the two parts, sides, aspects of our individual and cultural souls and psyches. She appropriates alchemical images and terminology to express this marriage: the Great Work of Alchemy, the alchemical marriage, joining the solar masculine and lunar feminine. She expresses it pithily at the conclusion of her chapter on the Shamanic Vision:

To recover this knowledge and transform our view of reality we need to recover the lost lunar vision and give it new expression in our time so that we might enter the phase that Owen Barfield called "Final Participation", when the lunar and solar aspects of our consciousness are reunited and taken to a new level, through our reconnection with everything from which we have become separated. (Baring, p. 103)

Anne Baring articulates here what I understand my task is with my shamanic and eco-spiritual practices with both the Wild Heart Quest and Seminary of the Wild. That is, I have undertaken learning shamanic practices with the purpose of not only recovering the lost lunar unitive vision but, more importantly, of finding new ways to express it in a more balanced, unitive consciousness with the solar ("a new level"), of what we might call the stellar age. Indeed, there is "much work in this area

as the implicate Stellar Marriage become explicate” (Taegel, p.c. 2021, February 5). My sense is that shamanic practices, the shamanic vision to echo Anne Baring, is the most fundamental worldview and has the most to offer the contemporary world in our calling and mandate to recover our lost connections with Nature and Mother Earth. Eco-spiritual pathways can facilitate such a recovery.



One author who offers an alternative masculinity in the service of our changing human consciousness is Sophie Strand. Toward the end of her intriguing book *The Flowering Wand: Rewilding the Sacred Masculine* (2022), she incorporates J.R.R. Tolkien’s Tom Bombadil of *The Lord of the Rings* fame to illustrate another possible masculinity. In the face of our contemporary world’s increasing chaos, especially as manifested in climate change, Sophie Strand recognizes that we, “like Tolkien’s hobbits, ...have a long, hard road ahead. We have friends by our sides. We have good stories to tell. But” she says, “we also need to get in touch with that golden hearth inside ourselves that is not tied to progress and is not tied to one human lifetime. That part of us ... that settles low, into the roots, when strong winds blow.” This “inner sanctum”, as she calls it, “is the table within us that we set with wine and food and fresh flowers.” Interestingly, she notes that “people with wombs have an easier time imagining this inner sanctum.... But the masculine has it too. The masculine is the master of the wood through celebratory, inclusive activity. He is the master of song and swimming and dancing and sharing his feast. The

masculine can find shelter, alongside the hobbits, in the home of Tom Bombadil”
(Strand, 2022, pp. 150-51).



In a personal journey (March 22, 2024, Journey Journal) my primary helping spirit took me to (called on) three of my other helping spirits “that can give me some insight on my dissertation.” They were my primary human guardian spirit helper, a wisdom-keeper feminine helping spirit, and my divination helping spirit. These three helping spirits had some good reminders for me including an example from the Christian tradition. They reminded me that shamanic worldview (imagination) knows that both Mother Earth and Father Sky/Sun are needed, equally. Both the feminine and the masculine are part of shamanic reality, equally. While (some) people need to reconnect with Mother Earth and feminine, it must not be at the expense of Father Sky and masculine. A recalibration, yes, but not a denial of one for the other. Both Sky/Sun/Light and Earth/Dark are part of shamanic reality. And so, they reminded me, the material I have about Mary Magdelene (The Beloved Companion) is germane. Mary and Jesus exemplify the sacred marriage – of feminine and masculine bound together, harmoniously, equally. In their marriage something new is created, a whole human being, not split apart. Shamanic imagination points the way. Shamanic worldview already holds this balance, has never forgotten it.

The significance of this potential recalibration of our perception (our imagination and perspective) – creating a new and true human being through the

harmonious union of feminine and masculine -- calls for further exploration..⁷⁹

Unfortunately, such exploration here would carry us well beyond the limitations of this dissertation. I have therefore included a brief introductory consideration as Appendix 1.

An intriguing phenomenon I have experienced personally within my shamanic experiences and practice, one I believe relates to this idea of a sacred marriage and becoming truly human – to use the term of early Christianity and Mary Magdelene – is that all my *human* helping spirits are women. In fact, my primary human, guardian helping spirit reminded me about this in a personal journey (on September 7, 2022). She also pointed out that all my *animal* helping spirits appear as male. When I commented that I had not previously noticed this, she said, “Well, pay attention, it’s important.” This realization coupled with my guardian’s comment triggered the idea that Jesus/Yeshua⁸⁰ manifested in his being a fully integral feminine-masculine personhood. Indeed, that he brought, called, imagined forth not only the prophetic but also the feminine reality of his Jewish tradition (here is an excellent example of how imagination is well used), even though that tradition, and most of Western culture for that matter, rejected his way (at least the mainline orthodox did). This idea then morphed into idea of the sacred marriage, the uniting of masculine and feminine – alchemy, mythology, Jesus and Mary, the

⁷⁹ Following the lead of my helping spirits, such an exploration carries us into the terrain of one of the more extraordinary spiritual teachings and traditions, that of early Christianity and specifically of Mary Magdelene. See Appendix A.

⁸⁰ Jesus’ name in Aramaic, the language he would have spoken.

idea/theme/Way of Love – in Jesus’ teachings themselves. Also seen in Western tradition of storytelling, myth, and poetics, for example that of Hafiz (Persian tradition, which then hugely influenced Western), troubadours, Sufis, early Christians, St. Francis of Assisi.

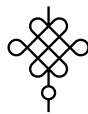
I propose that we are called into something along the line of weaving a new story using both old and new yarn. Such yarn could include Yeshua, Wild Christ, Way of Love, The Beloved Companion, Wild-ing, Trickster Coyote, transformative imagining and storytelling from myth and Nature, Mother Earth, of a new world, marriage of masculine and feminine. The rebirth of the feminine is not to cancel out the masculine (flipping again from one pole to opposite every 5,000 years or so), but creating a new being, a new and fully human, combining and fusing both archetypes into something new, perhaps luminous beings *a la* indigenous American prophecies.⁸¹

One example of such a new story is offered by Sophie Strand in her evocative book *The Flowering Wand*, in which she calls for “Rewilding the Sacred Masculine.” Reflecting on the biblical *Song of Songs* and the idea of ecological courtship through biological symbiotic cells she invites us to move beyond the very idea of opposites. She wonders, “What if we didn’t need to *enter into* a sacred marriage? What if we

⁸¹ Shamanic practitioner and teacher Alberto Villoldo and others of the Andean and Amazonian shamanic traditions speak of humans becoming luminous beings. Another prophecy is that of the Eagle (of the North) and the Condor (of the South): when the two fly once again in the sky, together, it will be as one being — but not with one wing of the eagle and the other of the condor. No such being would be able to fly! It will be something entirely new and whole and integral. (I owe thanks to Alexander Laszlo for the image and symbolism of the two great birds merging.)

already were one?” Indeed, she proposes a new sacred marriage, that of lichen: “That mischievous symbiotic wedding of fungi and algae,” which at first appears simple but upon closer examination reveals “...not a marriage of equal opposites, [but] a mixing bowl of multiplicities.” Sophie Strand concludes, “This is no dualistic marriage of opposites. Lichen seems to be a fertile alternative to the old heterosexual *hieros gamos*, otherwise known as ritualistic sacred marriage” (Strand, p. 118).

As we create and embrace new stories, whether that be uniting feminine and masculine energies within ourselves and culture or reweaving our torn relations with Mother Earth, we continue our spiraling circles. Ever deeper, ever expanding. Embodying and grounding our spirituality, recalibrating our perception, and growing our consciousness. In this journey, the stories we tell ourselves have a tremendous power, as we shall see in the next chapter.



B. Stories we tell ourselves -- including Mythic Dimensions

In this chapter I look at the power of story. What are the dynamics and structure of story that render it so compelling? Why is it so important that we work

and play with story and narrative⁸² in our efforts to connect with Mother Earth and to redirect the dreaming humans engage so as to “change the world”? Due to the broad sweep (across both time and space) and depth of our relationship to Mother Earth, with all the many ramifications and millennia-long energetic intermingling between human psyche and planetary psyche (perhaps what some might call the symbolic unconscious or the collective unconscious), a brief exploration of the mythic dimensions of the stories we tell ourselves about who we are and what we are doing here (on Earth) is also essential.

The many elements and dynamics introduced throughout this dissertation intertwine as constituent aspects of how we understand the world, our world. They come into our *weltanschauung*⁸³ or worldview. How we see the world, how we think of and perceive the world determines how we act and behave. In this regard we each operate from the story or narrative we tell ourselves about who and what we are. Such stories and narratives are essential building blocks for past, present, and future human interactions: with the world, with each other, with ourselves. It is therefore incumbent upon you and I to attend to these stories. If we would reawaken

⁸² The words “story” and “narrative” are often used interchangeably, although narrative has a more academic ring to it. I was advised to use narrative rather than story as a sociology graduate student a number of years ago. However, I choose, here, to use story because I feel it has a more recognized characteristic to it (at least by the majority of people outside academia). Who sits around a campfire to listen to a narrative? We gather to hear a story. We tell stories, we listen to stories, we believe stories, even if the term narrative may seem more appropriate for cultures, societies, and organizations.

⁸³ The word “worldview” is the English translation of the German word “Weltanschauung.” It comes from the field of philosophy and literally means an all-inclusive “vision of the world.” (Google.com/search)

humanity to our interconnectedness with Nature and Mother Earth we must change our personal stories and social narratives.

As storyteller Martin Shaw tells us, “A crucial directive in myth is how to tune our ear to a great story. How do we listen? To trail it but not to trap it. What if we dwelt within the psyche of the story rather than imagined it was all neatly contained within our own heads? What if the stories owned us rather than the other way around? This is a big shift” (Shaw, n.d., *The Storyteller and the Shaman*).

There is a power to stories, a certain dynamic energy inherent to stories. As independent scholar and author Kayleen Asbo tells us, “There are stories, songs, art and spiritual practices passed down through the centuries that can awaken our imaginations...” (Asbo, 2020). Indeed, “Through the art of language, the art of story, alchemy can occur” (Williams & Jensen, 1995).

“Stories allow listeners to draw their own conclusions and to gain life lessons from a more personal perspective. By getting away from abstractions and rules, stories allow us to see others’ life experiences through our own eyes. This information may then be internalized in a way that is difficult for abstract discussions to achieve” (Wilson, 2008, p. 17).

Early on in my research and thinking about writing my dissertation I had the idea of structuring it, as I have, as processing through spiraling circles; circling around in my dissertation from one point to another, coming back and moving on, ever progressing through the material moving deeper/higher as I developed the

thinking (research) of my thesis. So it was with appreciation that I came across the following corroborating statement from Terry Tafoya in Shawn Wilson's book

Research as Ceremony:

“Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen” (p.12).



One of the more remarkable perspectives and methodologies for organizational development, evaluation, transformation, and leadership that I encountered and used in my ministry is that of Appreciative Inquiry. Basically, Appreciative Inquiry is a method of change management emphasizing strengths, rather than focusing on fixing weaknesses. Key to such inquiry is the power of stories and narratives within the life of an organization or community. Insight into the tremendous power of story is provided by authors J.M. Watkins and B.J. Mohr (2011, pp. 147-48), whom I quote at length. They write:

The Power of Story according to Appreciative Inquiry is multifaceted:

- 1) *Universal* -- All cultures use story to share knowledge, custom, tradition, and learning. It is only through the story that a tribe knows its history.
- 2) *Engaging* -- Stories create relationships; they connect teller and listener and create a shared reality.
- 3) *Memorable* -- They are personal, dynamic, memorable, and transmit images and affect.

- 4) *Dynamic* -- Stories are continuously changeable; multidimensional; and capable of multiple interpretations.
- 5) *Stimulate Creativity* -- Story causes the suspension of our inclination to sort things into categories and causes us to search backward to earlier examples or parallels in our own experience. Stories create the possibility of new acts of creation. One story leads to more stories.
- 6) *Moves Us Toward the New* -- While a story causes us to look backward toward a territory we think we have left behind, we also are thrown forward to new possibilities and realities.
- 7) *Is a Living Thing* -- As the story is remembered, recounted, and received by the listener, it becomes a living thing. The “aliveness” of the story energizes listeners to pass it on and remains reborn in the storyteller and gives new insight and life.

Any one of these facets points to the power of stories to empower and motivate, to direct our thinking and acting. Combined, they dramatically illustrate story’s power to mold and move us.



Tom Bombadil in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* may point us toward a lost or at least highly disregarded element of our so-called Western cultural heritage, one which may have much wisdom for us even today, that type of story known as folktales. Michael Meade, mythologist and storyteller, addressed this aspect in one of his periodic podcasts (Meade, 2020).

In appearance Tom Bombadil appears as one of the common folk, a humble, jolly man-of-the-country. Yet, there is a mystery about him. He is named by Tolkien

as the Elder, oldest of the old, the one who has been around since the beginning.⁸⁴ Even so, and perhaps even more so, Tom Bombadil can be seen as representing the earthy, common life in contrast to the power and industry of civilization. As Michael Meade tells us, “The folk of folktales draw upon wisdom and traditions that offer connections to the original roots of earth knowledge.... like intelligent animals waiting and willing to be called upon for help ... reminders that what troubles us has happened before, and we have survived” (Meade, 2020).

Folk tales and folk myths can help us pay attention, they provide vehicles and reminders for listening, for walking with integrity our path through life during these challenging times.⁸⁵ “Folk myths are part of the open secrets of life. Part of the earthly wisdom that avoids the dizzying heights of culture by keeping close to the ground of being.... The folk of folk myth survive by ultimately remembering the age-old pattern -- birth, death, and rebirth – of human nature” (Meade, 2020, #369). So, too, my WHQ and my interactions with Redwood Tree and stake (as I discuss below in Chapter 5, B.) are vehicles reminding me to pay attention to and engage inquiry about death and rebirth, specifically my own, not some abstract construct. In a similar mode, both folk myths and vision questing amidst *implicate order* queries are “aspects of culture and yet not overly cultivated,” as Michael Meade puts it.

⁸⁴ There is a thesis that Tom Bombadil is actually Eru Ilúvatar, in incarnate earthly form (Alexander Laszlo, p.c.). Also known as the **One**, Eru Ilúvatar is introduced by Tolkien in *The Silmarillion* as the supreme being of the universe, creator of all existence.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmology_of_Tolkien%27s_Legendarium

⁸⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien’s essay “On Faerie” or, as published in 1947, “On Fairy-Stories” originally given as a lecture at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, on 8 March 1939, is an excellent resource. “His recounting of this realm — liminal, magical, perilous, wondrous — is instructive and in-formative, providing both structure and form through dimensional difference.” (Alexander Laszlo, p.c.)

Furthermore, they both “have a strong sense of place and [are] connected to Nature. [They] deal with shape shifting and radical transformation.” Indeed, the “teachings often come from animals who live in another realm” (Meade, #369).

I am not equating folktales and folk myths with vision questing and my Wild Heart Quest. I am saying that they both are vehicles for conveying wisdom teachings, for connecting with Nature, for radical transformation, and in that they share similarities.



Micheal Meade offers us such a folk myth in his lecture “A Time of Transformation on Earth” (January 15, 2021) in which he chose to work with an amalgam (his word) of Native American stories. The story was of an old woman weaving and unraveling and weaving again and again. It was about weaving creation, weaving the world into existence. A rug, a serape, the exact nature of the weaving is not significant. Of significance is that the unraveling creates the thread by which to recreate the world, our world. The old woman weaving and unraveling and weaving the world can be interpreted to illustrate why the world does not end. This is what we are doing or called to be doing, according to Michael Meade; to begin adding our own thread of imagination and genius to the world today as part of re-weaving the world fabric.

Transitioning from apocalypse⁸⁶ to the realm of Initiation and Rites of Passage, Michael Meade pointed out in his lecture for the Jung Center that the three primary or core dynamics of story and of apocalypse are creation, sustaining, and renewal. He remarked, “If enough individuals awaken to their natural self, then the movement into the collective can generate enough momentum to jump start renewal.” But change and transformation is challenging, they do not come easily, especially if by change we mean (and I do) one’s evolution into something new and as yet unknown. Indeed, people try to “change” all the time. Unsuccessfully, however, Michael Meade said, “because they don’t let go, they don’t get rid of the old, the corpse.” This is where rites of passage play out, because in order to transform and evolve we must enter the time and space of the unknown, the middle ground or liminal place of ‘I don’t know’. If evolution and transformation is our objective, we can’t just willy nilly devise a strategic plan, for that is ego according to Michael Meade. We must rather embrace the unknown, mystery, liminal. Almost like the scriptural account of Jacob wrestling with the angel (Genesis 32:22-31).

How to move archetypal energies from dreams to conscious solutions – that is the big question... and it moves us into *the realm of symbolic life*. Furthermore,

⁸⁶ Michael Meade illuminates a greater meaning to “apocalypse” than the popular “final, fiery end of everything.” “Apocalyptic events and times are revelatory, but in more ways than one.” Importantly, “another root meaning of [the Greek] *apocalypsis* is ‘to lift the veil;’ to reveal what was concealed.... When not taken literally or religiously, the archetypal dynamic of apocalypse refers to what happens when the web of life loosens, when the veils lift and the underlying forces of life become more palpable and evident; but also more transparent. Old structures may collapse and once vital systems may fall apart; yet other patterns and barely imagined designs are on the verge of being revealed.” Indeed, “The end lies concealed in the beginning; but the opposite is also true. The beginning is hidden in all that comes to an end.” (M. Meade, (2012). *Why the World Doesn’t End*, pp. 2 and 3.

harkening back to our inquiry into imagination, “[this move] dances across the liminal divide between the imaginary domain and the imaginal domain” (Alexander Laszlo, p.c.). How do we interpret our life symbolically? How do we learn the language of mythopoetics? How do we learn to see everything in our life as coming from Spirit (or Mother Earth)? It would seem that such an understanding and any subsequent action is part of our participatory reciprocity with the quantum field/Reality.

As Micheal Meade remarked, knowledge and imagination are pouring into the world all the time. The question is, can we handle it, can we find ways to deal with it? For instance, something comes into a dream, and we want to do something with it. *People must bring action to dreams, myths, and stories if we are to manifest renewal, if we are to dream a new world into being.* Otherwise, even considering the power of mind and of intention and will, such dreams and myths exist only in our heads. As Michael Meade stated succinctly, story doesn’t supply emotion to people, people supply emotion to story.

Letting go and separating from the old is the first step of initiation. This separation can be any kind of departure, descent, or loss. The ancients acted out what they experienced inside themselves, for example, going blind, naked, buried in earth, losing all one’s belongings, etc. (Meade, February 15, 2021). Unfortunately, most people today do not have any specific ways of doing that. What is missing in today’s world, Michael Meade tells us, is ritual, at least in North America. People do not have any rituals to acknowledge loss. In order to move to the creative aspect of

apocalypse we need clarity as to what we have lost, and to ritualize it. We need to experience our loss(es), individually and collectively, and we need to find ways to collectively ritualize those losses, acknowledging them. The myth of the old woman weaving the renewal of the world gives us, mythologically speaking at least, an opportunity to participate in a ritual of creating rituals of renewal.



Slide from *Historic Descent or Global Civilization?* Expert Group Meeting UN Headquarters November 19, 2007, Climate, Development, and Planetary Transition. Published by Thomas Gregory.

<https://slideplayer.com/slide/4517134/>



In this renewal process, this movement toward transformation, **language** is decisive.⁸⁷ Author, speaker, and researcher Dr. Joe Dispenza has developed a rather remarkable body of work in the field of human transformation.⁸⁸ Investigating and

⁸⁷ Language factors in all of our circles. It was specifically touched on above, pages 54-55, 63-65, and is explored further below, in the SOW section “Wild Earth”.

⁸⁸ Dr. Joe Dispenza’s books include *Becoming Supernatural* (2017), *You Are the Placebo* (2014), *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself* (2013), and *Evolve Your Brain* (2007).

researching the mind-body connection and the concept of mind over matter, Dr. Dispenza and his team of researchers have taken extensive steps to scientifically measure, record, and analyze the interrelatedness of transformation and people's biology (Dispenza, 2017, p. xviii). In his efforts to understand healing and transformation, Dr. Joe Dispenza has also investigated many of the world's mystical traditions. His findings help establish bridges between science and mysticism. Recently (December 2023 – January 2024) he posted on the internet a four-part blog on *The Language of Transformation*. In his fourth presentation Dr. Dispenza gives storytelling a prominent place of importance.

As I [Joe Dispenza] explained at the end of my most recent post, using all our tools and findings thus far – somatic and emotional feeling, the “temporal aspect” of language, associative learning, and metaphor – the language of transformation helps us begin to build a bridge from the known to the unknown. And we do that most effectively with perhaps our *most powerful tool of all* – storytelling.⁸⁹ (Dispenza, 2024, emphasis added)

In an essay (*The Politics of Ethnopoetics*) written from an April 1975 talk he gave at the Ethnopoetics Conference at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, poet Gary Snyder presented a nuanced appreciation of scientific complexity and its relation to language. Snyder weaves his essay around various themes working his way to the poetics of the earth which manifest as “concentrations of communication-energy result in language, certain kinds of compressions of language result in mythologies; [and] compression of mythologies brings us to

⁸⁹ This four-part series provides a wealth of excellent information, ideas, and practices related to the power of language and story in human transformation.

songs” (Snyder, 1977, p. 40). In his intriguing circuitous fashion, Gary Snyder then connects these communication-energies to both the universe with its energy flows “in massive objects coming together realizing their own gravity”, giving specific amounts of solar radiation per square meter, which he relates to “the tiniest fraction of that...captured by the chlorophyll of plant leaves” (p. 40). These dynamics of massive energies resonating and manifesting in complex molecular combinations here on earth such as rhythms of insects, bird songs, descants of whales, and vibrations of locust, are “on some subliminal level what we’re tuned into – for our language, for our songs. It keeps bringing us back around to earth” (p. 41).

As Gary Snyder looked then, in 1975, at the poetry emerging in North America (Turtle Island), he felt it was just beginning to reflect “this old sense of the Earth.” “We’re just starting, in the last ten years here, to begin to make songs that will speak for plants, mountains, animals and children.” He continued reflecting in what has proved startling premonitory these 50 years later.

Such poetics will be created by us as we reinhabit this land with people who know they belong to it; for whom ‘primitive’ is not a word that means past, but *primary*, and *future*. They will be created as we learn to see, region by region, how we live specifically (plant life!) in each place. The poems will leap out past the automobiles and TV sets of today into the vastness of the Milky Way (visible only when the electricity is turned down), to richen and humanize the scientific cosmologies. These poesies to come will help us learn to be people of knowledge in this universe with the other people – non-humans included – brother and sisters. (pp. 42-43)

A few years later, as if responding to Gary Snyder’s prediction through a manifestation of such poetics, Jerome Rothenberg exclaimed in his pre-face (*sic.*) to

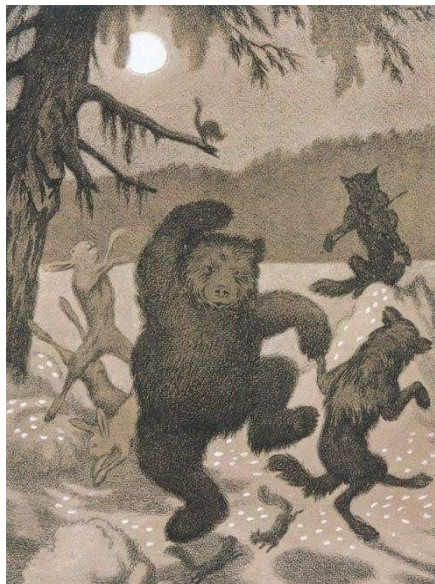
the second edition of his magisterium *Technicians of the Sacred* (1984), that imagination and poetry, inter-related through instinct and intuition are “only part of the human picture, but a part whose reemergence was long due.” Expanding on poet and playwright Michael McClure’s description of the “massive return” to these dynamics that McClure and others were witnessing on the West Coast in the mid-sixties, Jerome Rothenberg wrote, “The equation I saw... was of ‘imagination’ as a process of both ‘energy’ & ‘intelligence’; or, put another way, that the return of what Blake had called ‘our antediluvian energies’ would lead to a transformation of intelligence rather than its virtual obliteration” (Rothenberg, 1984, p. xvii). Jerome Rothenberg’s self-imposed task in compiling his monumental collection of world poetry was to “look back *consciously* to the early & late shamans of those other worlds: not as a title to be seized but as a model for the shaping of meanings & intensities through language” (Ibid., p. xviii).



Cultural thought-leader and astrologer extraordinaire Caroline Casey employs the mythological and legendary Native American character Trickster as a possibility for liberating our imaginations and breaking the bonds of our limiting stories. Caroline Casey has a delightful sense of humor, and she also brings a certain levity to our challenging cultural trajectory.

“...Trickster, for our purposes,” states Caroline Casey (2017, Module 1, p. 6), “is nature's evolutionary ingenuity. It's coyote, it's raven, it's seeds that sprout after

cataclysm. It's all of those qualities that we align with.” Trickster is like an archetype, a universal dynamic or energy. In fact, she tells us, “Trickster is older than humans. It's the originating, liberating spark of lightning that sets the whole shebang going and then it travels as a sizzle through everything, through all things, periodically getting constrained or inquisitions, but always escaping, always escaping.” Trickster is an escape artist and that is why, Caroline Casey says, we love Trickster as our ally and our guide.



Dancing in the Moonlight (Theodor Severin, 1857).⁹⁰

Granted, there may be other understandings of who and what Trickster is. Caroline Casey was orienting participants in a seven-week course she was leading, for which the intention was clearly stated: *Liberating the Citizen Trickster in You*[™]. This course took place in 2020 during the early COV-ID pandemic and the months leading up to a U.S. presidential election. Elaborating, she remarked, “part of our

⁹⁰ From Caroline Casey’s *Liberating the Citizen Trickster in You*[™].

definition is that the Trickster Redeemer, the Citizen Trickster within us all is willing to liberate the land, the humans, the animals, the critters but even the tyrant who has hardened his or her heart, not counting on it, not counting on it, but just willing, just willing.”

Caroline Casey brought together the power of storytelling and myth as a method for both analyzing current political-social dynamics and for empowering individuals to courageously engage their communities and society in breaking free from limiting stories and narratives. In doing so she employed what she called the **five-act structure of storytelling**.⁹¹ The power of storytelling is such that, “*We live in a storytelling creation*. Everything is telling us its story all the time by its shape, colors, song, rhythm” (Casey, *Liberating the Citizen Trickster in You*™).

Understanding and thus working/playing with the five-act structure of story assists us in moving from tragedy to redemption. This is important as we contemplate climate change and the demise of democracy, among other weighty social and global factors. How do we move from a worldview of a four acts tragedy which ends in despair, to one of a five acts, not comedy, but redemption?

Caroline Casey uses the image of everyone carrying a magic backpack in which a person keeps their “tools” of practices, knowledge, fun, and means of

⁹¹ Authors Bruce Lipton and Steve Bhaerman also use the five-act structure of story to illustrate their thesis on the place and role of Spontaneous Evolution (the title of their 2009 co-authored book) within the grand sweep of planetary history. They share how the evidence of our present “chaotic world of human dysfunction and environmental crisis” appears to be the closing moments of Act IV, which like a Greek tragedy ends badly. *Spontaneous Evolution*, on the other hand “is a story about how we can safely navigate from Act IV to Act V.” Five-act plays for the Greeks “were comedies filled with laughter, joy happiness, and love” (Introduction, page xv).

transformation. In this dissertation I use the image of spiraling circles to incorporate our layers of such tools. The five-acts structure of stories adds another circle.

Caroline Casey describes the structure for us.

Act One is here we are. Act Two is away. Act Three is oops, uh-oh. Act Four is evil. Oh, bad things seem to be killing and winning. The Fifth Act is the wedding, the kiss, the redemption, the go forth. A lot of plays end with Act Four, just oppression, play going, oh, it's terrible. Feel better, go home. [But], come back here and write Act Five.... Hollywood will often skip Act Four and just tack on a happy ending. You've got to do the whole thing. You've got to go down and see how terrible and poignant and tragic and despairing things are. You gotta earn Act Five. (Module 1, p. 22)

One way to earn Act Five is to invite it in with the quality of wonder.

Pondering, curiosity, questions.... "I wonder what can redeem us, what can save us now, what do we partner with now?" The truth of it is, each tragedy yearns for redemption. Act Four magnetizes Act Five (Casey, *ibid.*).



Micheal Meade says, "it is in the in-between world, that of the imagination and the deep world of the soul, that we wake up" (2021, podcast). At least, he reminds us, this is so according to the ancient way. But that is the rub or perhaps better to say that is our point of contention, a key point of this dissertation: the old ways, the ways of the ancients hold truth, they hold answers, needed answers for us today. Indeed, some of the old ways may be "old wives' tales," but that does not

mean they do not hold truths and even vital truths for the contemporary world. The old ways of which Michael Meade speaks can give us insight into how we “be” as humans, that is, how various life forces and dynamics impact our individual and corporate lives. The ancient way(s) place humans within a world and cosmos of meaning and purpose, sorely lacking and desperately needed among much of the world today. Stories and myths can carry us into the in-between world, they cultivate and incarnate imagination and soul, they can provide an illuminating and awakening spark to wake us from our taken-for-granted daily sleep-walking life.

Stories and myths and other ancient ways like shamanic practices *can help us remember who we are and why we are here*. Such stories and practices can break through the static of our contemporary world, the fuzz and buzz of our innumerable electronic gadgets that can be so distractive to hearing and responding to the energies and frequencies of Earth, Soul, and Spirit.⁹²

A poem by Irish poet, teacher, and author John O'Donohue⁹³ captures beautifully our hesitation to risk, to step out of our comfort zones, but then recognizes the delight our souls experience when courage arises and we step boldly (or even gingerly) into the unknown future, into the places of the heart. We can write

⁹² There is much to be said about the very disruptive nature of electricity itself to the human body as well as to all creatures, but that is an entire dissertation in itself and not able to be explored here. One resource for this is Arthur Firstenberg's book, *The Invisible Rainbow: A History of Electricity and Life*, 2017, Chelsea Green Publishing. See Appendix 2 (pg. 280) for how findings from neuroscience research compliment the possibilities ancient ways provide of waking up from our lack of attention.

⁹³ Used by Caroline Casey as a postlude to her reflections on Trickster and crafting stories.

and embrace our own story, a new and different story. We can call forth and live into the mythic (and very real) realm of Earth's Sacred Order.

FOR A NEW BEGINNING

John O'Donohue

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,
And feel the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

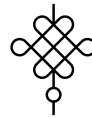
It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Holding nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;
And soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

Responding to O'Donohue's poem I share Caroline Casey's excitement. "Oh, wow! What would that be like, holding nothing back? 'Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning'" (Casey, pp. 22-23). And so we spiral another circle, embracing story and myth in our journey home, as we next reconnoiter our present historical moment.



C. A Kairos moment

The accumulated story or narrative of humanity's trajectory through time is commonly referred to as "history." All of history is special if not necessarily important, in the sense of each moment's uniqueness. There are many explanations for the various twists and turns of history. Among them, astrologers and the impact of planetary movements and solar flares, psychologists and the influence of different personality characteristics, social theorists and the impact of class, race, and/or gender. Each carries a certain truth and can be argued persuasively. Whichever lens one uses, however, there are periods within the broad sweep of time that stand out, that unmistakably reflect a transitional moment or period of time between one way of looking at life and another way, between one way of doing things and another way.

This chapter looks at how we can understand our present time in such a way. To do so, I use a concept I first learned as a biblical and theological idea while

studying in seminary in the 1970s. The term itself may not necessarily be used by the many cultural and philosophical thinkers addressing what they see as a time of shifting paradigms, but thinking and writing of our historical moment as a time of shifting paradigms is in and of itself reflective of such a dynamic time. So, too, I briefly address in this chapter the significance of an eco-spirituality to our historical moment.

Our present historical moment can be understood as a Kairos moment⁹⁴ — an opportune and deep moment in time where we turn and face the unknowing that marks this time in-between stories (Meade, 2012; Shaw, 2020; Baring, 2020; Tucker, 2006) toward a paradigm that affirms the **interconnected sacredness of all things** (Taegel; SOW; FSS; Kimmerer, 2013; Bernstein, 2005). As this new paradigm affirming story or narrative is told and re-told it gathers power and energy, taking on a life of its own. As more and more people accept and affirm such a new paradigm it eventually takes hold becoming itself society’s worldview. Of course, this is a decades-long process -- some might say centuries-long or even millennia-long

⁹⁴ Kairos is a significant concept, with which many people are perhaps unfamiliar, thus I have included a rather lengthy description. “The word *kairos* was an ancient Greek word meaning “opportunity,” “season,” or “fitting time.” Another Greek word for “time” was *chronos*. A sequence of moments was expressed as *chronos*, emphasizing the duration of the time; an appointed time was expressed as *kairos*, with no regard for the length of the time. Thus, *chronos* was more linear and quantitative, and *kairos* was more nonlinear and qualitative.

The Bible uses the word *kairos* and its cognates 86 times in the New Testament (e.g., in [Matthew 8:29](#); [Luke 19:44](#); and [Acts 24:25](#)). The word often includes the idea of an opportunity or a suitable time for an action to take place. When we “seize the day,” we are taking advantage of the *kairos* given to us. *Kairos* is related to the Greek word *kara* (“head”). A *kairos* is a time when things “come to a head,” requiring decisive action.” <https://www.gotquestions.org/kairos-meaning.html>

process – but it is nevertheless the way of the world, the manner in which history has unfolded; at least during the last ten or fifteen thousand years or so.

But there might be a different scenario, a different time frame... Consider the possibility of *Spontaneous Evolution*, which Bruce Lipton and Steve Bhaerman address in their 2009 book of that title. They postulate that just as some people experience seemingly miraculous recovery from illness, so too, the same thing is happening for our world. In their book, Lipton and Bhaerman offer a new and hopeful story about how we are poised to take an incredible step forward in the growth of our species.

We have forgotten and must recover the sense of the sacredness of life, of all of life, indeed, that we are part of a Sacred Order or Web of Life. Another way of naming such is our need of developing a spirituality of Gaia⁹⁵; reverently relating to the living, dynamic reality Mother Earth, our Earth Mother. **Re-establishing such connections is our human task in this time, this Kairos time.** Eco-spiritualities provide substantial vehicles for such a task, toward embracing a new paradigm that affirms the interconnected sacredness of all things.

⁹⁵ Gaia – "Although the name Gaia has various meanings and interpretations, it is most commonly associated with the Greek goddess who personified Earth in its primordial form. Quite simply, the definition of Gaia is life. She is all, the very personification of the earth. ...This name, steeped in the rich tapestry of ancient Greek mythology, serves as a bridge to the Earth itself, embodying the very spirit of the planet. ...The term has since transcended its mythological roots, evolving into a symbol for the interconnectedness of all life on Earth, particularly within environmental and ecological contexts." <https://www.gaia.com/article/meaning-of-gaia>

Mythologist Michael Meade writes, “It is our shared fate, to be alive at this troubled time and we are being called to help weave the elements of life back together” (Living Myth, n.d.). Yes, indeed, this is our calling today, those of us alive at this momentous historical time, balancing on the liminal threshold that we are between chaos and despair, and hope, wonder, beauty, and inspiration. *Called to help weave the elements of life back together*, this is my calling. This has been the focus of my career in ministry as well as my earlier studies, especially those resulting in my book *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth: a Practical Spirituality of Work* (1991, Peter Lang Publishing). It is also the focus and intention of my D.Min. studies and research. Work or Play⁹⁶ engaged in the vital undertaking of weaving the elements of life back together is crucial to our (human) efforts to align with the ways of Nature (Mother Earth). In keeping with my interconnected spiraling circles, from a mythological perspective we can view this “play” as *Lila* in Hindu cosmology, which refers to the divine play of God. Lila describes how the universe emerges as a result of God’s spontaneous and joyful creative activity.

⁹⁶ I make use of the word “Play” not necessarily to replace “work” but interchangeably so as to indicate it (life, human activity) is not all or necessarily “work”, but that *play is just as significant*. I also make use of the word play in order to jar the reader, to wake up the reader to the fact (sic) that play may be the proper or better way of engaging life. I intentionally use the word “play” in relation to “work,” in this paper and in daily life, both to remind myself and to exemplify to others how a simple change of one word can dramatically change how we tend to look at, articulate, and relate to our lives and endeavors.

The following comment from author Terry Tempest Williams attests to the significance of play: ‘Through play we develop relations and see each other whole. Through play tension is released, and joy is found. Humor emerges and that can be very intimate. This takes time. The culture at large views play as something frivolous, something that belongs to children. But that’s how community is created. If we don’t have time to play together, to eat meals together, to make love together, what holds us together?’ Terry Tempest Williams and Derrick Jensen, a conversation, *Listening to the Land: Conversations about Nature, Culture, and Eros*, 1995.

Author and Jungian analyst Anne Baring captures a profound sense of our present Kairos time in her article “A Crucial Time of Choice”:

We are part of an immense Field of Consciousness which sustains not only our world, but the entire universe. A new cosmology is struggling to be born; a new vision of our profound relationship with an intelligent, living and interconnected universe. The realization is dawning that we are participants in a Cosmic Consciousness or Intelligence which is present in every particle of our being and every particle of matter. We are, each one of us, an expression of a single Cosmic Organism. Contrary to what we have been taught for over two thousand years, Spirit or God is not something distant from us, transcendent to us. We are part of it, at the very heart of it, co-creators with it. (Baring, n.d., Website)

Anne Baring emphasizes her point by quoting American philosopher William Ophuls: “What the impending ecological crisis forces us to confront is that we have sacrificed meaning, morality, and almost all higher values for the ‘sordid boon’ of material wealth and worldly power. To keep drinking from this poisoned chalice will bring only sickness and death” (Ibid.).

Many people are expressing their feeling that this moment of history is somehow special, that we are indeed in a kairos moment or era of significant change. Among them, Caroline Myss⁹⁷ puts it bluntly in a promotion for one of her website programs: “This is the great era of transformation and we are being swept into that cosmic path together because it’s time. Simple as that. The era of wholism has arrived” (Myss, 2023).

⁹⁷ Caroline Myss, Ph.D., author and medical intuitive, is a pioneer and international lecturer in the fields of energy medicine and human consciousness.

Psychotherapist Carl Gustav Jung spoke of this time: “We are living in what the Greeks called the right time for a ‘metamorphosis of the gods,’ i.e. of the fundamental principles and symbols. This peculiarity of our time, which is certainly not of our conscious choosing, is the expression of the unconscious man within us who is changing. Coming generations will have to take account of this momentous transformation if humanity is not to destroy itself through the might of its own technology and science” (Jung, 1958, p. 110).

The following quote from Geneen Marie Haugen, Ph.D.,⁹⁸ expresses remarkably well my take on where we find ourselves in this precipitous moment of possibility.

We can meet this moment as if we meet the greatest mystery. We can offer holy ceremony to uncertainty, to the unknown. Praise without ceasing. Love what we know will die. *Bear witness to the magnificence of life. Enact our everyday lives as pilgrimage, as if everything we encounter is part of a sacred journey.* All of these acts hold the possibility of softening our psychic habits so that mystery can find us, so that the dream of the Earth can dream through us now, in a liminal time. (Emphasis added) (Haugen, 2020)

Our job is to step into the unknown, for standing in the dark opens the psyche, the soul. The other world is trying to reach us, too. Similar to the Christian saying that when we take one step toward God, God takes 1,000 steps toward us, Michael Meade shared that we only have to go half-way, so the other world can

⁹⁸ According to her bio on the Esalen website, Geneen Marie Haugen is “A content creator and guide to the intertwined mysteries of nature and psyche with the Animas Valley Institute, she has been on the faculty of the Esalen Institute and Schumacher College.”

reach us. He continued, we are all blindfolded, we cannot see, we do not know. But it is not a time when we can simply plan our way out, continuing the modern world's so-called progressive trajectory. It is, rather, a time of transformation. It is a time of deep listening, of reflection, of acknowledging what is, of accepting there is no going back to the way it was... for whether we/you like it or not we are in a liminal time of initiation, indeed a Kairos time pregnant with possibility (Meade, February 15, 2021, lecture). Michael Meade related an old saying appropriate to this journey of ours: "Before the journey begins you own the journey, but once the journey starts the journey owns you." We are in the journey. We do not know. And now the journey owns us.

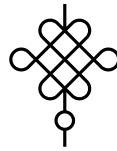
Another old mythic understanding was that the Earth is the womb of life and the tomb of life. Michael Meade reminds us that as the Feminine comes back this understanding will be central. An intriguing insight combining these two elements – the Feminine re-emerging and Earth as womb and tomb – is that traditionally, midwives attended both birth and death (ibid.). I find this a powerful image, for what we creatives, social activists, et al, are doing today, or need to be doing, is the role of midwives attending to both death (of the old) and birth or re-birth (of the new). An intriguing addition to this image comes from the Norwegian language, in which the word for midwife (*jordmødre*) translates in English as *Earth Mother*.

This brings us round on our spiraling circles to *Bridgewalkers*⁹⁹ such as Eco-Spiritual Mentors and Eco-Ministers, those who can play a significant role as a sort of midwife -- for individuals, communities, and societies – for growth and healing in this time of stepping into the unknown. We will first look at the Eco-Ministry training of Seminary of the Wild, followed by Eco-Spiritual Mentor training of the Earthtribe and Earth Wisdom Academy. Both programs move beyond intellectual constructs and ideas, providing specific guides and practices for me (and for anyone) to experience Owen Barfield’s “final participation”, shamanism’s “everything is alive,” a connection and oneness with Mother Earth, the reality that Consciousness underlies all and that we are co-creators (dreamers) with Consciousness, with God.

We have now spiraled through our circles of “analysis” exploring various themes which came to me in my information-gathering process; themes which surfaced, as it were, in the generative interplay of ideas and information, experiences, reflections on those experiences, generating new or additional ideas, leading to more experiences, and thence more reflection, spiraling deeper and higher into the realm of eco-spirituality. Now, in the spirit of my wholistic and organic research, we proceed into my personal accounts of experiencing and encountering these various themes, elements, and dynamics which arose in the course of my research. We move into the circles of my own lived experiences with these program pathways as I describe and interpret their dynamic, living processes,

⁹⁹ I borrow the term “Bridgewalkers” from Dr. Lillie Rowden’s book, *Bridgewalkers to a New Era: A Guide for Eco-Spiritual Mentors* (2021).

reflecting on their transformational value for myself and others. I treat each program pathway in the chronological manner in which I experienced it, thereby honoring and respecting the wholistic process inherent in its design.



CHAPTER 5. HEART OF THE MATTER

A. SEMINARY OF THE WILD

The first section of this chapter documents my learnings, experiences, and encounters (bodily and numinous, intellectual and psychospiritual) during the year-long Eco-Ministry Certificate program of Seminary of the Wild. I articulate and engage the main teachings, philosophy, and practices of Seminary of the Wild, weaving my personal insights, observations, and perspectives throughout. A number of the main elements and dynamics have been discussed in previous chapters, and are therefore not always described in detail here. The structure of the chapter follows the chronological flow of the year thereby maintaining the spiraling trajectory of my journey.

I participated in the first cohort of the newly established Seminary of the Wild from April 2020 through March 2021. A primary goal of Seminary of the Wild (SOW), and the purpose of their Eco-Ministry Certificate program directly aligned with my dissertation research focus: to “...cultivate a sacred relationship with Earth”, and to support participants in preparing “...to bring their own unique form of transformative work into a deeper service to the world.” SOW was designed as **“...a program that would facilitate participants developing ‘a new kind of consciousness’”** My participation in SOW was to explore (research) one way of doing this within the context of cultivating a sacred relationship with Earth.

Furthermore, Seminary of the Wild is a program designed to facilitate integrating one’s faith (Christian or other) into, “the wineskins of a new cosmology and new consciousness,” as one of their brochures states. My interest in SOW flowed from my Christian faith, as eclectic and unorthodox as it is, and my desire to respond to the cry¹⁰⁰ of the Earth. I was curious to see how these folks (the four founding faculty members) had put a program together integrating these very topics. Would it be fruitful? Would it provide an accessible way of accomplishing their goals? Would my Christian background be similar to or divergent from that of the other participants? And what, if any, difference might that make? How will SOW marry the Christian tradition with nature-based spirituality? Will it facilitate my

¹⁰⁰ I initially thought of it as a cry (as in a cry or appeal for help, for humanity to wake up) and responded to that, but now, reflecting on the various dynamics I have encountered and become aware of, I also see it as the call of Earth, of Mother Earth calling to me.

developing a new kind of consciousness, and cultivate a sacred relationship with Earth?

I knew we were off to a good start when I heard, “Begin to discover through enchantment, what the world *really is* and who you *really are* through nature-based spiritual practices....” Engaging with and reimagining enchantment has been an interest of mine for many years. I first talked about **re-enchanting the world** as important, indeed crucial for any meaningful transformation of consciousness or cultural paradigms and agendas in my 1989 Master’s thesis, *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth*.¹⁰¹ Doing so “through nature-based spiritual practices” spoke to my more recent interest in just that, nature-based or eco-spiritual practices.

This year-long program consisted of, among other things, bi-weekly Cohort Councils, alternating with bi-weekly Clan¹⁰² councils. Cohort Councils provided both intellectual grounding, context, and stimulation, as well as practical exercises and experiences of deep imaginal journeys,¹⁰³ artwork/play, and invitations for

¹⁰¹ Dale, Eric. (1989) Master of Sacred Theology thesis. *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth: A Practical Spirituality of Work*. Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. Subsequently published as a book with same title by Peter Lang Publishing (1991).

¹⁰² The full cohort had been divided into four smaller “clans” of about eight people each. I was in the Salmon Clan.

¹⁰³ Deep imaginal journeys are like guided meditation. They intend to induce a sort of trance state or altered state of consciousness. This is similar to psychologist Carl Gustav Jung’s active imagination, which he considered the primary method through which the transcendent function may be brought into play. “During active imagination, the ego, while fully awake and functional, experiences unconscious contents or products. ...The ego ... must give up all critical thinking and simply open to whatever the unconscious presents.” (Jeffrey Raff, *Jung and the Alchemical Imagination*, 2000, page 19.)

There is also a similarity to shamanic journeying, although deep imaginal journeys tend to be guided or directed while shamanic journeys are not. Both are however undertaken in an altered state of consciousness.

wanderings.¹⁰⁴ in the wild. In-house cohort topics led by SOW faculty¹⁰⁵ were supplemented with monthly “Luminary” webinar lectures and discussions by different thought-leaders, public intellectuals, and theologians.¹⁰⁶ Clans provided a more intimate, safe, confidential space for reflecting and sharing on a more personal basis.

Each of the year’s four modules – Wild Self, Wild Earth, Wild Christ, Wild Call – began with a three or four day intensive or immersion, a time of concentrated focus introducing (inducting or initiating) participants into the module’s themes; opening us (hopefully) to the possibilities therein. Originally these intensives were planned to be five-day in-person experiences immersed in a particular place (Ghost Ranch, New Mexico, a retreat center in Michigan, and a retreat center in Southern California). However, due to Covid-19 and the pandemic, they were conducted virtually via Zoom calls and the internet. I felt quite fortunate to have had the opportunity of attending the introductory retreat at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico in the autumn of 2019.

All exercises in the Wild Self immersion, indeed throughout the program, were designed to help us pay attention in a deeper, intentional way, and to develop a relationship, “a more enchanted alive relationship,” with the creation, with God, and

¹⁰⁴ To wander, wanders, or wandering are terms used by SOW for a key means of encountering the wild, a technique used to open oneself to the energies, forces, spirits of Nature; simply put, to wander in nature with intent, even if that intent is merely to have no agenda but simply be there.

¹⁰⁵ Victoria Loorz, Brian Stafford, Matt Syrdal, and Bryan Smith.

¹⁰⁶ For list of Luminary speakers with dates and topics, see Supplementary Bibliography, page 295. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which erupted just as we were beginning, all luminary talks and discussions were via Zoom calls.

with our soul. Ways to do this: We cross a threshold! We ask permission. We offer gratitude.

An important concept (reminder and guiding principle) shared at the beginning of the year was that everything that happens (for me, and for each of us within the cohort) during the initial week's intensive, and indeed, in each module and throughout the year, is part of the experience, that is, the things in the program and everything in my daily life. As one of the introductory handouts, "Saying 'YES'", put it: "Mystery and soul and nature are doing their best to provide for you." This perspective was also prominent in my Wild Heart Quest, reiterating that we are not randomly bumbling along from day to day, but rather, flowing along with the current of Life. There is meaning and purpose in what we do, in our daily lives – if we say so (*a la* Landmark Education.¹⁰⁷), depending on our perspective, on our consciousness.

Another important reminder and admonition: "you can't figure it out!" What is involved is a "surrendering control to something greater than our everyday strategic mind..."¹⁰⁸ This "something greater" has become a key idea in my conversations – here with SOW and also in my WHQ conversations and experiences. Imagination, ceremony, vision quests, etc., open one to something more.¹⁰⁹ This something more

¹⁰⁷ One of Landmark Education's key concepts is the language we use to describe our experiences and thinking has a profound impact upon our experiences and thinking. Case in point: If we say there is meaning and purpose in our lives, there is. If we say there is not, there is not, at least for ourselves.

¹⁰⁸ The understanding of not being in control, of surrendering to that which is beyond human control, is also a key understanding of the Earthtribe and incorporated in my Wild Heart Quest, which I explore below in that section.

¹⁰⁹ There are quite a few ways of saying this, all helping us get at this *something more* although none holding the 'getting' completely. For instance, they *carry* one to the realm or presence of this

is not new to me, indeed, to Life on Earth. Different people use different names or terms for this something more: God, Spirit, Source, Universal Life Force or Energy, Light, Love. While the language we use is utterly important in our construction of our social reality, I do not think the use of one of these words rather than another is necessarily of crucial importance in this regard. What is significant in this regard is the recognition, or not, of *the existence* of this “something more.” As people connect with nature, Mother Earth, the Wild, to protect the earth, save endangered species, or whatever other reason, do they view themselves as part of nature? Do they conceive their experiences as interacting with other conscious beings? Do they understand they *are* Nature? Do people experience themselves as expressions of Mother Earth? Do we desire or dare to “Fall into the imagination/dream of the Earth” (SOW handout, “Suggestions for Saying YES to the SOW Invitations”)?

One of the ways to participate fully is to create and sustain ‘containers of presence’, because “to the degree you are able to prepare adequately and create space for intentionality and presence to the practices during the week you will get the most out of this experience” (SOW intensive handout). That is the heart of the matter. This sentence states in a very succinct way *what I think is important and necessary to activate and engage imagination*, to carry us/one into the deeper, imaginal realm. Intentionality is required (as is also true with shamanic journeying) in preparation to participate in creating sacred space (in whatever various forms

something more; *open* one to ...; *allow* the possibility of *connecting* ...; make one *aware* of.... Currently, I am most drawn to use “open one” to this something more.

that might take). Opening to one's imagination, which SOW says is "always essential in this work," while perhaps not dependent upon this preparation, is nevertheless intimately connected. It is my contention that the practices of SOW, interspersed throughout this intensive and the entire year, are those things, activities, elements that help one engage and call forth imagination. And as such, it is, as the handout puts it, "holy work" as well as "dangerous work."



1. Wild Self Module

During the first quarter of the year-long program (end of April through first week of July) SOW explored "The Wild Self." An important starting point because the Self is that aspect of ourselves that experiences and participates in the world. "The more whole, the wilder, and the more cultivated our ways of knowing are, the more we can actually experience and participate in Reality. The more we participate in Reality, the better we can perceive our Selves, others, the more than human world, Earth, Christ, God, and Mystery" (SOW material, June 9, 2020).



Stepping into or opening to our Wild Self is an invitation to be wildly authentic. The Epistle to the Galatians states, “it’s for freedom that Christ has freed us...” (5:1). Often, however, the pathway to freedom takes us through wilderness (which is a place of encounter). The road to freedom is a journey to wholeness and it is imperative we actively cultivate it. The Earth supports us in this venture, for Earth is whole and complete unto herself. Setting out on an unknown pathway it is helpful to have a map. We need a good map, an appropriate map, a map of the actual terrain or reality.

One such map used subsequently throughout the year is that of **the four quadrants or directions**.¹¹⁰ I list them here with a few of their qualities and characteristics suggested by SOW (others emerged as we traveled the road):

- North: love letter to Earth – nurturing and generative
- South: cross-species conversation – feeling/emotions

¹¹⁰ The four-directions circle as used by SOW is based on psychologist and wilderness guide Bill Plotkin’s “Nature and the Human Soul” and his eco-soulcentric developmental wheel. Plotkin’s wheel incorporates overlapping levels including the four cardinal directions (North, East, South, West) and human psychological stages of development.

- East: spring/morning – fully present centeredness/sensing
- West: autumn/dusk/deep imaginal

The universality and significance of this map/symbol (the four-direction circle) is attested to by author and wilderness guide Bill Plotkin as he admonishes his readers to not think of it as “a flaky or New Age exercise”, but rather, “it’s an embodied acknowledgment of the panhuman intuition that wholeness, including your own, can be effectively embodied in a quadrisected circle aligned with the cardinal directions. It’s also an acknowledgement of the fact that most cultures around the world, including a variety of Western traditions, have understood this...” (Plotkin, 2013, pp. 253-54).

As we journey along the road to freedom, to wholeness, the Wild One beckons – as a model, as a prod, pushing and pulling as situation requires. **The Wild One** is she or he who holds erotic warrior energy. Such a One is Jesus riding a donkey into the belly of the beast (city of Jerusalem) to enact ceremony of disruption/deconstruction/dismantling culture of greed and corruption; knowing full well it would poke the “sleeping bear” and bring forth retribution, perhaps his own death.

Enlisting helpers and guides for our personal journeys we held a drumming journey one morning before embarking on our initial wander. Our intention was to find a guide. The guides to wild erotic warrior I encountered were bear and hummingbird.

My initial experience of Wandering in the Wild Self module was a type of walk incorporating the direction of the West, with its sense of romance, enchantment, (the fruitful) darkness, and shadow. West represents that part of our psyche that can totally upset our Western civilization because it is not rational, but rather that of active imagination. One archetype of the West is the wanderer, into the mystery. Our process for wandering in this initial wander was similar to that of most wanders in which we engaged throughout the year. Preparation might include smudging yourself, bringing a rattle or shaker, engaging all senses, feeling emotions, stating your intention.

Borrowing the term from sacred reading of scripture (*lectio divina*), SOW applied it to our earth-based wilding venture as “***Terra Divina or Wild Contemplation.***” The steps included the following:

- **Separate:** crossing a threshold, stepping into place of transformation, new seeing,
- **Wander:** allowing yourself to be drawn to something; releasing agenda and expectations,
- **Ask Permission:** and wait for an answer,
- **Wonder:** fully attentive, using all your senses, notice little things, listen, observe,
- **Ask:** speak to the place sharing why you are wandering; ask any questions that arise,
- **Share:** engaging in a conversation, with the “more-than-human-others”, journal, sketch,
- **Gratitude:** a song, poem, bowing, some acknowledgment of honor and gratitude; even just full attention,

- **Return:** cross back over the threshold and offer gratitude.

A scriptural reference for such wandering comes from the book of Job in the Hebrew scriptures.

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of Yahweh has done this? In whose hand is the soul of every creature and the breath of all humanity. (Job 12:7-10)

The following stanza from Mary Oliver’s poem, “Wild Geese”, offers hope and inspiration for anyone feeling inadequate to the task of wandering, reminding us such wanders are indeed a joy, an opportunity for wonder, for rekindling our sense of place and belonging, of connection and relationship with Earth and all that is.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting - over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

A daily practice recommended for cultivating one’s sense of and access to the power of one’s “wholeness” incorporated the four directions circle. Called the Practice of Wholeness, it consisted of starting in the center of the circle (a physical circle inside or outside), and then walking or turning to each direction in turn. In each of the four directions ask yourself, “what do I notice?” You are to feel into each direction, into the archetypes, the muse, the inner beloved, and other elements and dynamics of each direction. If feeling so moved, walk as a wild animal, move your body. Return to the center and call each direction as you face in that direction again,

expressing gratitude for what you noticed and for what that direction brings to your wholeness. Leave the circle in your wholeness remembering to always walk in your wholeness. This is a structured and powerful way to feel into the different energies of the four directions and archetypes.



Early on in the Wild Self module the question was raised, how do we allow and engage all aspects together, that is, the four modules: Wild Self, Earth, Christ, and Call? The story of Bartimaeus in the Gospel of Mark was used to illustrate some of the internal challenges that may arise in attempting to do so. Bartimaeus' experience with Jesus was a meeting of longing and grace that becomes transformative. The task -- our mission, should we accept -- is that of finding way(s) to speak our truth, to not let "the voices" win out in directing the struggles and efforts of our lives. A central question to keep before you is what is in my heart? What, and how, is it that I can experience freedom from fear to speak my truth, stepping into my wild self.

At this point the psychological concept of "shadow" was introduced. For SOW purposes shadow is something that is true for each person, but something which we would adamantly deny is so. It is not all sinister for we are seeking -- during our Wild Self module and throughout our lives -- the golden shadow, our unique calling and connection to the Divine. We can understand shadow as a receptacle

that actually holds everything, so we can access it when we are ready. As poet Robert Bly put it, shadow is the long black bag we drag along since our childhood.



Each week participants received invitations to engage the work from various perspectives (direction-wise and personality-wise). Among other things these invitations included Wanders, Journaling, Readings, Poems, and Songs. In the Wild Self module, we began with the North, direction of that aspect of the Self known as the “Nurturing Generative Adult,” to use Bill Plotkin’s terminology from his book *Wild Mind*. From there we moved to the South, direction of the Wounded Child(ren), then to the West, direction of the Muse, Inner Beloved, Anima/Animus, Guide to Soul, and completed our circuit of the four-direction circle or fourfold self, with the East, direction of the Innocent, Sage, Sacred Fool, Trickster. I will share a few of my experiences and lessons garnered from these weekly invitations.

Exploring direction of North, we took a wander intentionally as our own *nurturing generative adult*. I took a wander around my backyard.... I quote from my SOW Journal¹¹¹ :

Walking erect, chest out, head held high, relaxed, comfortable, natural, at ease. Walking slowly, intentionally placing one foot then the other; carefully, watching for dog poop, especially any remainders of diarrhea from Barnabus, who was sick all last week (and whom we had euthanized Sunday morning). Feeling for his presence; aware of him hobbling around the yard, pleased as punch to be outside smelling everything, taking in fresh air and ability to actually get around. Miss him! I look back and there, laying serenely with

¹¹¹ My journal entries are entered in italics.

their heads up, attentive, and totally relaxed in the sun are my two other dogs, Arlo and Juniper, on either side of the chair waiting for me.

I realize I can look at each plant, shrub, tree, flower... and see them as I walk, and stop, and gaze upon them ... no agenda, no schedule to keep ... present, appreciating each and all. Gratitude. Enjoyment. Feeling at home; belonging. Now, sitting under Redwood, Arlo at my feet on the alert for flies. Hummingbird stops on bare branch above me. Preens itself then darts about before landing on hummingbird feeder for a moment. Buzz! Hummingbird swoops right in front of me, about two feet away, as it chases another up and over walnut tree at edge of yard.

Barnabus – such a gentle soul. He was “old” for a big dog – a Labrador-Newfoundland mix -- His body just gave out.

As I wandered with the intention of becoming aware of my relationship with the elements, trees, rocks, plants, and creatures, I realized the opportunity for service, compassion, and caring was right in front of me. That is, my opportunity was to care for what is in front of me, that I can choose to take responsibility – and pleasure -- in caring for the backyard; to take the time and make it a priority. (May 19, 2020)

Continuing our journey into the Wild Self we took two other Imaginal

Journeys, to “find” our animal of the East and then of the West. These were powerful experiences for me; I did indeed encounter animal guides for these two directions (of the journey, of myself).

Seeking my animal of the East, I felt the presence of a large cat ... eyes in the dark ... power ... watching ... still ... deliberate. Yet, not sure, in the dark, not fully the one, yet this was my first awareness.... Then, when asking this cat/creature if it was my animal of the East, I saw/experienced two taloned feet appear or descend -- talons extended as if ready to grab their prey or object – yet I saw no animal, that is, no body or form other than the taloned feet. Curious. I then saw the figure of mixed creature with wings and head and body of a lion (I believe). But it was not moving and I’m not sure whether what I was observing was a stationary statue or alive. That was all I saw of it, because as I began asking questions and sharing who I was, my sense/experience was more of the eyes of a large cat. But, still not definitive. And no answers or replies to my queries (i.e., any teachings, lessons for me, etc.). (May 23, 2020)

I had a very similar imaginal journey a week later, this time seeking my animal of the West.

I experienced ... a large cat (of some sort), Jaguar?! Large, intense, yellowish eyes, staring out from the dark. I feel movement, power emanating from him (her?). I ask if it's my animal. No word or verbal reply but rather a felt sense that it is. No indication of any other animal presence.

What did it have to tell, show, or teach me? A very clear message: "The path, the way is safe! It may be intriguing, exciting, adventurous, terrifying, but it is safe." I had expressed my desire to move out, to continue, to dive deeper into the mystery, the way of wonder and exploration ... deeper into myself, deeper into Mother Earth, the dark, the unknown....

I had initially thought this "cat" allowed me to touch him at the close, in parting, but I realized after thinking about it, this was not so. I began a tentative hug but that was more than Jaguar (I kept getting sense it was Jaguar) was willing. But a hand to my heart and other hand on him connected us. (May 30, 2020)

Striking in that the two imaginal journeys undertaken to seek my directional animals, of two oppositional directions – East and West – both turned out to be large cats, at least in part. I would have thought they would be quite different animal spirits for each of the directions. It is true one (East) seemed to be of a mythical creature, a mix of lion and winged one (eagle?), while the other (West) was of a living cat (Jaguar or Panther?). Different and yet so alike, especially the initial awareness in the dark, the sensing and seeing of eyes glowing in the darkness of mystery, unknown.

In conclusion we did a deep imaginal journey¹¹² to experience wholeness. The animal guide that came to me in this journey was Bear, a huge Grizzly Bear... standing upright on hind legs... strong... confident. The clear message: walking through life in state of wholeness is one of strength and confidence.

As we talked about pursuing and reclaiming wholeness during the bi-weekly clan gathering concluding our exploration of the Wild Self, conversation turned toward our subpersonalities. They are the aspects of our selves that developed in childhood in response to perceived (and sometimes real) threats but which as we mature must be acknowledged (they never disappear) but no longer allowed a leading role in our lives if we would cultivate wholeness -- and how they are always trying to protect us from our destiny. Perhaps not surprising, such resistance is a sign we may be on the right path. In response, we can simply say, “thank you for sharing; I’m moving on through this....” The purpose of cultivating wholeness is so we can serve from our new way of being -- wholeness and wildness; service to our culture, our community, and to the more-than-human world from wholeness. In this process ask yourself, “What does this tell me about what I value?” and then act on it. How do we do this? Perhaps, just be present. The play of cultivating Self and Wholeness is never done.

¹¹² Much of the deep structure of Seminary of the Wild is based on depth psychologist and ecotherapist Bill Plotkin’s *Nature and the Human Soul* and his eco-centric developmental wheel. Imaginal journeys were used frequently to facilitate our connection to the imaginal domain.

Just being present may seem a small thing but consider that this work of wholeness is very much a reclaiming of our Selves. And stepping into our greater, whole, wild selves may take some getting used to, necessitating being present to the new, to whom we are in the face of social and cultural pressures (parental, educational, religious) that tend to keep us small, unemotional, and unimaginative. Part of discovering our wild bodies and emotions, cultivating our wild imaginations, and owning our desire to care for our self and others (of all racial, ethnic, gender, and species) may be “simply” sitting with what we are discovering to be who and what we really are. Too, in our present-ness we shall come to see that those parts of our Selves that keep us small and domesticated are included in our whole and wild self; it is not that they disappear. Some people will see and ‘get’ this right off, others only with kicking and screaming.



2. Wild Earth Module

a. Language, Reciprocity, Gratitude

Mid-summer we moved into our second module, “Wild Earth”, exploring and opening to new ways of interacting and being with the earth. One of the first questions posed, immersing us immediately into new terrain, “How do we get out of language eddies?” What does that mean? An example, stop calling animals and plants “it” and perhaps call them all “she”. Learning a new language beyond English,

beyond human language, per se. The untamed have no language. Moving from words but no language, to language but no words. I sensed a linkage to my WHQ and Will Taegel's "mother tongue."

Our initial wander for this module invited us to pay attention in a "Courtship of the Particular." Not just to anything, not an "it" or an object, but to a particular place or flower or being. Our invitation was to cross a threshold, "open up your human gifts of imagination and embodied presence and WANDER until you feel a sense of allurements" (SOW, Week of July 14 invitations). It felt like an invitation to open ourselves to wonder and awe. Wait for them to beckon us to come closer, and then ask permission to sit with them for a while. We were not to approach this as "an experience or a thing," but as interacting with a sacred "Thou", as the beginning of a friendship. And that takes time, so slow down, simply BE PRESENT. "Listen. Wait. Allow the silence between you. Eventually, go ahead and ask questions. Watch. Pay attention. Use all your senses, and your intuition and extra-sensory senses to listen to your new friend" (Ibid.). And then, of vital importance, "Praise them. Just praise them and bless them."

Berlin-based philosopher, biologist, biosemiotician, and journalist, Andreas Weber was the first presenter in Wild Earth module (Weber, 2020). I find Andreas Weber's insights beautiful, powerful, inspiring. Central to his perspective is the reality of humans as "embodied beings." He began his talk illustrating Earth as a huge body moving by itself, breathing... rather than seeing trees blowing because of the wind. "The world is a reality of constant breath: breathing in and out." He used

the relationship between humans and trees to illustrate. What we breath out, the trees breathe in, and vis verse. Breathing, he said, binds you together with other life. Because, literally, you're exchanging part of your body. CO2 into oxygen ... life as communion, as relationship. These moments fill us with "existential bliss and awe." These meetings and connections, such as the air carrying sun rays or the wind stirred by humidity, are not just a technical thing but they are imbued with feeling, by participating in it, the world. Andreas Weber talked about the "realization of splendor"... how everything is inter-related, that there is a give and take of it all, how eco-systems are love connections, they are fecund.

Our experience of beauty, according to Andreas Weber, is our experience to be loved by "this whole entangled commons." But, just in case one thinks this is so nice, that all is harmonious and peace and love, he reminded us that the meadow (his point of reference for many of his illustrations) points to and shows that everything feeds off others, that death is an integral dynamic part of all this. Allowing yourself to be consumed comes with the territory. The process of love is not a sweet candy version. Being yourself means letting go of yourself. A lesson of biology – through emotional engagement (Weber, *ibid.*). Andreas Weber's sense of beauty is intimately connected with the dynamic of **reciprocity**. Our experience of beauty he said is an acknowledgment of already recognizing that beauty; our reciprocity is

already there. We must step away from “beautiful objects.” The feeling and awareness of *being seen* is so precious and profound!¹¹³

One day sitting in my backyard intentionally practicing presence, I become aware of Hummingbird perched in Redwood tree, on a thin, curving twig of a bare branch. Quiet, still, present, illustrious, serene, beautiful, waiting, watching, breathing, sounding ever so quietly a gentle clacking of tat-tat-tatting, chirping, almost a smacking of lips. I never knew hummingbirds made a noise, a sound. Now, these last few years, regularly replenishing the hummingbird feeders and sitting near them, I’ve had the good fortune to hear them many times – as they perch on a branch, waiting, watching, “defending” their turf from other hummingbirds. And then, in a flash, accompanied by the thunderous humming of the wings, the chirping! (Personal journal, Sunday, July 26, 2020)

It is not that we interpret the world as some kind of objective outside observer. That is an impossibility. We as humans can no more be an outside observer than a racoon or a maple. We are the world. We are nature. We are part and parcel of this reality. *The forgetfulness or “sin”* (brokenness, missing the mark, tearing in the fabric of wholeness – at least of our understanding and perception of wholeness or, to be more precise, our presumed separateness) *is this very sense of somehow being separate or apart from Nature, from the world.* No wonder we are neurotic, us humans. It is like trying to live outside our skins, as if we were only minds, perhaps stuck in a body.¹¹⁴ Be that as it may, and there may very well be profound truth in reality of spirit being the essential element and dynamic of one’s

¹¹³ *Being seen* is one of the core intentions of the Wild Heart Quest as well.

¹¹⁴ This opens whole realm of intriguing and potentially troublesome issue for people, traditions, spiritual paths that speak of us humans being spirits inhabiting a body; perhaps not “trapped” – although that is a defining belief of many “Gnostics” (2000-years-ago-Gnostic) – but clearly in a reality in which the superior “spirit” is only temporarily in this physical body.

being, I think the old Hebrew sense (as I understand it and as I learned it in seminary many years ago) of our being equally body and spirit holds our earthly presence best. For we would not be (here), without a body, our body. We would not experience life, the phenomenal world/reality. We would not be who we are if we were not in *this* body. Touch is at the heart of this reality in which we live, as Andreas Weber expounds so eloquently.

A personal experience of recognizing the already-always-present beauty of the world around me, and of the transformative dynamics of reciprocal relationships and encounters occurred one day at the ranch.

I encountered pelicans and hawks this past week. Or should I say they encountered me?! The pelicans are of special interest. Four of them flew directly over me while I was at the ranch where we board our horses. Someone else called out, "Look! Pelicans!" I looked up and there directly over me were four pelicans flying in a diamond pattern. Wow. Very unusual; pelicans are at the coast, some 18 to 20 miles away to the west, not inland like this. The diamond shape was clear. Flying in formation. Then they broke and formed a "V" while circling around above me before flying off. (Personal journal, July 28, 2020)

What is the human role in this sacred reciprocity? What is my role? When we ask what our responsibility is to and for the world, we also need to ask what our gift is. Robin Wall Kimmerer¹¹⁵ says in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), our most potent gift is **gratitude**.

¹¹⁵ Robin Wall Kimmerer (b.1953), mother, scientist, American Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental and Forest Biology, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation.

In an October 2017 talk on reciprocity Robin Wall Kimmerer asks, “What is it the Earth asks of us?” To the dynamic of reciprocity she marries gratitude. Reflecting on *Sky Woman Story*,¹¹⁶ she said, what enabled the creation of the world is an alchemy between gratitude and reciprocity. She also spoke of the intimate relationship between reciprocity and justice – restorative justice makes things right again, through reciprocity; not just individual to individual, but to family, community, tribe, and the land itself. The very least we humans can do is clean up after ourselves. The heart of the problem is not so much that the land is broken (although it is), it is *our relationship to the land that is broken*. However, as Robin Wall Kimmerer emphasized, the restoration of this relationship lies outside the scientific endeavor and realm. Restoration includes Re-Story-action: opportunity to tell another story, a new story about ourselves and our relation to land.

Restoration is imperative for healing the earth, but reciprocity is imperative for long-lasting, successful restoration. Like other mindful practices, ecological restoration can be viewed as an act of reciprocity in which humans exercise their caregiving responsibility for the eco-systems that sustain them. We restore the land, and the land restores us. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 336)

Robin Wall Kimmerer continues, asking,

¹¹⁶ In this tale, Skywoman falls from her home the Skyworld to earth, where she is caught by a flock of geese and then helped by the other animals, who work with her to create a new land known as Turtle Island (as it is first created on the back of a turtle). Skywoman uses the seeds she brought with her to thank the animals for their hospitality. The birth of Turtle Island is a story that teaches indigenous beliefs about generosity in addition to their beliefs that humans and nature should have a relationship built on mutual respect; a “covenant of reciprocity,” as Kimmerer puts it in her new introduction to *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2020, November 5. Webpage. *Emergence Magazine*, “Skywoman Falling.” https://emergencemagazine.org/op_ed/skywoman-falling/

What if we could fashion a restoration plan that grew from understanding multiple meanings of land? Land as sustainer. Land as identity. Land as grocery store and pharmacy. Land as connection to our ancestors. Land as moral obligation. Land as sacred. Land as self. (p.337)

As mentioned previously (pg. 64), Robin Wall Kimmerer finds language to be a key ingredient in such restoration. Reflecting on how we have arrived at our present predicament, with our objectification of nature, she reminds us it is important to remember that language effects and influences not only how we think but also how we relate to and hence act in the world. For her, learning the indigenous grammar of animacy, which is a verb-based language, as opposed to English, which is noun-based, is part of the solution.

American architect, systems theorist, writer, designer, inventor, philosopher, and futurist, R. Buckminster Fuller also expressed this sense of a person being an integral, dynamic process rather than a static entity. In his 1970 book, *I Seem To Be a Verb*, he wrote: “I live on Earth at present, and I don’t know what I am. I know that I am not a category. I am not a thing — a noun. I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process – an integral function of the universe.”



Geenen Marie Haugen speaks of human imagination in relationship to Earth and Cosmos. She asks the question, “Had my imagination been seeded by a planetary entity? The Earth itself?” and poses the possibility that Earth is expressing

her longing through receptive human imagination. That, indeed, Earth is speaking to us ... all the time. Where indeed are our dreams and visions and creative works of art, music, poetry coming from? From the imaginal world. In the modern world we have split the world into two, mind and spirit, previously they were held together, seen as integral. Paraphrasing Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Geenen Marie Haugen argues that *Imagination is a sense organ* (Haugen, October 2019, talk at SOW Ghost Ranch retreat).

Geenen Marie Haugen also speaks about reciprocity or “participatory consciousness” between humans and our relations, those more-than-human, of presence, witness, and praise. This participatory consciousness, she writes, is “... a heightened, world-reshaping awareness of participation with the visible and invisible; embodied and numinous; past, present and future beings, relationships and energies among whom we dwell.” Indeed, it is a “...porous consciousness, a felt-sense of interpenetration and reciprocity; a psychic and somatic openness to the Others and to the mysterious terrain of imagination and dream” (Haugen, 2014, p.9). For example, the cottonwood tree at Ghost Ranch or my backyard redwood tree is reveling in our presence. And this is the cosmos reveling in our presence – we are being witnessed. The trees, and stars, the moon, the planets, and animals, are just waiting to be seen by us, to be heard by us, and for us to respond, to praise them.

Praise, and invoking, played a large role in my experiences at the Ghost Ranch retreat at which Geenen Marie Haugen spoke powerfully about praise and invocation. I credit her with activating my renewed engagement with these

dynamics. The power of both praise and invocation are enhanced through speaking out loud, through engagement and interacting with the more-than-human, including Earth herself. Here we have an example of moving from words but no language, to language but no words, mentioned above at transition to module on Wild Earth.

Many ceremonies were undertaken during the SOW year, in all modules. Because I have discussed them previously I will at this point, as we move into the Wild Christ Module, simply state that ceremony and ritual help us (re-)connect to that which is important, to our stories, myths, and cultural-historical context. Furthermore, echoing Sandra Ingerman, they create “a relationship between the creator and your own divinity in such a way that allows you to become the sculptor of your life and world” (Ingerman, 2000, p. 224).



3. Wild Christ Module

The Wild Christ module embarked with this *Immersion Invitation*, a manifesto in my mind:

Cultural unraveling has been happening for quite some time, sometimes subtly, sometimes violently in fits and starts. Now we are at a Kairos moment in history when we all can see it, it is becoming quite clear, that ‘business-as-usual’ is life destroying in all its forms. Jesus said to his disciples, “What you

hear whispered in the dark, proclaim from the rooftops.” We believe these signs of global upheaval are growth pains, and perhaps revelation – a call to ‘lift the veil.’ In our time, the voice of Earth cries out, a wilder Christ summons prophetic agents through a wilder Self to embody a sacred and fiercely loving response – manifested in a much grander adventure and wild calling than ever before. We seek to create space for a new Story to emerge, one broad, deep, and wild enough to live in this liminal age of awakening. Space that calls in the presence and wisdom of the Wild, the way of our ancestors – those prophets and mystics of old once did.



Map of Wild Christ, image by Matt Syrdal, SOW faculty

Recognizing that the “subversive, imaginal, and mythic dimension of the Hebrew Bible and gospel have been lost, distorted, and suppressed over thousands of years,” invitations and practices of the intensive were offered to help “experience the archetypes of the Cosmic and Wild Christ,” and to “undergo deep ecological metanoia¹¹⁷ as a church and culture” (SOW Wild Christ Immersion Invitations).

¹¹⁷ In the Bible, metanoia is a Greek word that refers to a change of mind or repentance. It is often used interchangeably with the word "repentance". Metanoia can be understood as a change of mind that leads to a new perspective on the world or oneself. It can also be described as a fundamental transformation of one's perspective.

I was challenged to fully engage in the intensive because I already embraced much of this understanding of the Cosmic Christ, of a Christ not domesticated by the church; much of the ideas were not new to me. The idea of *Wild Christ* however was new and a significant reason why I had enrolled in the program, and so provided a counterweight to my ambivalence. For example, part of the intensive was a Ceremony of Ashes, in which we were to symbolically burn our “known” images of Christ. A good way to leave behind that which does not serve and open to the new. I felt awkward in destroying my images of Christ – cosmic, mystic, prophet, healer, non-violent foe of empire, radical up-setter of social mores – but engaged (half-heartedly, I admit) in the ceremony with intention to open to explore the “wild-ness of Christ.”

An image of Jesus that was shared in the opening day of the Wild Christ module that I find exciting is that Jesus comes as a poet shaman.

To assist us in grappling with this image, Matt Syrdal, primary SOW faculty for this module, referenced **archetypes** encouraging us to think of them as the energy that helps unpack the divine energy that is within each of us. Archetypes help us deal with the numinous, with ecstasy, they are a way for us to reclaim this wild root. *The archetypal Christ has many forms or images.* Using the four-directions circle, Christ in the North is the Shepherd King or Divine Queen, the cosmic or mythic king or queen, Generative Leader. In the East Christ is the Wisdom Teacher, Trickster, the Sacred Fool (the one with ability to insert disequilibrium into the garden, to shake things up and leave them changed; to disarm audience with sense of humor, has a

dis-orienting presence...). The South is Christ as Wild Prophet/Prophetess, Healer, Green Man/Woman (edge-walker, action oriented, spirit of eros, ecological healing). Christ in the West is Earth Priest/Priestess, the (Inner) Beloved, Magician, Cantadora¹¹⁸.

Central questions running throughout the Wild Christ module were “why would we want to reclaim wild roots? What went wrong?” Delving into these questions recognized the “significance of dismantling the cultural ‘myths’ embedded in Empire in order to reclaim the wilder myths of the Christian story needed for the protection and re-sacralization of life and the transformation of culture in life enhancing ways” (SOW week of October 27th invitations). The purpose of re-sacralizing life and transforming culture was not new to me, indeed, I proposed exactly that in my 1989 Master of Sacred Theology thesis, *Bringing Heaven Down to Earth*.

I did however appreciate the inclusion of **myth** into a reading of the Christian story. As SOW faculty member Matt Syrdal explained it, “Myth is not a ‘fantasy’ or ‘fable’, but Reality itself experienced on a cosmic or mythic level.” Incorporating mythic understanding into our exploration of the Christian story is important because, “Seeing the mythic fabric of scripture (any sacred scripture) helps us to reclaim the archetypal realities in the deeper structural layers of existence. It

¹¹⁸ “The globally-resonant word ‘cantadora’ is a play on the Spanish/Italian/Portuguese word ‘cantador,’ meaning singer. Part of an ancient oral tradition, it refers to storytelling that arises from personal and collective history.” Whitney McVeigh, “Cantadora and the Path of Hope.” <https://writersrebel.com/cantadora-and-the-path-of-hope/>

enables us to see the prophets and mystics of old were speaking from an ‘Earth that thinks in myth.’” He continued, “**Stories** don’t want to be trapped in theology, they want to be tracked by the soul, they want to be trailed by something in each of us that knows what it is to be fully alive” (*Wild Christ Map*, SOW invitations).

This liminal time in which we live requires a return to myth. Myth, according to Matt Syrdal and to which I agree, is the only container large enough to contain or hold the numinous encounters and realities we have and are called to. Indeed, *the Earth speaks through stories and myth, not theology.*



An important idea and understanding for grappling with what went wrong is Matt Syrdal’s insight that our modern culture only supports a mono-phasic consciousness (Syrdal, September 18, 2020, oral presentation), that is, only one channel, as it were. The Celtic, Hebraic, and Indigenous cultures were and are multi-phasic consciousness. Of special significance, those cultures said it was not only okay but important to share the various channels with one’s community. It was not a taboo as it is in our contemporary culture, rather there was the expectation that such ‘receptions’ would be shared and communicated.

The Gospel of Mark portrays Jesus doing just that when he returns from his wilderness experience – in the first 15 verses of the book. Jesus returns after his temptations and fasting, from what could be called a vision quest, with the good

news; nothing was able to destroy his vision, his mission: The Time is Fulfilled! Now, here, we are set free, we can change our behavior, our way of being and living together. God's grace is ever with us.

Numerous things over the course of 2,000 years have contributed to this sense of "going wrong." One thing that Matthew Fox.¹¹⁹ shared was for me new information, a new perspective on historical dynamics. That was how the experience of the Black Death (Plague) throughout Europe in the Middle Ages was largely responsible for killing the understanding of the Cosmic Christ. The rapid and seemingly unstoppable deaths of so many people created a fear of nature, he said. People lost their sense of the sacredness of nature. Life became all about redemption, that is, how to save or redeem oneself amid utter chaos and destruction. Not a one-time tragedy, he pointed out, the resulting horrors of the genocide of indigenous peoples and the enslavement of African peoples were and are directly related to religion that had (has) lost the sense of the sacredness of creation and trust in it.

While the black death plague resulted in the loss of trust in creation and its sacredness, I am thinking that perhaps in our own time of the present Covid plague we may be turning the other direction, back to an understanding of creation's sacredness. There are signs of people expressing, at least the hope, of how this pandemic (if not a plague, per se) is forcing people to realize that our actions can no

¹¹⁹ Matthew Fox (b. 1940), A spiritual theologian, Episcopal priest, and an activist for gender justice and eco-justice. Author of 37 books. Speaker for the monthly SOW Luminaries series, 9/22/2020.

longer be viewed in isolation from earth's eco-system, that our actions have consequences, that creation is a piece, it is integral. This integrity is ultimate in the sense that it is sacred, that it, the material world, comes from consciousness (the sacred, the divine, the source, whatever terminology helps one come to terms with this reality). Perhaps we are now witnessing, indeed, participating in a reversal of fortune..¹²⁰ Mother Earth, on her own vision quest as it were,¹²¹ seems to be at work/play among us humans, coaxing and prodding us into our lost relationship of intimate connection.

How might we access this reawakening to the wildness of God, the sacredness of Nature? Matthew Fox suggested recovery of a sense and love of *Beauty* is part of it. Other elements of this reawakening might include the following. Julian of Norwich said *Wisdom* is the mother of all good things. *Prophetic imagination* (quoting biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann) is imperative according to Matthew Fox, for prophets speak out, combining the heart and mind chakras. The prophet in us is wild, too. Indeed, the historical Jesus is part of shamanic tradition, he had very clear wilderness vision.

¹²⁰ This perspective was in the early stages of the COVID pandemic, when there was a palpable sense among many people, myself included, that the socio-political trajectory (at least of North America) might actually undergo a fundamental shift, given the overwhelming evidence at hand. Unfortunately, while such a shift may be said to be underway on a deep level (witness the plethora of organizations, publishing, internet interactions, educational endeavors, etc. pursuing and advocating such), that has not proven to be the case in the everyday socio-political-economic world, where we see not only a return to "business as usual" but among a certain portion of the population attempts to embrace with a vengeance those beliefs and practices at the heart of the crisis.

¹²¹ An understanding Dr. Will Taegel first articulated, as far as I know. PhD, professor, author, and former Dean at Wisdom School of Graduate Studies, Ubiquity University, Taegel was also co-founder of the "Earth Tribe", an eco-spiritual community.

Present manifestations of social forces (some contemporary, others with us over the eons) resulting from a loss of trust in creation include fundamentalism, fascism, and patriarchy. Each attempt to control chaos (the God of Chaos), says Matthew Fox, is ludicrous because chaos is inherent in nature and the universe, indeed, of life on earth.

Loss of a sense of creation's sacredness has produced ennui, a certain dullness and boredom among the human species. Humans have become a narcissistic species, Matthew Fox claimed. But the universe is not here for us, we are here for it! We have forgotten the sacramental nature of the universe. We have lost our faith that God is in us, and we are in God. It is important we remember that the Hebrew meaning of faith is trust. Matthew Fox quoted Hildegard von Bingen (12th century) as pointing the way out of this boredom, "...we will arise from our boredom by our passion and call for justice." He made the connection, Justice is compassion, and God is justice.



Amid the Wild Christ module, I reflected on my personal perspective and interest in participating with Seminary of the Wild. I was originally attracted to SOW's year-long Eco-Ministry Certificate program not for the certificate, I already had more than enough pieces of paper on my walls, but to see what this group had

done connecting Christianity (the Christian story) with Eco-Spirituality. Of their four modules – Wild Self, Wild Earth, Wild Christ, Wild Call – I was most interested in the second and third. How were they helping people (curious, seekers, pilgrims) think about and connect with Mother Earth, and secondarily, how did Christ fit into the picture. As we progressed through the program it became clear to me that what SOW was up to was helping participants re-imagine Christ and the Christian story.

Re-imagining the Christian story or myth is paramount today. It is of vital importance if we as a society and culture are to successfully move into the new world aborning. It is crucial because so many people throughout the world claim the Christian faith,¹²² and because much of what passes as the philosophical basis of Western Civilization finds its foundation in the Christian tradition.¹²³ For better or worse, much blame for the dualistic understanding modernity propounds can be placed on Christianity. Like anything conflictive, however, the baby often gets thrown out with the bathwater. In the case of Christianity that has played out, among both its adherents and critics, in the denial of any mythological patterns and of any truth to most esoteric levels and understandings inherent in the Christian tradition, to metaphysical dimensions. Worst case, primarily among critics, is the denial of any truth to the tradition what-so-ever, dismissing the whole religious tradition as somehow antiquated and irrelevant.

¹²² Over 2.382 billion in 2020, according to Wikipedia.

¹²³ According to Carl Gustav Jung, the Christian story is the still living myth of Western Civilization. Shared by Matt Syrdal in his lecture.

Reimagining Christ opens the possibility of breaking free of our domesticated views and beliefs surrounding the central figure in Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth.¹²⁴ Reimagining Christ¹²⁵ also opens possibility of encountering a wild Christ, the Wild Christ; a wilder, wider, all-inclusive perspective of what Christ is, of what the word stands for, of the dynamic/energy/force that is Christ. Our reimagining takes us to a new and perhaps different place than where we have been, in this instance with our understanding of or belief in Christ. For example, we are reminded by Professor Ilia Delio, O.S.F., that the concept of Christ, both in scripture and among the church fathers, “relates to the Hebrew idea of corporate personality,” and that “the Pauline concept of the body of Christ...speaks of a sense of community that goes well beyond the idea of a collection of individuals.... Christ therefore refers to the whole and not to an individual person” (2011, p. 89). As we become awakened to this universal Christ, this power of love which is “the unifying and integrating center in creation” (p.136), and which gifts, as theologian Paul Tillich put it, the possibility of “New Being” and “New Reality” (Delio, p. 90), we open to a new consciousness; “a new birth, a new relatedness, a new way of being in the world” (Delio, p. 135).

Employing our imaginations in re-working or re-playing how we understand and thus interact with what we know as *Christ*, is a means for that something more (Spirit, God, Force, Consciousness) to break into our being. Using our imaginations,

¹²⁴ A case in point is Cynthia Bourgeault’s book *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind – a New Perspective on Christ and His Message*. (2008). Shambhala.

¹²⁵ Remember, “Christ” is not a last name. Although it may be used in conjunction with Jesus, Christ is not necessarily tied to a particular individual.

we can open new vistas and possibilities within our psyche and consciousness, we can actively play with that something more. At the very least we can give that something more a chance to set us free – from our self-imposed bonds as well as from familial and societal bonds. Our imaginations are key in any such transformation, or conversion.¹²⁶

A plethora of resources was provided by SOW through reading lists, lectures, videos, guided deep imaginal journeys, councils, mentoring, outdoor wanderings, journaling, and art. All of these, however, without imagination, could not take someone beyond where they already were. In other words, the necessary ingredient for movement from where one starts to a new space and perspective is imagination, the ability to see a-new, to image (imagine) something different. Our imagination is a doorway to the mysterious, to Spirit, to Christ, to work/play on and with us. Our imagination can open us to insight, inspiration, messages from beyond our individual psyches. Imagination can help us dream and create a new world, let alone self.

Much if not all the play of SOW is directed to help participants move or live into a new (already always present) way of identifying Self, Earth, Christ, and Call, that simply needs to be revealed and uncovered. Much like peeling off multiple onion skins to get at the truth. In this case, our one wild, precious life, to paraphrase

¹²⁶ I refer us to a helpful description of conversion provided by Delio: “Conversion (*metanoia*) refers to the way one arrives at a new way of looking at a situation or a new understanding of an issue....conversion is the maturity of accepting interdependence as the definition of human life and of life in the universe.” (Delio, 2011, p. 128).

poet Mary Oliver. SOW adopted the word Wild to convey this state of being, this true, underlying state of grace beneath our domesticated sense of Self, Earth, Christ, and Call.



As we moved through the Wild Christ module one of the elements we explored with the help of Brian McLaren¹²⁷ was that of **language**. Again, the significance of language; language proved a factor in each module, which is to say, in each dimension of human development and activity.

We are not unique in communicating through language, but us humans are unique in having words to express our thoughts. Although other sound-making creatures, such as dolphins and whales and dogs, may very well express themselves with “words” we have not yet been able to interpret or learn. And horses, among other creatures, communicate through a “language” of movement such as flicking ears, tossing head, and rolling eyes. Our human facility and ability with language is such that often we are not dealing directly with reality but with the symbolic system of language and that to which language points. This confusion of the symbolic with reality can create challenges especially when we deal with theology, when we speak about God and the Divine.

¹²⁷ Brian McClaren (b. 1956), American pastor, author, speaker, and leading figure in the emerging church movement. SOW Wild Luminary lecturer, October 13, 2020.

Language, however, also has, as Brian McClaren writes:

... numinous origins. It is free and wild. ... Our favorite poets and authors are able to connect us to a deeper longing at the heart of being human, to feel something real. To feel a sacred grief and love for a world that is alive, an empathy toward one another in our common and shared struggles. The language of praise evokes the deeper reality that the whole world is 'anointed' (messiah, in Hebrew) with divine presence, and that we are a part of a great and cosmic chorus. ...To be 'anointed' in this way is to belong to the grand array, the liturgy of the universe. Word images can reconnect us to this underlying reality of divine presence. As Sufi mystic Hafiz says, 'I am a hole in a flute that the Christ's breath moves through...listen to this music.' (SOW, October 6, 2020, *Writing and Wander Practice: Sacred Poetics*)

As always, our practices took us over thresholds, thresholds from the ordinary into "thin places" encountered or created in the landscape. "Thin places," where the Otherworld and this world meet, were and are seen as "special apertures from which divinity flowed forth, an ecstatic experience of 'living waters' (Gospel of John 4:11)" (SOW, week of September 29, *Wandering: Where Heaven and Earth Meet*).

One writing and wander practice I found fruitful was *Sacred Poetics*. This involved sifting through the poems, journal entries, scriptures, parables, koans, and quotes I read during the previous week and jotting down words and phrases in a free-flow manner on a page of my journal. The second phase involved determining which words and phrases would live in each of the four quadrants of the Wild Christ. These four quadrants were aligned with the four-directions wheel or circle of the

Wild Self module (East, South, West, North) and included various archetypes descriptive of Wild Christ's facets, as described on page 169 above.

Another exercise of this practice involved asking which characters or stories from the Bible or from other world myths or traditions would fit into each of the different quadrants. Are there qualities of Jesus or other spiritual leaders or figures that resonate with a particular quadrant?

I found that Jesus as a Whole person fits all four quadrants, that is, his fitting in and resonating with each quadrant reflects his integrity, his oneness or wholeness, his completeness: Healer, Shepherd King, Sacred Fool, Beloved, Wisdom Teacher, Generative Leader. And, so, too, to my surprise, does Mary Magdalene: Wisdom Teacher, Innocent, Healer, Sacred-Beloved, *Cantadora*, Divine Queen. Another interesting character who I found fit both North and South is Aragorn of *The Lord of the Rings*. In doing this exercise I was surprised how neatly, easily, and without questions Jesus fit all four quadrants. And even more surprised when Mary Magdalene did, too.

Digging deeper into the dynamics of language we explored the power of words and names. Poet and 2019 United States Poet Laureate Joy Harjo brings a bitter-sweet fragrance and strength with her writing.

... how to make it to the stars, on a highway slick with fear –

... The singers were singing the world into place, even as it continued to fall apart. They were making songs to turn hatred into love.” (Harjo, 2015, pp. 13 & 16)

And from a personal journal entry:

Naming the great mystery just that, Mystery. Mystery has been my overriding sense and sensibility of life, God, the divine or sacred since at least my earliest seminary days. I spoke of mystery in papers and applications for various schools and programs. I have held this concept and understanding of life my entire adult life. Hence the sense of awe and wonder. Indeed, mystery calls forth (demands even) a response of awe and wonder... at the unknown or unknowingness of it all. Even as things/stuff get answered, learned, understood, there is always more, always another question another layer or level of unknown, of mystery. To me, in my way of thinking, to consider one has the answer (to just about anything) is basically sacrilegious. It is a denial of our fallibility. (Journal notes, November 13, 2020)

“To remember the Name is to summon the Voice. The name opens the doorway, the portal” (SOW Invitations, week of November 10). The name *Christ* carries so much baggage. It has been attached to Jesus as if a last name, but that was never the case or the intent. The name Christ has been used as a banner of victory, empire, colonization, domestication of wilderness, and suppression of anything dark and feminine. However, the name Christ is not that alone, let alone at heart, in its indigenous sense. What images or names are we tracking that summon a Voice, a longing to sing, to wastefully belong?

The poet William Everson writes, “Christ was perhaps the greatest of all shamans... Forty days in the desert, the resurrection, the carrying of the cross, as a Sun Dance... Christ would relate to the Animal Powers that preceded our more sophisticated religious impulses” (SOW, November 10).

That which we of the West, of Western Christianity, consider to be truths related to “Christ” are not necessarily those of the entire Christian family, for instance Eastern Christianity. Indeed, “the Christianity of the East saw things radically differently,” Cynthia Bourgeault¹²⁸ writes in her book *Wisdom Jesus* (page 21). In the East “Christianity was supremely a wisdom path... In the original Aramaic of Jesus and his followers there was no word for salvation. **Salvation** was understood as a bestowal of life, and to be saved was “to be made alive.” This tradition “emphasizes how Jesus is like us, how what he did in himself is something we are also called to do in ourselves” (Bourgeault, 2008, p. 21).



Myth-telling, re-imagining his culture’s core beliefs and worldviews was central to Jesus’s mission and ministry. Steven Charleston, a Choctaw elder and Episcopal priest and bishop, talks about Jesus as an indigenous Messiah, as a myth-teller of the community gathered around his presence of power, healing, and renewal (*The Four Vision Quests of Jesus*). In this regard, Matt Syrdal writes, “the key to our uniquely human role as *homo poeta*, in the evolution of the universe seems to be in the power of our **story-telling**, meaning-making in the cultivation of the world –

¹²⁸ Cynthia Bourgeault (b. 1947), a modern-day mystic, Episcopal priest, writer, internationally acclaimed retreat leader, and a core faculty member at the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

the power to tell ourselves stories about who we are, and what we really are, our ultimate place in the world” (Syrdal, *Rewilding Our Narrative*, SOW handout).

Matt Syrdal and I have much in common, our appreciation of myth and storytelling, and the power of imagination. As I have shared previously, and it is worth repeating here, my primary question and guiding light for much of my intellectual journey since my early twenties has been, “What are the stories we tell ourselves about who and what we are?” My reply to Matt Syrdal, and to Geenen Marie Haugen and others articulating similar ideas is that Yes, this may very well be the heart of the matter. Mother Earth is expressing through us humans, in our dreams and stories and visions. We are part of the unfolding future. Indeed, it may be that our imaginations are the human uniqueness Earth is calling for, or better, making use of.



Such a reimagining of ‘Christ’ and “the bounds of the ‘kin-dom.’¹²⁹ of heaven’ to include Earth and cosmos, body and soul as well as spirit, requires the courage to **deconstruct** our cultural and anthropocentric distortions of our inherited patriarchal theology that had become severed from its rootedness in the natural world, the Creation” (Dowd, 2020, p. 3).

¹²⁹ “Kin-dom” is often used these days to replace the word “kingdom” and its patriarchal implications. I appreciate that it also resonates with the kinship concept I employ throughout.

Crucial to any successful deconstruction is honestly and fully assessing the present situation; no sugar-coating would be the appropriate cliché. The Rev.

Michael Dowd¹³⁰ pithily assesses our present predicament:

After centuries of profligate living, we have exceeded what ecologists call the *carrying capacity* of the biosphere. We have extracted more resources and exuded more wastes than Nature can sustainably provide and process. *Overshoot* is the ecological term for our species' predicament, and nothing in heaven or on Earth can spare us from the troubles ahead. We know this because Reality has revealed it through evidence. By dishonoring material grace limits, we have made a *Great Reckoning* inevitable. In the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, "Sooner or later we all sit down to a banquet of consequences." (Dowd, 2017)

Michael Dowd does say this great reckoning will be experienced as bad news for most of us humans alive today, however, it will be good news for other species and Earth's ecosystem. He calls this turning the "Great Homecoming." The essential key to this turn, he writes, "is that we will have learned to measure progress and success in bio-centric and eco-centric (Reality/GOD-centered) terms. Our descent into species narcissism will be a harsh memory, a clear warning, while stories of collective repentance and atonement become the bright new myths" (2017).

The power of words and stories or worldviews is appreciated by Michael Dowd. He writes, "Words create worlds and worldviews shape human behavior, individually and collectively." It is thus imperative that we understand the language

¹³⁰ Michael Dowd (b. 1958), an American progressive Christian minister, author, and eco-theologian; a veteran sustainability activist, religious naturalist, and big history evangelist. Michael Dowd, was the fifth SOW luminary lecturer, July 21, 2020. His topic was "God and Evolution."

and words we use to describe and simply talk about things – in our lives and in our world. For example, how do we talk about economics? the Divine? Michael Dowd argues that the limited and ultimately impotent notion of the divine currently reigning in most of the world “is directly responsible...for the demonic, anti-future economic system that now dominates human affairs” (2017, p. 2).

Michael Dowd equates GOD (he spells the word in lower case capitals to assist overcoming historical baggage) with REALITY or primary reality (two terms Dowd seems to use interchangeably). He makes his case concerning demonic economics based on the reigning worldview of human self-centeredness and denying or denigrating the Divine/GOD/REALITY.

When we trivialize primary reality as an otherworldly clockmaker (Creator) outside a clockwork cosmos (Creation), we contribute – albeit unintentionally – to our species’ demise. When GOD is either dead or otherworldly, according to Michael Dowd, doing evil is almost guaranteed. It is not just immoral, he writes,

it is evil to irreparably harm the future for short-term personal or institutional gain. Yet we have a global economic system, supported by governments on every continent and accepted by adherents of every faith, ensuring that it is not only legal to betray posterity; it’s profitable – highly profitable. This is precisely what history teaches: when religion fails, greed reigns and economics becomes demonic.

The Great Work of our time, writes, Micael Dowd, “is to do whatever it takes to bring forth an economic system that embodies the wisdom of ecology. ... returning to balance becomes our sacred duty” (2017, p. 4).

I appreciate Michael Dowd's facility in translating religious language into secular language and vice versa. His ability to reframe religious concepts and language into lay English is crucial for so-called post-modern people to "get" (and for many, simply to have a clue) what the Christian tradition means (at least what it meant traditionally). I will close this section with Dowd's brief nod to his mentor Thomas Berry,¹³¹ who reminded us that "The universe is primary; humans are derivative." And in Michael Dowd's brilliant use of language: "Reality rules – i.e., GOD is Lord."¹³² Indeed, as he says, "It turns out that the Judgment Day is real; it's just not otherworldly" (2017, p. 5).



As a closing to the Wild Christ module, we undertook a **"Ceremony of Wild Anointing."** We were to wander until we found a place or being through which the sacred Earth, the Mystery, the Wild Christ, wants 'to claim you'. After asking permission (to be there, to stay for a while), we were to introduce ourselves to the

¹³¹ Thomas Berry, CP (1914-2009) was a Catholic priest, cultural historian, and scholar of the world's religions. He called himself a "geologian". His most prominent books for purposes of this dissertation were *The Dream of the Earth* (1988), and in conjunction with cosmologist Brian Swimme, *The Universe Story* (1994).

¹³² Readers, remember, as explained just one page previous, Michael Dowd equates GOD and REALITY. He is saying, with his dynamic use of language, that in this age of climate change and socio-political unrest, REALITY will "judge" and the consequences will happen in *this* world, not some here-after pie-in-the-sky world. Dowd is flipping a couple concepts on their heads, providing access to and use of them, especially for Christians who find it difficult to accommodate their faith with scientific findings. The theological phrase, "GOD is Lord," becomes a recognition that Reality is the basis of what is; and secondly, he takes what is a difficult concept for many liberal Christians, let alone secular people, i.e., "judgment day," and makes it applicable to our current situation. One doesn't have to believe in "God" in order to appreciate what Dowd is doing, and that is part of its beauty.

place, and then enter into deeper conversation with the place through a simple ceremony.

I had “found” a spot on a small sandy beach, nestled behind tall bushes, along the Russian River.

Upon settling I realized I had been drawn to a spot on the river where the smooth glass-like flow shifted as it takes a small bend and apparently drops slightly, the water ripples and the current becomes visible – a place of change, perhaps.... I began the ceremony by sharing my intention as an offering. My intention was to develop a greater belonging to Mother Earth through a deeper surrender to the Mystery, through a relationship to Puha/Spirit/Mother Earth. After sharing my intention out loud (I was after all conversing with this place, with the water, the trees, the birds, and any animals that might be around) I took water from the river and touched it to my mind, my heart, my breath ... tapping into the flowing water. I gave thanks and played my South American wind whistle. The Cottonwood trees on the opposite shore rustled their leaves (it had been quite still until then), waving, dancing in the sunlight and breeze, thanking me for recognizing and praising them, for connecting and for honoring them and this place. (Personal journal, November 29, 2020)



4. Wild Call Module

With the new year (2021) we moved into the fourth and final Wild Call module. Our Wild Call Immersion involved questing a sense of Call; we were offered an invitation, and we were challenged to engage in a mutual call and response. We were invited to Commit to (to Enter; engage in Active Hope) the largest story

possible making us most capable of living into revitalization of our enchanted and endangered world.

Moving into this final module we re-visited the previous three areas (Self, Earth, Christ) with the intention not to figure things out but rather “to simply be listening with the ears of your heart” (SOW invitation). Listening to the voices of each of the four directions and their various personality characteristics is important because they know what is true for you and for me. And a relevant note: the word vocation comes from the Latin *vocare*, “to listen.” Insight I received from a journal writing practice posing the question, “what might saying ‘yes’ to one of the directions and/or to the wholeness of all of them, look like?”: *have more fun, not be so serious, trust.*

I felt most drawn to the West, and secondarily to the South. West, direction of the Muse, of the Beloved, of Mystery; remembers the future, direct access to dream of the Earth, dive deep, revel in the imaginal realm. South, direction of the Wild Indigenous One, Green Man, Lady of the Beasts; howl at the moon, play in snow, food fight, did you see salamander slide under rock....

Wrestling with Mystery was the theme for our afternoon wander during that opening immersion. A quote from Mary Oliver’s poem “My Work is Loving the World” (*Seedings*, SOW Wild Call Immersion handout) struck a resonating chord: “Let me/ keep my mind on what matters,/ which is my work,/ which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.” Who I am is *The possibility of beauty, wonder, and*

abundance.¹³³; it is no wonder I resonate with such work/play, learning to be astonished would seem to be at the heart of such a possibility.

The following day we looked at our sense of longing and grief, at what might have and still be keeping us from realizing our call or our genius, as Michael Meade expressed it in his SOW Wild Luminary lecturer, January 28, 2021, and in his book *The Genius Myth*. Paul's epistle to the church at Rome speaks of creation itself groaning in wait for the anointed One (Romans 8:22). I recalled an experience of creation's groaning:

I was standing on the edge of a lake/reservoir (both Lake Shasta and Lake Mendocino during drought in California a few years ago) when water level was extremely low and the barren earth scattered with old stumps long sunken below water level were exposed – the stripping of the land, tearing up of the forest and a natural ecosystem; Earth groaning. I felt pain, grief, sadness, almost like a blow to my body. Impact upon me was immediate, but it slipped away quickly, although the memory is embedded in me, and merely remembering it makes it real and present. It connects me with the tragedy, and crimes even, of U.S. government destroying homes and entire communities to build a dam and reservoir as it did in North Dakota to the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nations, flourishing beforehand in semipermanent, agricultural villages along the Missouri River, but literally adrift and often destitute afterwards ... groaning of Earth; of these humans as part of and an expression of Earth. (Personal Journal, January 8, 2021)

Recognizing one's grief is part of coming to terms with and recognizing what might be our personal genius; "what truly calls to us speaks to the personal myth

¹³³ That is my possibility, to use the language of Landmark Education. It is something I generated over 20 years ago, and something that continues to give me meaning and call me to adventure, to living life fully.

and the innate purpose seeded in our soul from the beginning,” as Michael Meade writes. Indeed, “the genius is what we aim to know and it is the force that drives us to awaken. Because each person has seeds of genius sown within their soul, each also has a calling to follow a purpose to pursue” (2016, pp. 95-96). Persons, events, and things have gotten in the way of each of us responding and pursuing, let alone recognizing, our unique gift to the world. We all have come up against obstacles in our paths of life. For example, some seemingly off-handed comments from others that have, unbeknown to them, nevertheless damagingly struck a tender chord within. Others, serious intra-personal and family minefields or “knife wielders” as some called them. It can seem like there is a concerted effort to deflate us.

A ceremony we undertook in the immersion to name, honor (recognize), and clear our grief used elements of earth symbolizing different aspects and emotions of our grief: a stone to represent fear; dry leaves, our sorrow or grief; a stick, anger; an empty bowl, hunger for what is missing, our deprivation and need; and a black cloth to represent shame. We arranged these items in a mandorla pattern.¹³⁴ for owning and honoring the pain and grief we feel in the world, for ourselves, and for others. As

¹³⁴ A mandorla (lit. ‘almond’ in Italian) is an ancient almond-shaped aureola, a container or frame that surrounds the totality of an archetypal or iconographic figure. Mandorlas often surround the figures of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in traditional Christian iconography. The mandorla is an ancient symbol of two circles coming together and overlapping one another to form an almond shape in the middle. Also known as the “Vesica Piscis”, symbolizing the interactions and interdependence of opposing worlds and forces, the circles may be taken to represent spirit and matter or heaven and earth, forming a lens shape, that brings intensity of focus to potential transformation. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandorla> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vesica_piscis).

we created our Truth Mandorlas we were to listen, to pay attention, to what might surface and ultimately to be open to what we might receive.

Strong feelings and recollections arose during this ceremony, for me it was especially with the stick and dry leaves (anger and sorrow/grief). I experienced anger and sorrow regarding my ancestors and their generational efforts working for peace and justice, for a cooperative society... and my father's and his father's feelings of being failures for not having successfully built such a society. I recalled my father apologizing, in his last years, for his failure to me and my siblings and to his grandchildren. Tears came. That recollection tied into my deep sadness and grieving over our society repeatedly choosing profit over compassion and people, choosing military might and death and destruction of people(s) throughout the globe. Placing the stone drew forth my fear of losing my optimism and hope, of not staying true to my sense of calling to encourage and embrace beauty and wonder... of becoming a cynical old man.

What came to me, as I put forth the query of what kind of vow, commitment, or ceremony I could make to myself, that might name me within all the above, was that I am *"a walking blessing, sowing seeds of beauty, wonder, play, and joy."* I offered this to all six directions (the four cardinal directions as well as to Mother Earth, and to Father Sky/Sun). Each person had an opportunity to share in clans. After each share we chanted, "For the love of the world, that all may hear and respond to their call." Recognizing and embracing the Reality of interconnected Earth and Spirit and the power of language and ceremony, this was very powerful. I

realized that the gift and the wound go together, that the path of genius (as Michael Meade proposes) is always a path of healing as well as growth.



“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.” Heeding these words of author and theologian Frederick Buechner, we deepened into our conversation about call, addressing the calling to “an oppressed and subjugated world” (SOW Cohort Gathering handout). The premise was that awakening to and responding to our groaning world is a core component of our calling as humans; that in so doing we find our own liberation.

As a group we reflected on the biblical story of Esther (*The Book of Esther*) in which she has to decide if she will go to the king to attempt to save her people. As she ponders her potentially life-threatening decision the advice a trusted advisor gives her applies to all of us today: you may have been put here (in this life, at this time) for this very reason, i.e., to save your people. Part of wrestling with our calling is being willing to risk everything to carry out fidelity to something within us. Perhaps, like Esther, that is standing against injustice. Each of us must ask ourselves, “What is the great price of our authenticity?”

Awakening to the ways we might help heal the wounds of history and contribute to re-weaving nature and culture as we participate in the re-creation of the world, we re-cognize, re-member, re-story that we are in a dance of reciprocity.

For as I respond to my calling, the world responds, to which I in turn respond. As we engage, we are transformed.



The final Wild Luminary, Laurie Ferguson¹³⁵, spoke on “Moving Through Resistance” (February 18, 2021). She reminded everyone that resistance is to be expected with any change, and so need not be feared or resisted. Indeed, resistance is part and parcel of the spiritual path. It is an invitation to grow, but it is, too, a wily trickster, it can also be a surprising friend. Laurie Ferguson navigates resistance as a *dance of being* (how do we show up and allow ourselves to be open, wake up, be in the moment), *and becoming* (but always more, how to be more open, more awake). Briefly put, what we need in order to deal with and overcome resistance is a wholistic three-pronged approach:

1. An open mind (think) in the face of the voice of judgment,
2. An open heart (feel) in the face of the voice of cynicism,
3. An open will or intention (gut) in the face of the voice of fear.

(Ferguson, 2021).

Resistance can be seen and thus interacted with as a paradox or a puzzle, as well as a problem to face. Circle around, be curious, question, pause, ask what is the message that it is bringing to me? Community, peers and mentors, may very well be

¹³⁵ Laurie Ferguson is a coach, consultant and a psychologist. She served as a parish pastor for over 20 years before getting her doctorate in psychology.

necessary -- to stand up for you, to support, to help us hold this counter-cultural approach.

Using the eco-developmental circle from the Wild Self module we can understand engaging resistance as advanced loyal soldier work, that is, as a means of achieving and maintaining something authentic. In this regard, when we run into resistance, we reassign our loyal soldiers (our inner critics) telling them something like, “I’m going to go ahead and do this, and I am going to put you (my critics, loyal soldiers) up behind my shoulder. Your *new* task is to let me know when I am doing something *not* in line with my heart, my being, my purpose. Then I will listen to you.”



I had insightful mentoring sessions during this Wild Call module with Brian Stafford, M.D., my SOW faculty mentor and clan facilitator. We had conversations about my DMin work and how it fit with the SOW Eco-Ministry program. We also had many enlightening conversations about imagination and the imaginal realm. Future reading for me will include Carl Gustav Jung’s autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, in which he saw that the imaginal is primary in life. As Brian Stafford put it, “It is just routine or habit that we think daily activities are more important than the imaginal.” The Talking Heads song “Water Flowing Underground” came to mind enticing us to look deeper, that much of what goes on in life is underground or unconscious. Possible ways discussed to access the imaginal include dreams, deep imaginal journeys, courting the Beloved (...into the West, direction of imaginal,

the muse, the beloved, mystery), and holotropic breath work of the renown Czech psychiatrist Stanislav Grof,¹³⁶ among others.

As I explore the imaginal, an important reminder from my mentor is that one can over think the imagination, it is more about participation and giving oneself to these others, it cannot be just an abstract, intellectual exercise. My research into the imaginal realm is not a one-dream stand, as it were, it is long-term dreaming. In opening to the West, the direction to which I feel most allured and called I can court the qualities of the West – even dress up as my most Westerly qualities, adorn myself in a way most alluring to the Beloved who showed up in my dreams. I am to keep allowing dreams to come to me; speak them out loud, speak at dusk facing West. I cannot just dip my toes in, I must be awash. Be curious, revisit dreams and journeys, have conversations with Bison, Raven, Beloved, and others I have encountered. Ask them how do they make me whole? What do they have for me in how I am to serve the world?

My responsiveness to the West is beyond rational analysis, it is beyond reasoning and logic, it is, in truth, reciprocating to and with the response I received to my invoking and calling upon the spirit/energy/consciousness of Mother Earth, entreating her to guide me in deepening our connection, hers and mine. I opened myself to mystery, wonder, beauty, Mother Earth, Father Sun, calling for guiding

¹³⁶ A therapeutic technique suggested by my mentor, which I have not experienced. “Holotropic Breathwork® is a powerful approach to self-exploration and personal empowerment that relies on our innate inner wisdom and its capacity to move us toward positive transformation and wholeness.” <https://www.holotropic.com/holotropic-breathwork/about-holotropic-breathwork/>

spirits and helper animals, for dreams, for messages. In my deep dive in this awesome dance of reciprocity, it was the West which called most strongly to my inner self, for further and deeper exploration. This reciprocal courting involves creating portals for mythic imagination and the imaginal realm -- through dreams and visions, non-agenda times of wandering and daydreaming, practicing heart coherence. Another image for the West is “the fruitful dark,” it is wound together with the idea that dark equals unknown, in the positive attribute of “I don’t know.” The fruitful dark is the creative, womb-space from which possibility arises.

As I carve out my role in the on-going creation, and as we each do so, Michael Meade’s words encompass big-picture purpose for us:

Genius is the source of all innovation and invention; but also the driving spirit of human participation in the ongoing creation of the world. The human soul with its resident genius is intended to be an agent of creation, a knowing participant in the constant re-creation of the world. The genius myth ties each of us to the ongoing story of creation and calls upon us to awaken to the precise ways that we might help heal the wounds of history and contribute to the reweaving of nature and culture. (Meade, 2016, p. 47)



5. SOW – Conclusion

During our final Clan meeting, we each shared what we had learned (from the year) and how we may have changed, and/or what we feel has been meaningful about the journey.

I learned a greater appreciation for and acquired a relationship with Nature, The Wild, in new and deeper ways. Reciprocity is a hugely important dynamic, including the dance of call and response, among humans and among more-than-humans. Nature/Mother Earth is just waiting for me. Everything is alive: elements, directions, planets, stars. Wildness is key to access and exchange or relationship in the sense of being true to Self, embodying Wholeness, being integral; so too is wily Coyote-Trickster!

What I found most meaningful about the journey with Seminary of the Wild over the previous year: Introduction to dream-work, playing with dreams; Idea about and ways of being engaged with Courting the Beloved, ramifications and possibilities thereof. Both of which are ways of accessing the imaginal realm, the realm of possibility... and grace and love.

I became clear that my calling is (still) that which I intuited (in-spirited, inspired) in one of my Landmark Education programs many years ago (late 1990s): “Who I am is the possibility of beauty, wonder, and abundance.” And my commitment – shared aloud with the gathered, entire Cohort Council toward the end of our year program: I commit to dancing and playing with mystery and power of imagination in birthing a new world, in the never-ending cycle of life and death, renewal and rebirth.

I close this chapter with this cut-to-the-heart poem by 14th century Persian poet, Hafiz¹³⁷, shared in the final SOW Invitation. It pretty much says it all.

We Have Not Come to Take Prisoners

We have not come here to take prisoners
But to surrender ever more deeply
To freedom and joy.

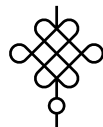
We have not come into this exquisite world
To hold ourselves hostage from love.

Run my dear, From anything
That may not strengthen
Your precious budding wings,

Run like hell, my dear,
From anyone likely to put a sharp knife
Into the sacred, tender vision
Of your beautiful heart.

We have a duty to befriend
Those aspects of obedience of our house
And shout to our reason
“Oh please, oh please
Come out and play.”

For we have not come here to take prisoners,
Or to confine our wondrous spirits
But to experience ever and ever more deeply
Our divine courage, freedom, and Light!



¹³⁷ Hafiz of Shiraz (14th century CE Persian poet, Khwāja Shams-ud-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfeẓ-e Shīrāzī, c. 1320-1389).

B. WILD HEART QUEST

In this chapter I explore the meaning and purpose of the Wild Heart Quest within the context of the eco-spiritual community Earthtribe and Earth Wisdom Academy. Central to this exploration are my experiences and learnings during the Wild Heart Quest process. My mentor throughout was Dr. Will Taegel, author, psychologist, Wisdom School faculty and former dean, and a co-founder of the Earthtribe. My experiences and reflections have been nourished through conversations with Dr. Taegel, participation in monthly online Earthtribe gatherings, my readings, and from personal shamanic journeys. Throughout I connect personal and community experiences and ceremonies with perspectives from transcendental physics,¹³⁸ and the synergy of ecopsychology¹³⁹ and the matrix of field physics,¹⁴⁰ which are fundamental to the worldview embraced by Earthtribe.

The Wild Heart Quest (WHQ) is an elective within the Eco-Spiritual Mentoring certificate program of the Earth Wisdom Academy and is usually engaged after completing the initial course, “Earth Wisdom and the Primordial Mind.” As that course ended in December 2019, I was invited by the co-instructor, Dr. Lillie Rowden, to consider participating in the WHQ. I accepted.

¹³⁸ Close, Edward R. *Transcendental Physics*, (1997, 2001). Basic premise: Consciousness is ultimate and prior to the material or physical universe.

¹³⁹ **Ecopsychology** is an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary field that focuses on the synthesis of ecology and psychology and the promotion of sustainability.... it focuses on studying the emotional bond between humans and the Earth. (www.Wikipedia.org)

¹⁴⁰ The **field** definition in physics is **a region of space in which a force acts**. Because a field is a region of space, it can be made of anything (or nothing if it is a vacuum).
<https://study.com/academy/lesson/fields-physics-overview-examples.html>

The WHQ is a practice dedicated to the further development of an in-depth connection with the natural order and its eco-fields, with the aim of deepening intimacy and compassion, and assisting in a “Great Return” of human beings to the original source of the natural order (Taegel, *Earth on Vision Quest* presentation). It is undertaken in the larger context and understanding that *Mother Earth is on Vision Quest*,¹⁴¹ and we are her eyes, ears, hands, and feet.

The WHQ includes and transcends the traditional North American, Indigenous “Vision Quest” and seeks to unfold a process more linked to a variety of traditions, including those currently being unfolded through Earth’s evolving consciousness. The Earthtribe website states: “The Wild Heart Quest invites us to think of Mother Earth as a Whole. It invites us to engage Buddha by the tree, Jesus on the mountain top, and Rachel Carson by the sea. We continue to embrace our North American, indigenous elders while gaining a sense of the larger Whole” (Earthtribe, n.d.). The Quest links with that domain of consciousness little influenced by humans, belongs to all cultures, and is not possessed by any particular culture. While faithful to indigenous traditions, the WHQ blends together the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary.

In the Earthtribe, a WHQ is a three-part process under the guidance of a tribe Elder. The first part, one has the aspiration to quest. The seeker attends the monthly *Earth on a Vision Quest* online council gathering as a general supporter, part of the

¹⁴¹ The theme *Earth on a Vision Quest* comes from a vision Will Taegel had that Mother Earth herself is on a vision quest at this time of history.

Earthtribe community. Once ready to pursue a quest, the seeker works with a guide in finding a stake and preparing a stake ceremony. The second step begins when the seeker puts his or her stake in the ground declaring the intention to quest. It is a time of preparation and purification of body, mind, and spirit which culminates in the Wild Heart Quest proper, which is often referred to as the WHQ sit or circle.

The WHQ circle sit is a brief retreat.¹⁴² “into nature in solitude, removed from the distractions and trappings of modern life, [in which] the quester opens to a heightened state of awareness.” It is a dedicated time of sitting in a circle formed by one’s prayer ties. As in traditional vision quests the WHQ can be “a doorway to enter spiritual realms” (former Earth Wisdom Academy website). Due to pandemic restrictions, stake ceremonies and quests were held individually at each quester’s location and shared via video.¹⁴³ Summaries of the quests were subsequently shared at Earthtribe Zoom gatherings.

During both parts of preparation, the seeker notices what energies come into his or her circle of awareness and what lessons are to be learned. He or she works with settling the mind and emotions, spending time in nature, and paying attention to how their quest is showing up in daily life. The third segment is spent processing the WHQ proper and integrating it into one’s life. It is also time for the quester to give

¹⁴² The WHQ circle sits of the EWA were generally about four hours in duration. They were not the three or four days of fasting which are common for traditional vision quests.

¹⁴³ See pages 75-76 in chapter on “Shamanic and Scientific Connections...” for comments on impacts of lack of physical presence.

back to the community that supported the quest. One shares aspects of the vision received that may benefit the tribe and his or her community.

A Wild Heart Quest takes account of the reality that humanity is in “the midst of a crisis that reaches into the loins of the Earth.” To find solutions, we must “bring into our inner council of selves that wild aspect not yet dominated by culture” (Taegel, 2010, p. 171). The vision quest is a shamanic practice undertaken individually but held within a community (Earthtribe); a community that provides “an atmosphere for listening to Nature’s untamed resources, and nourishes the dialogue between the wild heart and the civilized selves” (Taegel, 2012, p.289). Community dialogue and support are crucial because wild heart quests may pull us “against our civilized selves and stretch us. In the tension, [however,] solutions may arise” (Taegel, 2010, *ibid.*).

A significant aspect of the WHQ for me was it taking place within the circle and support of a community. The quest was not an isolated, individual endeavor, the quest was an integral practice of this community, “embedded in the communal life.” “[T]he fullness of the quest occurs only in ongoing community. ... Just as one or two trees do not make a forest, so a quest requires the tribe. Indeed, the quest is for the individual, the tribe, and the whole Earth” (Earthtribe website). Although a newcomer, the Earthtribe was open and supportive of me and others who, like myself, were entering the circle of this community through the gate of this new, hybrid practice, the Wild Heart Quest.



My wild heart questing began in earnest during the summer of 2020, with regular, monthly phone calls with my Earthtribe mentor Will Taegel (he lived in Texas, I was in California), and attendance at the monthly, tribal council gatherings (via Zoom online) which were called *Earth on a Vision Quest*. Another piece was the monthly Spirit Lodge virtual gatherings.

During my first council call with my mentor, he guided me through new ideas and ways to explore and incorporate what was for me a new way of thinking about my daily experiences. With this WHQ, I am in the process of enlarging or upgrading my consciousness and energizing the consciousness of my circle or vortex. What is necessary is to realize that the three-dimensional world around me is a form of consciousness. The birds, dogs, animals, et cetera, are condensed consciousness; this is the message of the “new” sciences. A generalized way of summarizing the “old,” 20th century (and earlier) science says that consciousness grows out of the material, an epiphenomenon of the brain. On the other hand, the new sciences such as quantum physics, what Dr. Edward Close calls *Transcendental Physics* (Close, 1997), the science of Fields.¹⁴⁴ (Taegel, 2012, Feynman, 1998, Sheldrake, 1995), and a new and still rare discipline, Dimensional Biopsychophysics.¹⁴⁵ (Neppe

¹⁴⁴ “In addition to what we call the gravitational field, there are three other fields now accepted by mainstream science: the electromagnetic field, the strong nuclear field, and the weak nuclear field.” (Taegel, 2012, p. 63)

¹⁴⁵ Dimensional Biopsychophysics (DP): A new multidisciplinary term that impacts across many different major areas of study. DP includes dimensions, the finite and infinite, and consciousness. It

and Close, 2012) say just the opposite, that the material is a manifestation of consciousness; that the material are sensual and perceivable forms of consciousness.¹⁴⁶

In building my world, I have the option and opportunity of attending to everything that comes to the edge of my circle as another form of consciousness developing in me. What comes to me is like a gym for exercising this new muscle. For example, going to the ranch where my wife and I board our horses. Even though I have been going there a while, now it is new, now I have a new task or intention, to see and engage with things and critters differently, to develop this new consciousness, to upgrade my consciousness.¹⁴⁷ This new consciousness is fledgling in me like the baby hawk chicks on the ranch.¹⁴⁸



Our conversation moved to the realm of wilderness – Will Taegel stated that no one knows how to define wilderness, and it is a crucial question. Indeed, in my

integrates the broader scientific biological, psychological and physical disciplines and includes mathematics. (Glossary in Neppe & Close, 2012).

¹⁴⁶ One book that develops this thesis is, *What is Reality? The New Map of Cosmos and Consciousness*, by Ervin Laszlo and Alexander Laszlo. (2016). SelectBooks, Inc.

¹⁴⁷ Only after completing my research did I learn of a movement called “The Upshift.” An instance of synchronicity, it would seem... Growing from Ervin Laszlo’s book *The Upshift: The Path to Healing and Evolution on Planet Earth* (2022), it is about upshifting our consciousness and meeting the challenges our world faces today, “building a world beyond war.” Ervin Laszlo articulates this as “a phase of upshift to higher levels of order and coherence to keep us on our evolutionary path.”

¹⁴⁸ While pursuing my research a pair of hawks hatched four chicks in a nest high in one of the trees overlooking the paddocks and fields of the small ranch where we boarded our two horses. Watching the chicks grow and eventually learn to fly and dive (swooping down while in flight) from their parents was a fascinating experience; and timely -- consciousness speaking.

notes I wrote, “as a human, questioning my understanding of wilderness... everything pivots on my understanding; on this view of wilderness!” Will Taegel referenced the book *1491* by Mann,¹⁴⁹ as illustrating that what Europeans experienced as wilderness was how the landscape appeared after 100 years of pandemic that killed, potentially, millions of indigenous people, and also after millennium of millions of people living here, in North America, and “managing” the land. As we open the question “what is wilderness?”, as individuals and as community, it is important at the outset for us to concede that we are not quite sure.

There is an interior aspect to this question, to the realm of wilderness. Looking inside into our “inner council of selves” we can say there is an “ecology of selves.”¹⁵⁰ My task is to pay attention to my experience and feelings when observing Nature/the Wild – the fledgling hawks, the horses, et al. Specifically, pay attention to what in me is not from culture, that is, in other words, to that which challenges my usual patterns of understanding and control; to that “for which we have few, if any, maps” (Taegel, 2010, p. 174). My new awareness was that Earth¹⁵¹ as an organic system has a vested interest in Eric Dale, in me as a representative of the human species. Through that vested interest Earth is sending me information that may help

¹⁴⁹ Mann, Charles, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, 2010, Vintage Books.

¹⁵⁰ Dr. Will Taegel contrasts “ecology of selves” to a “psychology of selves.” Personal conversation.

¹⁵¹ I refer here to Earth as the interested organic system, but I could also include the entire Cosmos on one end of the spectrum and the local watershed on the other end of the spectrum. Granted the interconnectivity and participatory nature of Reality, *everything* is inter-related (as argued in this dissertation). I refer to Earth because I live on this planet within the solar system and greater cosmos. Also, I contend that Mother Earth herself is on a vision quest and thus imbued with a certain agency.

the greater system, that is, Earth. Ask, why is this little ranch (where my wife and I board our horses) interested in Eric Dale?

As I explore my eco-field, my interior landscape engaging with the phenomenal world of forms of consciousness, there is always a bi-focal thing going on. On the one hand, again considering the hawk chicks on the ranch, the hawks surviving and growing has *nothing* to do with me. On the other hand, it has *everything* to do with me. *Both* are true. The larger system is sending me information, information that only I can decipher.

Another example of this bifocal dynamic was the four pelicans that flew directly overhead at the ranch one day in the form of a diamond (see page 162). These pelicans brought diamond shape into my wild heart circle. The bifocal see-saw in this case: on one side, I dismiss the notion of any symbolism for me; on the other, there is clearly some weight added to my circle and pelicans entering it. The task: listen! watch! pay attention! Indeed, all sensibilities engaged.

“Such a pathway allows for the deep experience of BEING SEEN by the sacred web of Earth’s being. This WHQ process emphasizes a reciprocal, participatory interaction within Mother Earth as she unfolds. More and more, we are experiencing Mother Earth’s unfolding through us as tiny cells within her being” (Earthtribe website).

Mother Earth herself is on a vision quest and we are a part of her quest, perhaps she is using us. I paraphrase Will Taegel’s description, from his talk to the

Earthtribe virtual *Earth on a Vision Quest* gathering on March 7, 2021: what Earth is unfolding inside her being as an organism at this particular time in her life, you and I are a part of her unfolding and so it is important we try to understand what she is saying. Our previous thinking, he said, was that a quest was about the quester seeing, hearing, and/or experiencing something, but it turns out that was only half of it. The other half is the realization that the quester is *being seen*! The experience of being seen is the core of the quest.



These monthly gatherings were helpful to me in bringing this new way of seeing and understanding onto a broader social and global scale. For example, in the first few months of 2021 we were looking at the different forms or waves of energy emanating out of Mother Earth. Prominent waves in North America at the time were: 1) Trumpism, revealing the fragility and underbelly of our (U.S.A.) experiment with democracy; 2) pandemic; much deeper than #1, Mother Earth saying, “let’s go deeper...”; 3) (even deeper) wildfires in the West and winter onslaught in Texas.¹⁵²... going and getting deeper and deeper into vulnerability, and getting wilder and wilder... way beyond “me” and the “state” to handle or deal with.

¹⁵² “In February 2021, the state of Texas suffered a major power crisis, which came about during three severe winter storms sweeping across the United States on February 10–11, 13–17 (known as Winter Storm Uri), and 15–20. The storms triggered the worst energy infrastructure failure in Texas state history, leading to shortages of water, food, and heat. More than 4.5 million homes and businesses were left without power, some for several days.” The official death toll was 246. All the Earthtribe members living in Texas told of harrowing experiences.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Texas_power_crisis#:~:text=In%20February%202021%2C%20the%20state,\)%2C%20and%2015%E2%80%93320](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Texas_power_crisis#:~:text=In%20February%202021%2C%20the%20state,)%2C%20and%2015%E2%80%93320)

Considering Mother Earth being on a vision quest, we are getting taken into an initiatory process of living without support of human control, without a safety net we thought was there.

A provocative way of addressing this initiatory process that resonates with my sensibility is provided by Alexander Laszlo in his blog “Embodying and Enacting Humanity’s Sacred Mission” (2024). He writes, “Awakening to Humanity’s Sacred Mission is a **re-membering** of our roles and response-abilities as dancers in the cosmic jam session that has been playing since time immemorial. Time to shake a mean leg – or perhaps a more gentle, loving, and mystery-imbued one” (emphasis added). As Mother Earth undergoes her quest things are “thrown” at us which provide opportunities for us to re-learn or remember our roles not only in the human drama but in the cosmic jam session. We must remember how to dance, to flow with the rhythm of life, nature, Mother Earth, Spirit, not merely follow blindly (unconsciously) domesticated cultural scripts or narratives. Similarities here with SOW.

It was interesting to note that arguably the two most powerful states in the U.S. (California and Texas) are where Mother Earth is acting up, giving us a real jolt; even the most powerful states are powerless! What is at issue here is learning and adapting to shuttle back and forth between worlds (e.g., vaccinated and unvaccinated, illusion under control and reality not under control), between what is happening deeper and practical reality, in what shamans call Middle World.

Personal lessons I was receiving had to do with recognizing that I am in the process, in this WHQ, of enlarging my consciousness and energizing the consciousness of my circle, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Physical: “hurts” (electrical impulses me and my body are generating that other creatures pick up). Mental: grapple more with my inner council. Spiritual: working with my allies, my stake, etc. Within our circle we always have a voice that wants to speak (i.e., information) and the polar opposite (I don’t know anything). I recognize my identity as a polar vortex, i.e., two poles operating within my circle. Later discussions with my mentors, Dr. Will Taegel and Dr. Alexander Laszlo, confirmed the similarity of this polar vortex to what physicists David Bohm and Karl Pribram referred to as the Holoflux or Holomovement, the dance between the implicate and the explicate orders.

The reader will note that I have been stating some concepts and perspectives as given, conveying that they are accurate, real, and genuine; and they are, at least for me and for Earthtribe and those of us on the WHQ. I state it this way because part of embracing these “new” understandings of the universe, of reality, that are being revealed by the new sciences, particularly quantum and transcendental physics, is the ability to accept them and to integrate them within one’s being. Indeed, our perception of reality seems to be dependent on us the observer, that is, reality communicates with the observer, but the dilemma or challenge is, as Edward Close puts it, “the message received depends largely upon how much we are willing and able to accept” (Close, 1997, pp. 250-51). Close goes a step further stating on

page 273 of his book, the major barrier to realizing the new paradigm, i.e., the nature of reality, is that of disbelief. And I say, here is the place and role of imagination; imagination is that through and by which we as humans are capable of willing and accepting newness and change. Imagination is necessary to take the next step(s).

Why even explore these questions raised in the WHQ? Why explore this whole realm of inquiry? Because by doing so we engage “a process of integration: the experience, knowledge, and understanding is becoming a part of one’s being” (Close, p. 253). Our journey of exploration, both inner and outer, enables us to integrate our findings into our very being. We come to know intimately what we find, as such it becomes a part of us, no longer something abstract, no longer merely an intellectual concept. Participating in eco-spiritualities such as the Earthtribe or SOW provides a necessary means and support for engaging such a process, for grappling with these new and different understandings of reality, of our life and journey with Mother Earth and the Cosmos.

Another element of participating with the Earthtribe was the monthly Spirit Lodge gatherings. The Spirit Lodges¹⁵³ are a way to draw on the wisdom of the sweat lodge. In the Spirit Lodges we are being introduced to pre-historic wisdom of the directions, the four cardinal directions plus the additional layered directions of ancestors, relations, Mother Earth, and Father Sky/Sun, for a total of eight directions. It is important to realize that each direction has energy, and they have an

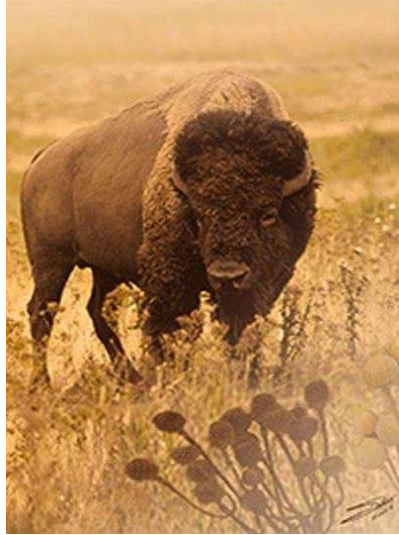
¹⁵³ Monthly Spirit Lodges were held virtually via Zoom by the Earthtribe during the first year and a half of the Covid-19 pandemic.

interest in *my* quest. The directions provide a lens to look at reality. Indeed, the inner dynamics of the sweat lodge, that of the medicine wheel,¹⁵⁴ is the best vehicle Will Taegel has found to hold all this material and information of the (our) vortex (Taegel, p.c.). The eight directions are a rich integration of reality... all over the world, not just in North America. The Spirit Lodge with its ceremony is helping me identify the voices of the different directions.

One of the Spirit Guides or Helpers I encountered during my WHQ was Buffalo.¹⁵⁵ He came to me in November 2020, during an online healing circle in which I participated with Shamanic Reiki Worldwide. We were directed to go (journey) to our sacred space, ask for a guiding spirit, and ask for a gift, if they had any for us. Buffalo showed up for me, a huge, male buffalo. He came right up to me where I was seated, breathed on me, blowing his breath across, over, and into me. I could feel his warmth and incredible energy and power. I could smell the earth on him, sort of like the smell of wet wool. The gift he gave me was strength and fearlessness, strong heart!

¹⁵⁴ I use the term “medicine wheel” here because of its use by the Earthtribe, as adopted from Bear Heart, but I also recognize and acknowledge the misuse of this indigenous symbol by many, especially over the last 50+ years. Otherwise I speak of the four (five, six, seven or eight – different people and systems use different numbers) directions circle in reference to its use as a symbolic teaching vehicle for inherent energies and/or psychological dynamics of the earth and humans.

¹⁵⁵ Commonly known as Buffalo, Bison is the “proper” scientific term for the animals we know in North America. Technically, Buffalo refers to the animals in Asia more common to what we refer to as Water Buffalo. I use the two terms interchangeably, although I mostly use Buffalo.



Later I learned that Buffalo is a symbol for strength and perseverance. Unlike domestic cattle that turn away from storms, and often perish in severe weather, buffalo turn into the storm. In other words, they face their challenges, they persevere. This came to be significant for me as my WHQ stretched out over the course of almost two years. I called upon Buffalo for strength in persevering. I also came to see that the WHQ was a process, it had no hard and fast timeline like I originally anticipated but, rather, each person traversed his or her quest in their unique fashion and timeframe. Furthermore, it was not a matter of life “getting in the way” of the quest, it was rather my quest showing up as my life. I came to see that all the events and situations coming to me as I lived my daily life, all the so-called disruptions, were pieces in my WHQ, they were part of my circle. They were energy and forms of consciousness showing up for Eric Dale on his Wild Heart Quest, or more accurately, as my WHQ.



1. Listening – Paying Attention

Examples of my listening to Earth, my paying attention to things coming up, things going on in my life as part of my quest, were many. They arose as Spiraling Circles in my pursuit of expanding consciousness. They were opportunities for me to sharpen my focus. Often, very practical things come up with quests, that is, with additional information (nudges, hints, curve balls, big lessons). A big one for me was having to get rid of numerous files and hundreds of books in my move from California to Washington, after retirement.¹⁵⁶ With that give away I came to realize I was saying to Earth: I am ready to be bigger, to understand myself in a new way, for my personality to be different. Letting go! And yet, I need to be gentle with Eric (with myself) who did save all these things.

There would seem to be an internal guidance system of the universe. Lots of little indicators that can lead or point to bigger things, to which we need to pay attention! For example, encountering Coyote (two of them) crossing the road in Nevada, and Pronghorn Antelope watching us drive by, these seemingly simple and happenstance occurrences were significant (see below, p. 232-33). The process of tying my prayer ties which were to form the boundary of my quest circle (see p. 242) came to be appreciated as an exercise in really being awake. It became increasingly clear that my growing sensitivity to the myriad things that arose during my days was me gaining a greater awareness of my consciousness and the interrelatedness of

¹⁵⁶ Between my wife and I, we had two personal professional libraries, we gave away over 30 boxes of books.

everything. I realized that choosing how to encounter what comes to my circle is very important. The next two sections relate in some detail how I choose to encounter two specific situations occurring in my life, i.e., as my Wild Heart Quest.



a. Horses

Reflecting on my experiences with *Rohan, my horse*, I came to understand them within three general frameworks.

- a. I have a dense form of consciousness in the form of horse – my horse, Rohan.
- b. I also have spirit of horse, archetypal, which manifests in many horses; and which manifests in relationship to me putting my stake in the ground.
- c. Everything in the manifest universe is actually a form of consciousness. In a more subtle type, Rohan, an expression of archetype.

What follows is my attempt to articulate the process of deepening consciousness or awareness.

Out of my letting go (of my many “I’s”, e.g. Eric of files and books) what is emerging is Eric more aligned with archetype, in this case, that of Horse. On one level this is dealing with moving horses (from California to Washington). On a deeper level, I whistle, and Rohan comes – we recognize each other – and this leads to an even deeper level of consciousness: my being gifted with Rohan. Horse Archetype/Spirit/ Consciousness is calling me to a deeper level of quest. It is

working with me over time. Archetype Horse is seeking to participate in my unfolding. Here was the possibility of consulting archetypal Spirit Horse, to lift me up like Pegasus.

Traditionally, the horse archetype was thought of as connecting Earth and Sky, and you have Spirit Horse, Pegasus, that can fly.¹⁵⁷ Among many shamanic cultures the horse was seen as a carrier of the shaman between worlds in their journeying.¹⁵⁸ Ginger Krantz, founder and principal of Earth Horse Healing, comments:

For many cultures, the horse has been a symbol for the journey of the shaman. An animal that transports the healer into another dimension of reality. ... The horse, a four-footed, well-grounded animal with a powerful spirit is the perfect totem. The shaman values those qualities of the horse and embodies them to walk between the two worlds of flesh and spirit. The shaman's feet are firmly planted on the earth and her heart is lifted by a spirit that is free. (<https://earthhorsehealing.com/>)

¹⁵⁷ “**Pegasus** (*Pegasos* in Greek, Πήγασος), the magnificent **winged horse** (or *pterippus*) of Greek mythology.... Pegasus ... continues to fascinate and inspire. His story, filled with adventure, heroism, and tragedy, speaks to the human desire for freedom, creativity, and transcendence. From his miraculous birth from the Gorgon Medusa to his partnership with the hero Bellerophon and his eventual ascension to the stars, Pegasus embodies the power of imagination and the allure of the impossible. He represents the duality of nature, the consequences of hubris, and the human quest for inspiration and freedom.” <https://www.greekmyths-greekmythology.com/pegasus-winged-horse/#:~:text=In%20some%20interpretations%20of%20the,can%20soar%20freely%20for%20eternity>

“In late antiquity Pegasus’s soaring flight was interpreted as an allegory of the soul’s immortality; in modern times it has been regarded as a symbol of poetic inspiration.”

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pegasus-Greek-mythology>

¹⁵⁸ I found evidence of this on my “Shamanic Journey” to the paleolithic caves in the Dordogne region of south-central France, July 2023 (a Ubiquity University program). Many images of horses graced the walls of these caves; pigment drawings and carved reliefs from 10,000 to over 30,000 years ago. These horse images have been brought into the contemporary world in the form of neckless fetishes, to more mundane items such as refrigerator magnets.

Archetypes have a way of sneaking into culture. Pegasus the winged horse of Greek myth shows up as the Flying Red Horse on the gas station logo and signs. It shows up as the logo for Tri-Horse films. Spirit Horse is taking me to more and more exalted views, giving me the ability to transcend wherever I am.

This was all part of my engaging with and embracing the shamanic understanding that everything is alive, that everything has spirit..¹⁵⁹ I was learning to communicate with Horse. In this quest I discovered that two things, among others, were going on. One, I was one with Pegasus, flying to the white mountain – a mythic place, used within Earthtribe and Earth Wisdom Academy,¹⁶⁰ and two, I was becoming animal.

¹⁵⁹ This fundamental shamanic perspective is shared and taught by such organizations and individuals as the Foundation for Shamanic Studies (especially their course, The Shamanic Worldview: Everything is Alive); Sandra Ingerman; Llyn Roberts; Alberto Villoldo; Hank Wesselman (deceased).

¹⁶⁰ As far as I could discern, the white mountain as used by Earthtribe was not a geographic place, but rather a symbolic place, sort of a destination to be reached in one's spiritual (life) quest. Perhaps similar to Hinduism, in which White Mountain symbolizes purity and holiness, representing both a geographical feature associated with mythological events and an embodiment of sacred energies, as reflected in its connections to deities and legendary figures.

<https://www.wisdomlib.org/concept/white-mountain#:~:text=Hindu%20concept%20of%20'White%20mountain'%20In%20Hinduism%2C,its%20connections%20to%20deities%20and%20legendary%20figures>



Here I am with Rohan

I found myself swimming within a paradoxical and complex dynamic exemplifying an aspect of what Will Taegel refers to as the Mother Tongue¹⁶¹. A hypothesis of the mother tongue is that as we own our animal natures then we can communicate with animals, and I specifically can communicate with Rohan, we learn animal nature. Horse archetype was using Rohan and me to teach me how to speak animal language, to reconnect with a language and ability we humans had millennium ago but which we have lost.

Mythologist Martin Shaw tells us that the horse within myth is often regarded as some seasoned energy that we ride throughout our life; not entirely wild, not

¹⁶¹ W. Taegel, *The Mother Tongue: Intimacy in the Eco-field* (2012). Synthesizing spirituality and science through the lens of shamanism, Taegel invites us to learn the language of the earth, the primordial language of our planet's ecology; discovering an old way of being, communicating with humans and more-than-humans alike, co-creating a life of harmony, joy, and presence.

entirely domestic. It is the horse that preserves life, our life, in the face of many adversities (Shaw, internet posting April 21, 2024).

In this aspect of my quest, I have been drawn, almost unwittingly, into a relationship with this horse, with Rohan. This has something to do with consciousness. Indeed, there is a crazy piece to it, something challenging and outside the ordinary, way out beyond my usual way of doing things. I am spending money (more than I would normally do, as in budgeting prudently) and quite a bit of time being with and attending to this horse, my horse, Rohan. In some ways it does not make sense, yet I am doing it. Not quite compelled, rather a sense of being called to it. This is a clue, I had to admit to myself, something bigger is going on.

This in turn opened up a whole other area of enquiry within myself, for there have been other instances in my life of this type of phenomenon: how do I relate my “practical” self with my “impractical” self (that does not make sense)? And how to balance these two parts of myself?

With regard to Rohan’s death (he had to be “put down” as the result of a freak accident shortly after we moved to Washington), it was also an instance of a particular form of consciousness (Rohan’s death) coming into my circle (my inner council), presenting me a situation with which to be dealt, even if with grief, itself another form of consciousness. The point here is that Everything in the universe has a form of consciousness (Close, 1997, pp. 264, 282-86), indeed, forms of consciousness that are primal and are seeking entry into more normal

consciousness such as our daily lives. Regarding my house (which I discuss below) I had to deal with the disappointment of finding it left a mess by the tenants.

I came to see that these visitors to my circle almost always came as a mixture, a combination of both positive and negative, and mostly not in ways that can be expressed in terms that stark. For instance, Redwood Tree in my backyard responded to a storm and lightning with a broken sapling, out of which I was gifted my stake. Regarding Rohan, he was a true gift to me. He and I developed a great relationship over the two years we were together. His sudden death was a true tragedy, leaving me devastated, tearing my heart. As he left that opened doors for me, even though I did not yet know what they were.

During one Earth on a Vision Quest gathering a woman described as a Horse Dreamer shared about the Language of Horses. Sara Jackson¹⁶² began her talk stating that interacting with horses is all about energy and breath. She shared some of her personal journey with horses, how she got into having and being with horses. Right off she confronted the reality that most horse people reside in and operate from the paradigm of dominance over horse, so she had to go looking for more enlightened folk.

¹⁶² Sara Jackson was described by Will Taegel as a Horse Dreamer, Earth on Vision Quest gathering 3/6/2022. She is a member of both the International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants and the Pet Professional Guild of Australia. Jackson helps others learn more about equine behaviour and body language through her business Equestrian Balance and the Learn to Speak Horse Online Program. <https://www.equestrianbalance.com.au/>

The reality is that horses are prey and humans are predators. It is a testimony to their (horses) generosity that they deal with us at all. So, it is up to humans to learn horse language if we want to have conversations with them. It is also, therefore, incumbent upon us to be optimistic and light-hearted, because horses are pessimistic; horses are concerned, always, about “what is going to get me” (them). For example, when we halter a horse, we need to ask permission and wait for them to offer. To a large extent learning the language of horse is learning how to listen. It is about patience. Sometimes we must wait. We have to be willing to set aside some of our “normal” behavior (our ego). Jackson ended her share by paraphrasing Anna Blake,¹⁶³ another horse trainer: it is a sacred thing to have a relationship with a sentient being that is bigger than me. Being with horses, she said, is a spiritual practice of being present, aware, and patient.¹⁶⁴

Sara Jackson shared from a deep, primal place. In talking about listening to horses she was speaking about learning an aspect of the Mother Tongue. It can be said that underneath Jackson’s talk and all such profound sharing is a deep, primal love. My interactions and learnings with Rohan and with Horse were profound. What I was imbibing from this and other EVQ gatherings was that we were needing to access this primal love and the Mother Tongue deep inside ourselves, in a place not

¹⁶³ Anna Blake is a horse advocate first, and works as an international clinician, and award-winning author. She trains horses and riders communication skills and kind methods of training.

<https://annablake.com/>

¹⁶⁴ Another way to speak of this, pointed out by Alexander Laszlo in a personal communication, is that of coming to know and respect their *horsenality* (as taught in the Parelli Natural Horsemanship program).

contaminated by culture, as Will Taegel often put it. Such a place always ever speaks of hope, love, and trust.



b. House

When my wife and I moved from California to Washington in the middle of my research journey (June 2021) we were faced with the need to do some major renovation on our house before we could move in. We had rented the house to various tenants for the previous 15 years (after I had managed a total rehab of the house) and unfortunately the last set of tenants had not left the house with respect, they had simply walked out leaving an unkept house. It became apparent to me, with help from my mentor, that the house itself had become part of my quest. The situation gifted me with the opportunity to work out some muscles crucial to my quest. Letting go! Relinquish, as Bear Heart¹⁶⁵ would have said. We could even reference Jesus' famous adage: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others..." Yes, I had to admit to myself that the situation with the house was disappointing. My

¹⁶⁵ Marcellus Bear Heart Williams (1918-2008) was one of the last traditionally trained medicine persons of the Muscogee Creek Nation. Bear Heart was a roadman in the Native American Church and an American Baptist minister. Among his many accomplishments and interactions he was a mentor to Will Taegel; the Earthtribe was created out of their work together. Bear Heart's teachings and practices continue to inspire the Earthtribe. (personal conversations with Will Taegel and Reginah WaterSpirit)

inner council (Taegel, 2010).¹⁶⁶ required I attend to my disappointment – I should see it as a visitor to my circle – as a part of my letting go, in order that I might let go. What it came down to was that I had to deal with disappointment, or it would become part of my shadow.¹⁶⁷

An image I found helpful was to imagine a seesaw at the edge of my circle. One side was my anger, at the tenants and the property managers, and on the other side was a meditation, visualizing the house finished and clean and welcoming. I realized that I cannot just jump over to the “done” side, I have to find a balance. It was not simply a matter of immediately getting the fix-up done but rather of getting balance, which could motivate me to get things done. Like I experienced with Rohan, a major lesson for me with my house was that visitors to my circle (e.g.,

¹⁶⁶ I am indebted to Will Taegel for this term. In his 2010 book, *The Sacred Council of Your Wild Heart*, he devotes a chapter to describing “The Inner Council of Selves”, in which he compares our inner world to the early colonies of what became the United States – there were many sub-divisions which forged a unity. So, too, we have sub-selves (many of them), such as the inner critic, the pleaser, the perfectionist, the victim, the persecutor, the pusher, and the rescuer. The organizer of all our many selves Taegel calls the *operating ego*. This operating ego is not evil but it has the habit of going with us wherever we go seeking “solutions through protection and control of anything that threatens the status quo” (p.43). Taegel’s proposed solution to this dilemma “is that we create an inner council on a personal level,” one that “breathes fresh air,” by opening to and including ongoing connections “with the Sacred Web of Life in its raw form.” This is a sacred endeavor, similar to Plato’s *enlargement of the soul*, and calls for enlarging our inner dialogues, inviting “several sets of sub-selves to sit in the council.” Be aware, however, Taegel warns us, that even though our operating egos do their best to support us they can invite only those selves they know about, “but most of our vulnerability lies outside our usual awareness” (pages 39-44). Counter to our operating ego we must ask, therefore, “What does it mean to bring the vulnerable selves into Sacred Council?” (p. 46). And that demands we face the selves of our inner shadows. Continued in next footnote #167....

¹⁶⁷ I quote from Will Taegel, “The shadow selves are aspects of our inner life pushed into the dark recesses of our interior by our usual operating egos. We disown these selves because these shadow aspects are not acceptable to the values we hold or the patterns of our lives. These sub-divisions of ourselves live in the darkness, of our unconscious, also known as the subconscious.” (Ibid., page 50).

disappointment, fixing up the house, animals, et al.) are almost never a neat either/or, but rather a complex both/and dynamic.

What I came to realize was that both Rohan's death and the situation of my house were particular forms of consciousness presenting me situations calling for attention. With my house, I had the possibility of birthing another form of consciousness during my visualizations in meditation of a clean, healthy, and vibrant house. In doing so I was giving birth to another form of consciousness. Cleaning up the house no longer had to be a task, I was developing a relationship with my house! The purification (clean up) was part of giving birth to another form of consciousness. The tenants had left a form of consciousness, a filthy house, but I had the opportunity to replace that with a different form of consciousness. In consciously developing a relationship with my house I was embodying the reality of a participatory environment and universe.



Moving to a deeper level these dynamics illustrate not only that everything is a form of consciousness but that everything is alive – as shamanism has said for millennium – that there is nothing that is inanimate. This sense of aliveness resonates with our understanding that everything is vibration (A. Laszlo & E. Laszlo,

2016).¹⁶⁸ One could say that our growingly chaotic contemporary historical moment of dramatic climate change, world conflagrations, and pandemics may be part of Mother Earth's strategy to loosen up the ways we humans see and know things. As we undertake efforts to find and rebuild our center, we are making a pivotal move when we begin to see everything in the universe is alive, animate, that indeed, there is nothing that is inanimate.

This pivotal move is a choice humanity is facing. Will we continue along the road leading to even greater chaos and disorganization or will we take another road, known in some North American indigenous cultures as the *Red Way* or *Red Road* (Taegel, 2021; Good Feather, 2021),¹⁶⁹ which requires humility in the face of an overwhelming force that is beyond human control? This latter road calls us to a seemingly incongruous agenda, we must accept limitations, *and* we must do all we can. Much like the saying attributed to the Christian Saint Augustine (354-430 CE): "Work like everything depends on you. Pray like everything depends on God"

¹⁶⁸ What the Laszlos found, and articulated in their 2016 book, *What is Reality? The New Map of Cosmos and Consciousness*, is that "...there are no 'things' at all. Only vibration. In classical physics, this would make no sense. One would need to know what it is that is vibrating. But that's just the paradigm shift: vibration is primary, and it is out of coherent packets of vibration that 'things' appear. Truly, everything — every 'thing' — is vibration. The more 'solid' things are densely packed coherent packets of vibration. That's all. And consciousness is another form of vibration — with lower frequency and longer amplitude than matter, but it is still made of the same 'stuff' — which turns out not to be stuff at all, but rather vibration. As such, matter, energy, and mind are all emergent phenomenon of one unitary quintessence, which can be expressed as the zero-point energy field, the cosmic plenum, the akashic field, or cosmic consciousness. Many terms for the same thing — which isn't a thing and therefore isn't substance, at all." (Alexander Laszlo, p.c., April 2025).

¹⁶⁹ Talk by Will Taegel, Earth on Vision Quest zoom call, September 5, 2021. And, from Doug Good Feather: "Those of us who feel called to live life rooted in nature-based spirituality are said to 'walk the Red Road.' This simply means that we have certain universal truths and sacred principles that guide us as we live a spiritual life" (2021, p. 7).

(framed poster on my study wall). Trust in the process, in Mother Earth, is necessary, which is a challenge for many of us. Something that will support such trust is the recognition that there is a pulling, as it were, of the whole process toward greater intimacy, toward another form of consciousness.

Author Richard Powers addresses this overwhelming force beyond human control through the lens of trees and the natural world in his monumental 2018 novel *The Overstory*. At one point in the story, one of the main characters addresses a class of university students: “It’s a miracle, she tells her students, photosynthesis: a feat of chemical engineering underpinning creation’s entire cathedral. All the razzmatazz of life on Earth is a free-rider on that mind-boggling magic act. The secret of life: plants eat light and air and water, and the stored energy goes on to make and do all things” (page 124). The following poem, offered toward the end of the saga as a eulogy, speaks of the force of nature greater than humans who have placed themselves at the center of creation.

For there is hope of a tree, if it
 goes down, that it will sprout again,
 and that its tender branches will not cease.
 Though the root grows old in the earth,
 and the stock dies in the ground, at the scent
 of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs.
 But man, man wastes away and dies
 and gives up the ghost, and where is he? (page 485)



A major theme for the Earthtribe throughout this time was that of **trauma**. As understood within Earthtribe, the role of trauma is to disrupt our life identity.¹⁷⁰ There were many disruptions both societal and personal during the time of my quest: wildfires and evacuations in California (my wife and I had to evacuate from our home twice in three years); Covid-19 pandemic; political upheavals; retirement; learning to be with horses; preparing for and then moving from California to Washington.¹⁷¹; the death of my horse; major house fixing-up in order for my wife and I to live there after 15 years of renters. Some identities are not consciously chosen, such as sexual or gender, others are consciously chosen, such as career and hobbies. The quest is consciously chosen, that is, by undertaking the quest I am consciously choosing this disruption and trauma (even if I may not have initially realized the implications). It is like a little death building up muscle for “big death” (passing through “the great doorway” when one dies), to use Earthtribe terminology.

The challenge, or at least *a* challenge, in accepting this understanding of trauma and disruption is that in the quantum order of things, as explicated by physicist David Bohm (1917-1992) and his “implicate order,” what appears to be chaos is not, because there is no such thing. “Underlying his innovative approach to many different issues was the fundamental idea that beyond the visible, tangible world there lies a deeper, implicate order of undivided wholeness” (Peat, 2024). This

¹⁷⁰ Trauma can be understood and related to in different ways. One important commentator on trauma is the German mystic Thomas Hubl, who has focused on the dynamics of social and generational trauma, and how people can overcome such trauma.

¹⁷¹ A process involving much “letting go” as I went through accumulated “stuff”, in some cases from the last 30 to 40 years. Very much a letting go, clearing out the old, allowing space for the new.

deeper order appears as chaos due to my limited perception. The question is: how wide is my lens?!

Such an understanding draws from David Bohm's double-slit experiment, an illustration of wave-particle duality, in which a beam of particles (such as electrons) travels through a barrier that has two slits. Depending on the questions asked and how the experiment is set up, the results show waves or particles. In his experiments there was a transfer of information, but without a medium; it was faster than the speed of light, and it was from some source beyond, beyond the bounds of the experiment. Within the implicate order everything is connected.

The emerging scientific understandings of the dynamics undergirding this connectedness are quite intriguing. Until quite recently mainstream physics asserted the universe was the result of random interactions. Recent research (assisted by powerful computational means) has shown that there is tremendous order, precision, and complexity to the universe. So, too, there appears to be "a system of laws [of nature] that together introduce nonrandomness into otherwise random processes." There appears to be "a bias built into the universe that selects toward those alternatives that enhance coherence and wholeness." As a result, "the systems that evolve in the universe tend to be integral ensembles of their parts," functioning together as "cooperative wholes." And this, state the Laszlos, "is the evolution Bohm called 'holomovement'... which "occurs and recurs on multiple levels, on higher and higher scales of order and dimension of size" (Laszlo & Laszlo, 2021, pp. 2-3). This growing awareness and the scientific "proof" of it has had and

continues to have a profound impact on all fields of knowledge, from psychology, physics, and art to religion and spirituality.



Another piece of the puzzle which helps “fit” elements of my WHQ together is the historical flow of an important idea and concept in our modern intellectual world. Scientist Wolfgang Pauli¹⁷² apparently coined the term “collective unconscious” from David Bohm’s sense of a source beyond. Psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, who had an extensive relation with Pauli, interpreting over 400 of Pauli’s dreams,¹⁷³ adopted Pauli’s term for use in the psychological realm and added archetypes for large groupings of this information (Taegel, p.c., 8/24/2020).

In my interactions and life situations I have come to see that I am receiving information from a greater, deeper source. For instance, in connecting with my stake for the WHQ,¹⁷⁴ Redwood Tree received the message that I was interested in choosing one of its shoots, but I was having difficulty in selecting which one. So, too, did Lightning receive the message, and Wind. They received the message, the information, from Spirit or Source or, depending on your field (perspective), from the collective unconscious or implicate order. The morning after an exceptionally

¹⁷² Wolfgang Ernst Pauli (1900–1958) was an Austrian theoretical physicist and one of the pioneers of quantum physics.

¹⁷³ Wikipedia. “Jung’s elaborate analysis of more than 400 of Pauli’s dreams is documented in *Psychology and Alchemy*.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Pauli

¹⁷⁴ The stake I connected with in the first phase of the WHQ and which I put in the ground declaring my intention to quest, transitioning from the first to the second WHQ phase (see above, page 204).

violent storm with lightening and very strong winds.¹⁷⁵ I came out to find one of Redwood Tree's shoots had fallen over, they (the universe, Source) had given me the shoot I was to use.

As my WHQ mentor reminded me more than once, "When the unanticipated happens, listen." In receiving the wood for my stake, it was important to experience this on a deeper level than merely a broken tree shoot. I was listening to Nature telling me what to do, with me being gifted the redwood shoot. There was the awareness that Mother Earth is bringing ceremony to me, to us, and it is like we are just the co-pilots. In developing my stake ceremony, I was developing a relationship with Tree, with Redwood. My stake became a way to develop this relationship and relationships with the more-than-human world. It was an opportunity to develop an earth-based ceremony and to ask myself, what is meaningful for me?

There is an important distinction to be made at this point, a distinction significant for my WHQ and significant to our general understanding and interaction with Nature and Mother Earth, as well as with our human-made world. In searching for my stake, or more succinctly, in opening myself to the possibility of connecting with a stake, of being called by a particular piece of wood, how was I to know which was the right one for me? There was a certain dynamic of attachment or of seeking an attachment. But that concept of attachment can be understood in more than one way, and some are better suited to living in the quantum world. For instance,

¹⁷⁵ The same night that one of the worst wildfires in Northern California started from lightning strikes about 20 miles north of my home.

psychologically we can speak about object relations; I was seeking to form a relationship with an object, my stake. However, epistemology in quantum physics – and the Earthtribe – is that all are related, there are no “objects.” My understanding of the Implicate Order is that information is transferred non-locally, that is, there is a movement or connection with the whole, what David Bohm called “holo-movement.”¹⁷⁶ The deep implicate order is providing me a pathway, is giving me a form of consciousness out of which comes my stake ceremony.

In this process I keep reminding myself (and appreciating reminders from mentor, readings, Earthtribe gatherings, and anything serving that purpose) that I need to be working with the notion that *everything* that comes into my life is coming into the edge of my circle; everything that comes is something special, a form of consciousness, an energetic form from Spirit. All are there for me to pay attention to, to sharpen my focus. All are part of the stream.

WHQ is an approach to integrating the understanding that I am participating with the electro-magnetic field or aura of my physical body, as well as with my “spiritual” awareness. If we assume we live in a participatory reality, then everything that arises (in one’s life), especially the surprising stuff, is connected. The level of participation depends on how awake one is and is largely determined through imagination.

¹⁷⁶ “The holomovement is a key concept in David Bohm’s interpretation of quantum mechanics and for his overall worldview. It brings together the holistic principle of “*undivided wholeness*” with the idea that everything is in a state of process or becoming...” David Peat (2024), “David Bohm, Implicate Order and Holomovement.”

Another example are my **dreams**. As a practice, I should acknowledge these encounters (my dreams), say a couple sentences where I greet and honor them because they are the implicate becoming the explicate; they are an experience of intimacy. In this acknowledgement and creating a practice, I am becoming more sensitive, developing a greater awareness of consciousness. Dreams can be seen as a nudge or hunch of intuition, which I can decide whether to acknowledge or not. For even dreams have agency, they are from beyond my control and human control in general, they too are an aspect of consciousness.

The question may arise, why build a conscious container around myself? In answer, to put it bluntly, because there is so much stuff out there, and in (t)here. Given the implicate order, and the reality that all is connected in a deep underlying Whole/Source/Consciousness, it becomes important to filter out the trillions of things bombarding us all the time. We do not have to let things in; we must therefore develop **discernment**. We can ask, what do I want in my circle? There are lots of eddies in the stream of consciousness. The stake ceremony allows me to open to what is meaningful, for me; to see what fits for me.

An aspect of discernment is that of unraveling; unraveling the numerous energetic forms impinging on my circle, to reveal what lies beneath. Like a weaver,¹⁷⁷ upon encountering or discovering a mistake you must unravel everything you have so far woven to find out what and where the mistake lies. You must go back

¹⁷⁷ This example was given by an Earthtribe vision quester, January 3, 2021, Earth on Vision Quest online gathering.

through this process because you might not know exactly where the mistake happened. Applying this image to our world of pandemic, political upheaval, and climate change we see that Earth is unraveling, and we can understand the importance of seeking out the roots of our predicaments. In this realization and search to find the golden thread,¹⁷⁸ we have the opportunity, with Earth, to recreate our world. I agree with Will Taegel that what we experience today is a lack of awe and respect of Nature and Mother Earth, of the mystery of life, and subsequently, we are now dealing with the consequences.¹⁷⁹ of this lack of respect. We therefore need to renew our connection with Nature and Mother Earth, even if we can only do so by making one stitch at a time, to use our weaving image again.

The Earthtribe *Earth on a Vision Quest* gatherings included reports from different Wild Heart and Vision Questers each month. Not only the questers but everyone on these calls, collectively and individually, was on a journey, and all the geographic landscapes of the various questers were also coming to everyone, coming into and interacting with everyone. Again, another experience for realizing the connectedness of the whole. There is a reason for whatever randomness might appear; each of the questers bringing a different landscape, a different geographic element into the circle, into the groups' awareness. I shared from the Redwood and

¹⁷⁸ Image used by Will Taegel to illustrate the binding together of awe and terror. Earth on Vision Quest talk, January 3, 2020.

¹⁷⁹ Our present era has been called the Age of Consequences. A documentary film by the same title was produced in 2017, which investigated the impacts of climate change on increased resource scarcity, migration, and conflict through the lens of US national security and global stability.

Oak rolling hills landscape of the Russian River watershed in Sonoma County of Northern California.



2. The Web of Eco-Fields



Fragrance Lake

The imprint of landscapes and of more-than-human relations coming into my circle received an expansion when my wife and I made a trip to New Mexico. As we drove through Nevada, we were gifted with visitations from two coyotes and one prong-horn antelope. The coyotes came separately, that is at different times, but each walked across the highway (we were on a two-lane highway) ahead of us but not so distant we couldn't see them and identify who and what they were. Each stopped for a moment after crossing highway, as if looking back to make sure we had seen them, before disappearing into the brush. Antelope appeared to our right, quite close to the road as we topped an incline – there she was only some 30 or 40

feet away, looking right at us as we came over the hill. Antelope did not move, she just watched us drive past. For me, it was unusual to see a solitary antelope. Previously, I had only seen them together in herds. Too, each encounter occurred in the middle of the day, not near dusk or dawn when I would have expected to see these animals out and about.

Considering my WHQ and my growing awareness I could see that the coyotes and the antelope were simply doing what they are doing, just being themselves, and at the same time... Coyote and Antelope were visiting me regarding my quest, to inform consciousness from within. That is, I was beginning to know differently as I became aware of these energetic connections. My mentor brought a greater understanding to these encounters with my more-than-human relations. "The web of eco-fields in which we humans live have a form of consciousness that has a vested interest in humans evolving or expanding consciousness to better live on Earth." I should therefore see these encounters as a message from a deeper level of consciousness than merely a happen-stance along the road. They were for me to develop skill in listening to and engaging my ability with the Mother Tongue.¹⁸⁰ They came along in order to create a matrix for my quest. Indeed, there is much more here, my mentor commented, "pronghorn antelope is a very, very sacred creature in our tradition"¹⁸¹ (Taegel, p.c., October 20, 2020).

¹⁸⁰ The Mother Tongue is a term Will Taegel uses to describe the primordial, root language of Earth, "the more-than-human language of the eco-fields." Cover of *The Mother Tongue*, Taegel, W., 2012.

¹⁸¹ The tradition of Earthtribe via Bear Heart (1918-2008) a Muscogee Creek medicine man and roadman in the Native American Church, and Quanah Parker (1845-1911) a war leader of the Kwahadi ("Antelope") band of the Comanche Nation.

The idea that the web of eco-fields in which we humans live have a form of consciousness, is challenging enough for many people in the so-called post-modern world. Taking that idea to the deeper and more profound awareness that this form of consciousness “has a vested interest in humans evolving or expanding consciousness to better live on Earth” may be, for many, beyond the scope of possibility, let alone comprehensibility. Mother Earth has a vested interest in the species on her surface wreaking the most destruction changing its ways (that would be us, humans). Is that so unbelievable? So unrealistic? Perhaps so if one sees reality as a mere material realm that somehow or other produces what we call “consciousness.” Perhaps so if one sees themselves and humanity as observers on this planet, as somehow outside of or removed from nature. But from the indigenous perspective and the *scientific* perspective of quantum and transcendental physics (Close, 1997, p. 264) everything in the universe is a form of consciousness, is filled with Spirit, is alive – different traditions use different terminology. Furthermore, these forms of consciousness are primal, and it can be said they are seeking entry into more normal consciousness (Taegel, p.c., September 3, 2021).

Indeed, as we move from the fourth world to the fifth world (of Native American prophecies),¹⁸² members of eco-spiritual communities such as Earthtribe

¹⁸² As expressed in different indigenous prophecies, but especially from the Hopi people. *Book of the Hopi*, Waters, F. (1963). While not using the terminology of 4th and 5th worlds, from a mythological perspective archetypes or archetypal energies awake at certain times or things, calling humans to respond. Mythologist Michael Meade envisions “everyone today is on a threshold, it is the end of an

and Christian communities involved in the Wild Church movement,¹⁸³ have the opportunity, indeed calling, to play a prophetic role. Living from and sharing this expanded worldview (an eco-spirituality or eco-consciousness) as they do, part of their awareness is that nothing is inanimate. Everything is of some agency and consciousness. We live in a participatory environment. The disruptions we are witnessing in the world today can be seen as Mother Earth's strategy for loosening up the ways we see and know things (*Earth on Vision Quest* online gathering, September 5, 2021). As we (humans) rebuild our center, our connection and participation with Nature, with Mother Earth, a pivotal move is that we begin to see from this perspective that *everything* in the universe is alive, animate. An eco-spirituality not only incorporates such a perspective, it generates such.

A crucial element in this new/old perspective is that of humility. In the face of the tremendous disruptions in the world can humanity, people in general and individual people, admit and embrace the reality that there is much beyond human control? We must accept limitations, *and* we have to do all we can. Such a paradox can be a challenge, to say the least. Trust is essential, trust in the process, the process that Mother Earth and Consciousness is pulling us toward greater intimacy, toward another form of consciousness.

age, a shifting of archetypes, a time of paradox." Online series, "Wounded Healers in a Broken World," September 24, 2021. <https://www.mosaicvoices.org/healing-and-making-whole>

¹⁸³ Wild Church or Church of the Wild is a growing movement throughout North America (and probably other parts of the world, of which I am unaware). Gathering outdoors, in the wild, a guiding incentive is "for church to be a place where Mystery is experienced, not explained," as Victoria Loorz, a co-founder of the Wild Church Network and Seminary of the Wild, put it in her 2021 book, *Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred*.

A term used within Earthtribe for experiences like mine with coyote and antelope is **“eco-intimacy”** moments, referring to times when we know that something more primal is occurring. They are not confined to encounters with more-than-humans, such moments can be experienced in relationships with spouses, friends, and others. It is important to acknowledge such moments of intimacy with words and/or actions, which themselves should be seen as living forms of consciousness. In planning my stake ceremony, it would be important to express gratitude to Earth for giving me Coyote and Antelope.



My stake is more than a simple piece of wood, more even than just a gift from a living tree. My stake is a tuning device to help me tune into these awarenesses and energies. Embracing the perspective of quantum physics and the implicate order, my stake can be seen as a condensation of consciousness. This awareness reflects the difference between the old worldview – that the material world somehow produces consciousness – and the new worldview, which is just the opposite; that the primary ground of reality is consciousness, and out of consciousness comes the material world. My stake, like words and language, is a condensation of

consciousness, not our consciousness or my consciousness but a form of consciousness. It is Consciousness expressing itself.



Stake Ceremony under Redwood

For my stake ceremony I incorporated a symbolic circle with seven directions (the four cardinal points plus sky, earth, and center), acknowledging and calling into my circle the allies, animals, and spirit guides who had played a role in my WHQ. Eagle in the East, Antelope and Coyote in the South, Bear in the West, Buffalo in the North, Pachamama or Mother Earth below, Father Sun/Sky and Great Spirit above, and Redwood at center. I had a bowl of water and acknowledged Salmon. As pictured in the photo above, I included the sacred items of Bear Heart -- gifted to me by his medicine helper and late-life spouse, Reginah WaterSpirit -- representing the Earthtribe community's ancestral tradition and lineage. A ring of redwood twigs and branches encircled Redwood and my altar space, holding my sacred circle. My

ceremony took place at the base of Redwood, Redwood being in this ceremony the Tree of Life connecting below and above at the center of the world.

Although I had my stake ready a couple months earlier, I chose to wait and hold my ceremony on December 24th, celebrating my 70th birthday. The intention I stated during my ceremony just before driving the stake was to continue developing my capacity for playing with Spirit energy; for participating in the play of consciousness; being a clear channel or transmitter for receiving and generating creative forms, relationships, and possibilities of beauty and blessing; that I might be a walking blessing. Later, I shared a video of my stake ceremony at the January online Earth on a Vision Quest gathering, bringing my landscape eco-field and my circle energetics into the community eco-field.



Another way to talk about the purpose of the WHQ is bringing my inner council (of selves) to loosen the way things are on the inside of me, that is, my usual configuration inside. It is important to keep the tension between the two sides of myself: my ordinary, daily, usual configuration; and my journeys, dreams, and visions. Sometimes amidst encounters with the latter side, a voice rears up with the admonition, “Oh, you must be making this up,” as if something is wrong with me. However, at such times it is important to remember, among other things, that someone such as the pioneering psychiatrist and psychotherapist Carl Gustav Jung said the active imagination is the gateway to larger perspectives. My active

imagination has gotten me into a place that is beyond my control... and it is okay.

Indeed, this larger perspective is a class of experience for which we as a species are deeply hungry (Taegel, p.c., January 31, 2021).

I had shared earlier with my mentor a shamanic journey experience.¹⁸⁴ I had, which I relate here in total because of its significance in my WHQ. I undertook this journey with the intention to seek information, ideas, and suggestions for my stake ceremony. It played a significant role in my listening, in my attuning to Mother Earth and Great Spirit. Subsequently, as I have mentioned above, I incorporated into my ceremony the guides and helpers/allies who showed up – eagle, bear, and salmon – as well as the thematic materials, impulses, and images.

I descend to lower world through hole at Redwood Tree. I am going down tunnel, and keep going a long way, looking for doorway or some entrance to lower world. I finally come upon an opening and go through, but it is like entering a jungle; there are drooping vines and thick foliage. It's difficult to move forward. There's no vista, no landscape to be seen other than immediate space in what appears to be jungle. I wonder if there is a vista point, some way to see further out, some expanse. I am now looking out over valley with hills surrounding on all sides. But the whole thing feels off. It's not what I expected. However, I tell myself, well, that's okay, I'll simply need to go with it, there must be a lesson for me here...right?! I'm back in thick jungle but now it's like threatening and grey, no longer green and lush. I leave with thought, "maybe another time." I am back in tunnel and looking down tunnel I see a way off light coming from an opening. I am at the opening and as I go through, I am looking out onto a meadow of golden, waving grass with trees and hills looking off down to the ocean in the distance. I call upon my helping spirits and state my intention again (I also did so before descending below

¹⁸⁴ "Shamanic journeying is the inner art of traveling to the invisible worlds beyond ordinary reality in order to retrieve information for change in any area of our lives, from spirituality and health to work and relationships." Ingerman, S., *Shamanic Journeying*, 2008, Sounds True.

Redwood): asking for ideas, suggestions, guidelines for my stake ceremony coming up in just under 2 weeks on December 24th. Bear comes and Eagle is flying overhead. I thank both for coming. But then immediately Bear begins eating me. Not so much tearing me apart but devouring me. I marvel, no fright although total surprise and momentary hesitation (“this can’t be right...”). And now I am part of Bear, inside, aware of myself, but not me, well me, my consciousness, but not me my body. Eagle swoops down and gouges out my eyes, eating them. “I” can see everywhere, way off, all over. It seems like we are (me, Bear, Eagle) just stationary for a spell. I think, wondering are we going to go somewhere, and Bear/I is now moving through what I realize is the floor of an old-growth redwood glen – huge redwoods, silent, lush.

Redwoods. I realize we are in the presence of the Ancient ones ... standing guard, ever-present witnesses to Life, to ways and wisdom of the ages and of Earth. Bring this reality to my ceremony. I realize Eagle is not here, heck, there’s no way for Eagle to fly around down/through these majestic trees. I see Eagle flying above the redwoods, and see that this huge, glorious glen of Redwoods though filling an entire valley is but a small piece/place of this part of Earth. Eagle flies just beyond the Redwoods and there is a river. I am at banks of river with Eagle and Bear, and there is Salmon swimming upriver, but more than just swimming, there in the air above the water, being with us. Then Eagle grabs this mighty Salmon in his talons, taking Salmon’s life, biting into Salmon. Bear, too, tears into Salmon, nourishing himself on/with Salmon. I am, for a moment, not aghast but saddened and shocked – Salmon is my clan in Seminary of the Wild, Salmon is mighty, special; why did my helping and guardian spirits kill Salmon?! Then I realize; (the message/lesson comes to me): life and death; Salmon plays an immense role in Life, bringing life and substance to others (Eagle, Bear) by giving of her/himself. Life, death, re-birth! Entire cultures/societies based on Salmon, on the taking of Salmon, yes, but also, more importantly, on honoring of and respecting Salmon. And both my helping spirit (Eagle) and guardian spirit (Bear) eat Salmon. Salmon is for both a major source of food, nourishment, life. We are all bound together!

(drum beat changes) I must begin my leave-taking and return, but I realize I am in/of Bear and Eagle, they ate me, somehow I’ll have to be “me” to return above lower world. Bear and Eagle return to spot where I was devoured. I attempt to step out of them as it were, to put myself back together, but that’s not working; I must become a new me – the realization “hits” me as “I” simultaneously emerge there by Eagle and Bear in my body but a glowing

sparkling body ... me but a new me, alive. (Personal Journey Journal: Friday, December 11, 2020)

Reflecting on my journey, my mentor said it was a very good and sacred experience, an experience of the cycle of life, which is perhaps why Buffalo was with me (in an earlier journey) – to honor this cycle. The quest is always an initiation from one form of consciousness to another, somewhat like the stages of being digested (over time) and coming out a new being. These are archetypal experiences – my journey was, too. Definitely a new birth in which I was gestated by a bear. I had a new being introduced into my inner council, a new me, Eric that is resplendent; I developed intimacy (Taegel, p.c., January 31, 2021).



As I moved on from my stake ceremony to preparing for my eventual WHQ Circle, I was instructed to allow the universe **a participatory role** in helping me find a place for my circle sitting. In other words, it was not just a matter of me, Eric, heading out in nature to “find” the perfect spot. The “finding” was to be a process of me participating with Nature, my more-than-human-relations, Spirit, Mother Earth, asking for their help (and listening to it!) in guiding me to the right place. My real practice in all this was that of becoming more and more aware and awake. A helpful guiding principal, for my WHQ and for all of us as we blithely go about our days, is “slow down the game;” see possibilities we cannot see when things are moving so

fast. Look, listen, see what is at the edge of my circle; pay attention. Another helpful eco-spirituality practice for care of persons.

Another fifteen months went by after my stake ceremony before I was able to undertake my WHQ Circle. During that time, I continued my explorations, reflecting councils with my mentor, and Earth on Vision Quest gatherings. One new practice in preparation for my circle was the tying of **prayer ties**: small bundles containing significant items to me in my quest and life, such as redwood needles, seeds and bark, cedar branches, horsehair, flowers. These items were wrapped in different-colored, cotton material, each color representing one of the eight directions of the medicine wheel as used by Earthtribe.¹⁸⁵ Representing the interface, boundary or bridge between inner and outer worlds, the finished prayer ties (which were tied three to four inches apart on one long strand of twine) would form the edge of my circle in a literal circle surrounding me. The power and energies of those items and the prayers that accompanied their making serving as both invitation and protection. Tying the needed 405 prayer ties¹⁸⁶ became a spiritual practice much like a rosary or malla.

Mother Earth continued spinning, gifting us with the changing seasons of the planet and our lives. Once again out of death bringing new birth, resurrection, spring. After the wet and cold of winter, it was time for my circle. I sat in my WHQ

¹⁸⁵ The four cardinal points (North, South, East, West), and overlapping the cardinal points, Mother Earth, Father Sun, Ancestors, and Relations (all creatures, the more-than-humans).

¹⁸⁶ The number 405 comes from the number of spirits Bear Heart encountered on his initiatory journeys at a particular sacred spot he frequented. Honoring and connecting with this number has become part of the Earthtribe tradition.

Circle on March 24, 2022, the first day of Spring on which the sun shone here where I live in Whatcom County in Washington. In concert with my helping spirits and prayers to Spirit and Mother Earth, the site chosen was a small clearing in the woods some 100 feet from a creek. It being in the Pacific Northwest the “clearing” consisted of an opening in the overhead canopy, not an absence of underbrush. (See photo below, looking to the north.)



Site of my Wild Heart Quest Circle

In preparation I was reminded that dreams and visions come to show us things we don't already know. Mother Earth is using all of us, questers and everything happening in the world today, to give birth to a new era in the coming together of Cosmic Father and Mother -- a very fertile, indeed, pregnant possibility. Not that pain will disappear in this great unraveling, but it is part of the birthing pains we experience in Mother Earth birthing the new, reweaving the world.

One of the primary messages I received in my WHQ circle, as I sat amidst the just- beginning to leaf and bud bushes and trees, was that both Mother Earth and Father Sun are necessary for life. It is not just Mother Earth that gives life, although it is from and in her, as it were, that we are born, live, and die. It is the combined interplay of the energies of earth and sunlight that makes it possible for life on Earth.¹⁸⁷ The trees and bushes springing forth were a thing of beauty, a wondrous breaking forth up out of the earth *and* up into the sunlight and sky. A dance of branches, trunks, and leaves above ground, while underground, beyond my visual sight but not my imaginal sight, a dance of tendrils rooting deep into the fertile Mother. Not new, this insight, but received in a visceral, experiential manner; an important reminder of the relational harmony interwoven into the wholeness fabric of the universe.

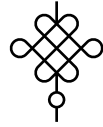
It is intriguing to consider what is involved and necessary for the articulation, manifestation, and spread of the “messages” or energies of connection, oneness, love. How do they get expressed and propagated? What are the human or other energetic qualities and dynamics that make possible the spiraling? Dreams, visions, painting, poetry, music, travel (walking, riding, boating, dream or journey-“flying”), are among the many and wondrous means Mother Earth uses in her unfolding and weaving of her ongoing ever-changing “play of consciousness,” to use Swami

¹⁸⁷ Also, another reminder/example of the marriage or interplay of the archetypal Feminine and Masculine; both together.

Muktananda's¹⁸⁸ phrase for this beautiful, at times horrific, wondrous earthly drama of life. And so, even today, with all of us gathered for *Earth on a Vision Quest* and the Vision Questers and Wild Heart Questers, with our dreams and visions and other expressions, we continue Mother Earth's purposes, as she continues her play (*Lila*) through our expressions and experiences, and subsequent acting in the world.

In conclusion, Wild Heart Quests are an important part of (re-)connecting with Nature and spiritual realms perhaps not recognized by mainline culture. Such quests are practices for seeking direction or guidance in one's individual life and in the life of a community. Preparing for my Wild Heart Quest, as part of my Eco-Spiritual Mentoring training, was in part both an invocation and an intentional opening for Mother Earth to act through me, to "speak" to and through me. It was an inner exploration, an emotional and psychic cleansing or purifying process. As my mentor, Dr. Will Taegel said, "What [the quest] is about is allowing Spirit to connect us, to connect us with that part of Self little controlled by culture and connected or 'controlled' by Mother Earth." A key question for all of us and each one of us is, "How do we, do I, engage with Mother Earth recognizing that we are an integral part and parcel of Mother Earth, and not separate observers...?" The Wild Heart Quest establishes a direct, personal, experiential encounter with Mother Earth, connecting on a visceral level beyond the rational, analytical mind. It opens new possibilities, of caring and creating – for self, community, and planet.

¹⁸⁸ Swami Muktananda (1908-1982), a Siddha Guru and realized master of the Siddha lineage, author of over 30 books, including his spiritual autobiography, *Play of Consciousness*.



CHAPTER 6. ECO-SPIRITUALITY AND CARE OF PERSON AND PLANET, MOTHER EARTH

I have indicated numerous ways in which eco-spirituality impacts people, both individuals and collectives, and our planet, Mother Earth, throughout this dissertation. I will therefore in this section address one underlying, dare I say it, universal and timeless human dynamic and condition, even if perhaps more pronounced in our contemporary world. All religious traditions and spiritualities address this in one way or another.

As we go about our daily lives it is easy to be distracted from what is important, from our source, from our center. Some of us have meditation or prayer practices, we may attend church, synagogue, or mosque, others may go on vision quests or solo retreats in the forests or deserts. There are many ways to seek connection. All are good in that they assist us in remembering our source or center, our connection to Mother Earth and Spirit, to God and Consciousness. Of course, there are many who do not even acknowledge such reality, which of course is part of our conundrum. We have become so disconnected in the modern world from Consciousness and our inherent inclusion in what we call Nature, that many humans simply go about their lives unaware, or in the language of many religious

traditions, asleep. (See Appendix 2 for additional comments about distraction and possible remedies.)

“When you realize that your mind has wandered away from Me, don’t be alarmed or surprised. *You live in a world that has been rigged to distract you*” (Young, *Jesus Calling*, November 1st, p. 320, emphasis added).

There are consequences from being asleep, from a lack of attention, from not listening to Nature, as author Keith Badger points out in his insightful article, “In Search of Bombadil: Tracking J.R.R. Tolkien’s Keeper of the Forest” (*Parabola*, Fall 2020, pp. 102-109). Keith Badger states that the character of Tom Bombadil in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*

...may be the reminding factor that awakens us in any given moment of experience where we retain immunity to the sin of inadvertence, and the ever-looming darkness of inattention where our will is bent toward the “Ring” of false power, thus leading to the devastation that unconscious levels of thinking, being, and action wreak onto the world of Nature.

He continues, “Bombadil represents a world of values that may very well be our salvation, if we pay attention” (p. 105).

Such consequences are of a personal nature as well. Keith Badger references author Robert Macfarlane, who wrote “... deficits in attention tend ultimately to a forgetting of “self”, the “place” we call home ... the loss of presence.” Regarding ideas that our bodies think, Robert Macfarlane states, “We are literally ‘losing touch,’ becoming disembodied, more than in any historical period before ours.” Keith Badger opines this is the fear J.R.R. Tolkien expressed mythologically

with Tom Bombadil a hundred years ago. To wit, that as we become disembodied to the land and to our very selves, we have nothing to ground us so we tragically forget our role within nature “because we don’t remember this story we call life and living.” J.R.R. Tolkien’s greatest fear according to Keith Badger was “that of the loss of spirit and life force within not only the landscape but within us as well” (Badger, 2020, p. 108).

Poet Gary Snyder lamented the loss of “elegant cultural skills” and the intimate knowledge of place and interacting with plants and animals, skills and knowledge “the industrial world might never regain,” in his reflections on re-inhabitation (1977, p.65). Yet, he said, it is “Not that special, intriguing knowledges are the real point: it’s the sense of the magic system; the capacity to hear the song of Gaia *at that spot*, that’s lost.”

As the quote above from the daily devotional, *Jesus Calling*, reminds us, there is no reason to feel guilty or ashamed that we forget or fall asleep, the world is designed that way. This is so especially in our contemporary so-called technologically sophisticated world, with the wonders of the internet and pocket computers (usually referred to as our phones, which, however, are merely an “app” on these technological wonders). All of us have seen or heard of people blithely walking along with their eyes peeled to their pocket screens only to barely miss an on-coming vehicle or telephone pole, not to mention the hours spent watching screens on computers, monitors, and television sets. Distractions are omnipresent.

Yet Spirit, Consciousness, Mother Earth is also omnipresent, but with a secret¹⁸⁹ advantage, that of being omniscient. The Field, Consciousness, God is everywhere and knows all; not in the manner of a papa or mama sitting around knowing what you are thinking or feeling, but of a super awareness, of perhaps an unlimited possibility. Quantum physics has informed us that yes, indeed, everything is connected. Experiments in consciousness have shown that our human minds and hearts can impact things not only non-locally (spatially) but also non-temporally (impacts upon past, present, and future).¹⁹⁰

The practices of eco-spiritualities, shamanic traditions, and lest we forget, of religious traditions, are designed to remind us of our connection to the divine, to the sacred source and center of our being. Rituals and ceremonies play a key role. They are structured, even the “spontaneous” ones, to take us to a place in our psyche and in what shamanism calls non-ordinary reality in which we are open to the many and varied forces, forms, and energies of consciousness and spirit that generate, renew, and hold our world and universe together.

¹⁸⁹ I use “secret” intentionally, for something that is secret may be out of sight, but it also wants to be found. A secret is there to be discovered. Think of all the tales, myths, and legends with buried or secret treasure; it is there to be found, not to lay hidden for eternity.

¹⁹⁰ For example, Ubiquity University's annual (since 2021) Science & Consciousness Event (An open five-day scientific and experiential exploration of consciousness) held annually in Broughton Sanctuary, Skipton, Yorkshire, UK, builds on the work of Professor Robert Jahn and Brenda Dunne, Princeton scientists who dedicated almost thirty years to exploring our ability to affect the world around us with our consciousness. Their findings statistically demonstrated that we are indeed interconnected at the informational energetic level, and can interact outside of the standard parameters of time and space. <https://broughtonsanctuary.co.uk/retreat/the-annual-science-and-consciousness-event-ubiquity/>

A major reason we partake of rituals and ceremonies is to intentionally place ourselves in this stream or field of awareness, to become tuned in to the flow or play of Consciousness,¹⁹¹ indeed, to participate in this play. In the words of shamanic practitioner and teacher Sandra Ingerman:

In the practice of shamanism, life is seen as a ceremony. When we bring the sacred into all our activities — into how we think about ourselves, others, and the world — and create sacred space, we improve the quality of our own lives and bless all of life at the same time. Performing ceremonies creates beautiful healing and changes, and brings to us the goodness of life. (2018, p. 183)

Such is an excellent example of an eco-spirituality's ability (power) to impact individual persons and our planet.

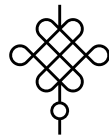


“The Four Sacred Elements, the Seven Sacred Directions, and the Seven Indigenous Values are all concepts to help us think indigenously and understand the natural order of the earth and the fundamentals of indigenous spirituality. It’s in the Center of our being where we take these concepts and implement them into the experience of our daily lives” (Good Feather, 2021, p. 113). However, we are easily distracted by our memories of the past and our fears of the future, and so miss the experience of the present moment. The present moment is where we can become

¹⁹¹ A term for this state and way of being is *Syntony*. Syntony can be understood as “a creative aligning and tuning with the evolutionary processes of which we are a part” or a “consonance with the flow of life” (Alexander Laszlo, May 27, 2020. *Practices that Ensoul the Cosmos*. Earthwise blog. <https://medium.com/earthwise-stories/practices-that-ensoul-the-cosmos-f36f4217f00b>)

aware of “and available to the power and teachings of the sacred directions that are moving through us.” When referring to the Center, Doug Good Feather refers to our lives, for “Our life is the space through which the other six sacred directions are moving at all times,” and this space, the sacred Center, is not only where we can dive deeper into the meaning and understanding of life and our roles as human beings, it is here in the experience of the present moment “that we’re consciously co-creating our life as part of the wild divine” (p. 114).

Eco-Spiritualities, with their worldviews and practices, can help us overcome our distraction and daily-life sleep walking. They can bring us back to ourselves, to our center. Our participation reconnects us to our fundamental relationship with our Sacred Mother Earth, as co-creators with Consciousness.



CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” — Arundhati Roy (Quoted by Geneen Haugen, 2024 lecture)

My intention with this dissertation has been to embrace the mandate set forth by Micheal Meade (Chapter 4, above, p. 123) that what we are called to be doing in this historic moment is to begin adding our own thread of imagination and

genius to the world today as part of re-weaving the world fabric. My organic and grounded participatory research into the phenomenon of eco-spirituality and the transformation of consciousness has corroborated the prominent role of language and imagination in such transformation.

Philosopher and wilderness guide Geneen Marie Haugen speaks to the place of imagination and changing perception.

We are at a threshold moment in our planetary journey. Some days, the future might feel despairingly bleak. At other times, we might feel hints of a possible world coming; we might even hear the intake of her breath. What lies between these two contrasting experiences? Perhaps it's similar to the permeable border that lies between experiencing a dead universe and experiencing an animate cosmos – a border that might be crossed by way of imagination, perception, or shape-shifting worldviews. (*Imagination in a Changing World*, 2024 lecture)

I have found that the practices of the programs in which I participated as my primary research for this dissertation (SOW and EWC especially, but also SRMT and FSS) are conducive to such change, indeed to a transformation of mind, belief, and habits. Through my research I experienced (sensually, emotionally, intellectually) the reality of what previously were only intellectual concepts. Ceremonies, land wanderings, shamanic journeys, giving and receiving healing, meditations, and other practices have exposed me to and engaged me with the greater dimensions and reality of Mother Earth and our Cosmos. The programs and their practices have both facilitated my changing beliefs and habits as well as confirmed deeply held intuitions. With this dissertation I have endeavored to articulate and share that

enhanced awareness, offering the path of eco-spirituality as a possibility for individual and collective restoration of kindred relationships with Mother Earth.

There is a magic in believing. Intention, desiring to transform one's perception and perspective, one's consciousness, and the power of language to call forth and generate change is rather staggering. "Remember, words grant us access, language grants us access to the realm it describes. If we speak of it, we can journey there" (Casey, 2017, Module 1 transcript, p. 9). It is thus imperative we understand the language and words we use to describe and simply talk about things – in our lives and in our world. This journey of transformation can be said to be one of believing, of coming to believe a new world is possible, indeed of having new eyes with which to see the world anew. Participating in eco-spiritualities such as the Earthtribe or Seminary of the Wild provides a necessary means and support for engaging such a process, for grappling with these new and different understandings of reality, of our life and journey with Mother Earth and the Cosmos.

There seems to be among many people today a sense of foreboding, as if the future were inescapable. Yet, I would submit that EWA and SOW are two among numerous groups, organizations, and individuals actively and courageously stepping into the future, intentionally dreaming the new world aborning. They and others do so, among many ways of working and playing, by bringing our attention to the here and now. Amidst whatever tensions, apprehensions, chaos, and destruction we might perceive, eco-spiritualities reconnect us with Mother Earth

and the Great Spirit and say, “let’s begin (re-) writing the story right now.” In fact, that is all we ever could and can do: start where we are, today, wherever we find ourself.

The story is being written, now, today, by you and me and everyone as we go about our lives. Energy and scalar waves, light and sound vibrations, thought and verbal vibrations (intentions, invocations, blessings), communicating with plants and animals, planetary influences, archetypes and cultural mythic influences, the implicate and explicate orders, you name it. In every moment all and everything is weaving through you and me. We are inextricably intertwined amongst this wondrous entangled world and universe. And... we too, therefore, are one of the threads weaving the story of Mother Earth and the universe. We can grab hold of any thread and play with it (on it), adding our genius to the unfolding creation – which, without our participation will be incomplete – tuning, as it were, the unfolding creation to the reciprocal tune, melody, or pitch of wholeness.

In the old way of thinking, as Michael Meade and Gary Snyder put it, we humans were understood as being a bridge or conduit linking spirit and matter, heaven and earth. Participating in eco-spirituality gives one access to practices conducive to regaining such an understanding. Surprisingly, or perhaps not so surprisingly, these practices for restoring a kindred relationship with Mother Earth can come from the rustle of leaves, the songs of birds, the ripple of water, the yip of a coyote, the screech of an owl, the smell of lavender.



I offer the following reflections as learnings in response to questions I asked (in green) at the beginning of my research; some of which are here in the form of statements.

Learnings from participating in these two year-long programs have been many. As a practical matter I have learned specific ceremonies and rituals, and shamanic healing techniques and methodologies (e.g., extraction, soul retrieval, divination) which empower persons striving for wholeness (i.e., health). I learned that healing the world (Earth) involves healing self and the converse that healing self involves healing the world (Earth). Reciprocity is profound, it is at the heart of the laws of nature, indeed, of the ways of the cosmos. I came to appreciate that science is not only corroborating ancient and indigenous ways and traditions but contributing new insights and language by which to understand some of the Old Ways. My previous understanding that language, imagination, and ceremony play prominent roles in transformation and changing perspectives and consciousness was confirmed.

My ministry has been expanded and deepened. Preparing for Eco-Spiritual Mentoring and Eco-Ministry was by design a path of personal exploration as well as training to mentor or collaborate with others in their pursuits of such mutually enhancing relationships between themselves and Mother Earth. The various elements of my training provided experience in areas important for developing a vibrant eco-spirituality (whether specifically related to ministry or not).

Participating in these earth-based spiritualities has broadened the possibilities for both my focus and my repertoire of ministry. For instance, the variety of ceremonies, rituals, and other practices which can be incorporated into regular and seasonal worship. They can also be used with group and individual educational activities and spiritual development. For example, practices such as land wanderings and the four-direction developmental wheel can be used for personal psychological development and connecting persons with the elements and archetypes. Both of these practices could be incorporated into group discernment and decision-making, and could be expanded for use with a community. The theological and sociological implications for ethical consideration and action are profound, especially regarding issues of climate change, ecological stewardship, and social policy.

Seminary of the Wild itself is no longer an entity, its faculty have branched off establishing organizations unique to their interests, expanding the reach and possibilities initiated with SOW – over 100 people in four cohorts received the Eco-Ministry certificate. Two of those groups are The *Mythic Christ Mystery School* with its program of “awakening mythic imagination”, and The *Center for Wild Spirituality* with its program “Seminary of the Wild Earth.”

Others involved in ministry can avail themselves of similar resources and experiences from a variety of venues. The internet has made it possible for numerous organizations to offer online courses and workshops in all the areas and topics I have covered; many of them also offer in-person workshops. One example

within the Christian tradition is *The Church of the Wild* movement and *The Wild Church* Network which offers training on starting groups for building eco-spiritual communities, as well as providing a network of existing groups (churches) around North American with which people can participate.

Vital elements for teaching and pastoral ministry regarding individual and collective spiritual growth and activity in the world can come from embracing eco-spirituality. At the heart is understanding that each of us is at the center of the universe (from quantum and mythic perspectives). Like the redwood twigs circling Redwood Tree in my stake ceremony, together they formed the circle and this circle encompassed the tree, the ceremonial items, me, my stake. While Redwood represented the Tree of Life for the ceremony, thus the center of the universe, I as participant and actor within the ceremony also held the center. I, human, holder of space and place where heaven and earth meet, a conjunction of the spiritual and material. Setting intention and calling forth ancestors, directions, elements, helping spirits and power animals, indeed, Mother Earth and Father Sky. Creating opening as conduit for energy, Spirit. Non-local entanglement radiating waves of love, trust, and longing into Mother Earth and throughout Universe. Reciprocal embrace of Mother and Father and All spiraling and spiraling, higher and deeper without bounds.

Thus is the possibility for invigorating ministry enhanced (with various aspects of eco-spirituality). Ability to assist others in finding and experiencing their center, their uniqueness within the grand cosmic scheme. Shamanic awareness –

that everything is alive -- is a democratic spirituality (as FSS calls it), that is, each person has direct access to Spirit, and each person experiences Spirit uniquely. Same Spirit, manifesting as each person thence a unique expression. One task of ministry is people learning to trust themselves (as the unique cosmic energetic expression they are; Christians would say child of God). As each person becomes a clear conduit for Spirit, *another world is not only possible, she is on her way*; we become adept at dreaming a new world into being.

How would I grow? How would this help prepare me for elderhood and retirement? My participation in eco-spiritualities has given me first-hand experience of what I speak. As I move farther into retirement, I am in a position to share my wisdom, to advocate for Earth and the more-than-human relations from a deep, spiritual grounding. As I move into this next stage of my journey I bring with me, as part of who I am, this new awareness, this higher level of consciousness.

Preparing to be a Bridgewalker or Bridgebuilder between the present how-it-is and the future-becoming new era, resonates with the ideas of the Old Ways, that is, an elder's wisdom helps build a bridge for youth as young persons move from childhood and adolescence into adulthood and full community participation. An elder brings their experience to bear among a people as a help-meet and guide in times of change.

My relationship to Earth (and to Spirit) has been radically deepened.

Particularly my WHQ experience has impressed upon me the extraordinary

understanding that we are all in the midst of the vision quest Mother Earth herself is undergoing. There is, therefore, a tremendous need to develop awareness of this participation. Coming to understand and explore the concept of Earth as Mother Earth and *Gaia*, a living, organic entity, was not entirely new. That she might be inviting me (and all of us) into a conversation, a dialogue of intimacy and personal development was new and quite intriguing. It became a central motivating factor in my research. Embracing *Gaia* as a reality, and not just a mythic or archetypal reality; Mother Earth as indeed sacred and life-giving, as having a journey and a vision quest of her own.

The programs facilitated exploring ways of reconnecting, reestablishing, remembering, and engaging an eco-spirituality (way of life). Yes, this was very much the case, in fact, these dynamics are very much a central thrust of not only the programs but of my research and dissertation as well. Of note, however, and of great significance, is the role eco-spirituality plays in the *emergent path* of evolutionary transcendence. Eco-spirituality is a vehicle for people to connect and establish *once again* something I and others argue is inherent to human beingness and essential to *human well* in the world, but which has been lost and/or forgotten. And, as expressed throughout this dissertation, as we find and implement ways (old and new) to connect and establish relationships with Spirit and Mother Earth we continue to spiral into higher levels of consciousness, deepening our transformation and contributing to the miraculous adventure of life. It is not only about re-connecting, but of connecting; not just re-establishing, but of establishing. As we

participate “weaving into existence expressions of light and love that are metamorphosed expressions of deeply alchemical processes of spirit” (Alexander Laszlo, p.c.), we may very well be fulfilling our purpose, our calling in this kairos time.

These ways help build bridges, for instance between traditional and contemporary worldviews and peoples, between the spiritual/religious and the scientific/analytical approaches and realms, between humans and more-than-humans. Indeed, *participating in these programs has provided wisdom for living in right relationship with the more-than-human world*. And as a result, it becomes a way of life as well as a practice – recognizing and living from the awareness that we are all sisters and brothers, humans and more-than-humans (all my relations), all of the same Mother.

I found the wisdom of eco-spirituality to be embodied and storied in the complex intermingling of numerous strands such as myth, narratives, and stories with shamanic practices and reciprocal relations with Nature, as well as imagination and invocation with language, ritual, and ceremony. A challenging aspect of composing my dissertation was deciding what to include and what to leave out because the eco-field, as it were, of eco-spirituality is vast. My judgement call, in line with my phenomenological and organic inquiry, was to include those areas most impactful on myself, on the trajectory of my research as I pursued my journey into eco-spirituality and the process of transforming consciousness. The chapter on “Three Linking Spirals” explored three key areas of significance. The

chapter on “Shamanic and Scientific Connections to the Eco-Field” explored several important topics that arose in my research. These two chapters covered three areas and a few topics impacted by and with eco-spirituality; other people would likely select others topics. Each topic and area are subjects of unlimited curiosity and many previously published works. Even so, as these areas reflect core human dynamics, they will undoubtedly receive extensive further research.

As I have [explored shamanism and its connections](#) to consciousness, healing, and eco-fields in my research it has become clear to me that shamanism is a world-wide phenomenon, it has been around for over 30,000 years, it does not belong to any one people or culture, no one has property rights or ownership of shamanism. Shamanism belongs to all people (FSS Instructor Juan-Carlos Safa, p.c., March 23, 2025). In fact, “As we each descend from shamanic peoples, expanding consciousness, healing ourselves and living harmoniously with the earth is our birthright and responsibility” (Roberts & Levy, 2008, p. 7).

At the heart of shamanic imagination is the understanding that everything is alive. Shamanic practices are ways and techniques of engaging this aliveness in everything. This being in touch with the *Whole* thing, with everything, is a big part of what we might call shamanic magic (Medicine Eagle, 2023). Shamanism is a true blessing for today’s world in this regard, for truly, magic would seem to be required to pull us out of the deep hole we are in today. This deep hole stems, as I have attempted to show in a variety of ways, from a lack of consciousness, which creates at the same time a lack of connection to Mother Earth. Therefore, part of healing our

contemporary situation (individually and collectively) is a transformation or shapeshifting, as Llyn Roberts calls it (2011), into higher consciousness. Here again we see the significance of shamanism, for shamanic practitioners are among the best placed to explore cosmic consciousness at a deep level because of their experiences with it (Laszlo, 2023). Indeed, the work of shamans is to help people discover and live their own lives, to empower others, to help people wake up (Chaka-Runa, 2023).

My [explorations of scientific connections to the eco-field](#) have been more circumspect in that my research into any such connections was directed by what and how diverse topics (connections) surfaced in my journey. In that regard, scientific connections were considered supporting evidence for what I was encountering, they were not primary movers of my research. I was intrigued and even amazed by such connections and was grateful to encounter them and so able to add them to my quiver or backpack, as it were. My primary interest, however, has been more aligned with the spiritual energies and dynamics of practices which can facilitate an intentional recalibration of our perception (our imagination) and living in right relationship with the more-than-human world.

My research points to Mother Earth and Spirit collaborating to bring forth such a transformation among the human species. Shamanism and other manifestations of eco-spirituality play an instrumental role in this transformation. As more people become aware, reconnect and find balance and harmony, the commons, the collective is affected which subsequently generates further

transformation and greater awakening. Here we also see [how eco-spirituality relates to the care of the person and care of the planet](#), for as we become more present (more conscious) we become aware of spirit in everything. From this we experience a respect for everything and thus we take care of things (the Earth), including ourselves and each other. Out of such an awareness community can blossom, a community not only of humans but of all relations – people, animals, plants, rivers, eco-systems.



There are many ways to approach, meet, experience, and worship what we call sacred. So much gets lost and confused in translation and expression and the narrowness and rigidity of individual and group or institutional ego, let alone what is considered sacred scripture and traditions. Language and perspective, as creative and life-giving as they may be, can also function as an iron cage, as the German philosopher and sociologist Max Weber so bluntly put it.¹⁹² SOW helped me better incorporate Christian terminology in discussing and interpreting the interweaving relationship of Mother Earth, humanity, and Consciousness; of pushing beyond domesticated boundaries into “the Wild.”

¹⁹² The original German term is *stahlhartes Gehäuse* (steel-hard casing); this was translated into “iron cage”, an expression made familiar to English-speakers by Talcott Parsons in his 1930 translation of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905).

As an ordained minister of a protestant denomination - The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) – with over 30 years in ministry and an advanced degree in Spirituality, I come to the Christian tradition as an insider, as it were. With over a half-century of study and participation in a variety of religious and spiritual traditions, I also bring a certain level of not only “Christian” awareness but of religion and spirituality in general. I found SOW’s efforts at blending the Christian tradition with nature-based or eco-spirituality successful. In fact, quite revealing with refreshing interpretations and readings of familiar texts and stories and, among other things, a variety of prayer and meditation practices. SOW delivered on its intention “to embrace a disruptive innovation in our western culture with both imagination and spiritual integrity.”

The year-long SOW engendered a stronger sense of community for me than the program of EWA. This resulted from the cohort and clan structure of the SOW program, compared to the WHQ and EWA which I found to be more an individual enterprise, even though held within the (online) activities of the Earthtribe community. The intentionality of regular small group (clan) meetings over the course of a year developed an intimacy and sharing I did not experience with EWA.

I did, however, develop a stronger connection with my EWA/WHQ mentor than with that of my SOW mentor. The same dynamic applies in this regard, that is, although I thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated both, I had more one-on-one interactions with my WHQ mentor than I did with my SOW mentor. In part, this was due to my WHQ extending almost two years, and my monthly (mostly) mentor

meetings continued a-pace, whereas my monthly mentor meetings for SOW concluded when the year program did.

My primary focus and activity within EWA was the Wild Heart Quest, just one aspect of their Eco-Spiritual Mentor certificate program, and which was pursued at each participant's own pace. Unfortunately, after my WHQ as I started my last course both Co-Directors of the program passed away within a few months of each other: Will Taegel in May 2022, and Lillie Rowden later that summer. The Earthtribe and EWA were unable to continue the program, so I was not able to complete the full Eco-Spiritual Mentor program. Also of significance, Will Taegel, my WHQ mentor, was also my original doctoral degree advisor. It took a number of months to regroup and recover from this loss (of program, advisor, and personal mentor). Although no official certificate resulted, I continued my journey through participating in programs of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies and Shamanic Reiki Worldwide, as well as through continued interaction with my helping spirits and power animals, and with colleagues from the programs. Additionally, through writing my dissertation, and interaction (intra-action) with all the books, podcasts, encounters in the wild, and the myriad manifestations of participating in the miraculous unfolding of Consciousness. Indeed, the road goes ever on.



Significantly, at this time in human history, earth-based or eco-spirituality offers humans a way to (re-)connect with Earth, with our Mother, with the very

physical reality in which we live. It is in this regard that an eco-spirituality may play a vital role in spiritual mentoring, for it can profoundly affect people. For instance, someone who has always thought of nature as inanimate, or as a collection of commodities to be exploited, may have experiences which move them emotionally, which might lead to making a dramatic or even slight change in their life and how they interact with and treat “nature.” The effect of such experiences can be life altering.

In other instances, it might be that someone desires a deeper connection with either nature or Spirit. An eco-spiritual mentor or an eco-minister could suggest or illustrate a variety of ways for the person to connect. It could also be the case that a spiritual mentor might be called upon to help a person interpret or understand what is happening to them or has happened in some practice or encounter in which nature or Spirit appeared or interacted with them in a new and different manner.

Eco-spirituality is practical, it has implications for how we live our lives in the contemporary world. Doug Good Feather addresses the importance of decisions we make (or do not) about how we live, about whether we are “going to live in alignment with Grandmother Earth or live for a corporate system” (Good Feather, 2021, p. 113). He does so in real-world terms, that is, in relation to social, economic, and political dynamics in which contemporary society functions. I quote at length in order to capture the integral nature of these connections.

The power structures of our modern-day society distract us from our internal understanding that we are part of that *all*. On every part of the earth, we can clearly see the devastation and horror humans inflict on other sentient beings and the destruction we bring to Grandmother Earth. It's not just the bad medicine humans bring to the world, but it's also the disrespect and abuse we inflict on ourselves mentally, physically, and spiritually with the toxic waste that we allow into our hearts, minds, and bodies. For those of us that walk the Red Road, it's part of our life's work to dismantle these harmful power structures in all the ways that we're able to.

There will come a time in each of our lives when we have to be honest with ourselves and decide if we're going to live in alignment with Grandmother Earth or live for a corporate system. This may be the most important decision we face in this lifetime – because finding our Center and living a life of genuine meaning and beauty is what's at stake. (pg. 113)

W. Clark Gilpin, Professor Emeritus of the History of Christianity and Theology, The Divinity School, University of Chicago, helps us remember the profound prophetic imagination and possibility held within the Christian tradition for such alignment to the interrelatedness of life. Gilpin quotes the Rev., Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who in a commencement address delivered in 1961, *The American Dream*, “declared that as individuals, as a nation, and as a universal community, we find our freedom not as individuals but as an inclusive community of mutual responsibility. As King memorably stated, ‘All life is interrelated. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality; tied in a single garment of destiny’” (Gilpin, 2024, p.8).

In the face of such possibility Caroline Casey reminds us that “**Wonder** is also a sacrament. I wonder what would alleviate my despair. I wonder what would transform this despair into deeper dedication. I mean all true emotions are good,

but they're presented to us to transform. What does despair want to be? It wants to be a deeper dedication to beauty" (Casey, 2017, Module 1 transcript, p. 19).

We are inviters to the big story. Come on over here to this renaissance. This is what's happening. Come on over here. We're all inviters. If we go, "oh, it's terrible," it's terrible. It's almost a responsibility to ally ourselves with that which is joyful, that we be magnetizers, that we be agents of solution. We are the molecules of which the big story converses with itself through the agency of synchronicity. (Casey, 2017, p. 24)

The last paragraph of the *Shamanic Reiki Master Teacher* "Spirit Guide" pamphlet (2021) speaks to a fundamental experiential knowledge I have acquired during my research journey, one that bears directly on my dissertation. "The more we relax into the experience of our spiritual helpers and open the space in our schedules and in our hearts to perceive and play with our allies, the more we allow the mythical reality that interweaves the mundane reality to come alive and be accessible to us. This is part of the ecstasy of the shamanic path." An eco-spirituality can be *a modality for dreaming a new world into being*, allowing the mythical reality that interweaves the mundane reality to come alive and be accessible to us! To recognize and help manifest the wholeness and harmony Earth and Spirit hold for us is surely an ecstatic journey, should we choose to partake. Shamanic imagination and eco-spiritualities help us remove our cultural blinders so that we may really see... how the mythical and spiritual interweave and interpenetrate everyday life; that indeed it is all one.

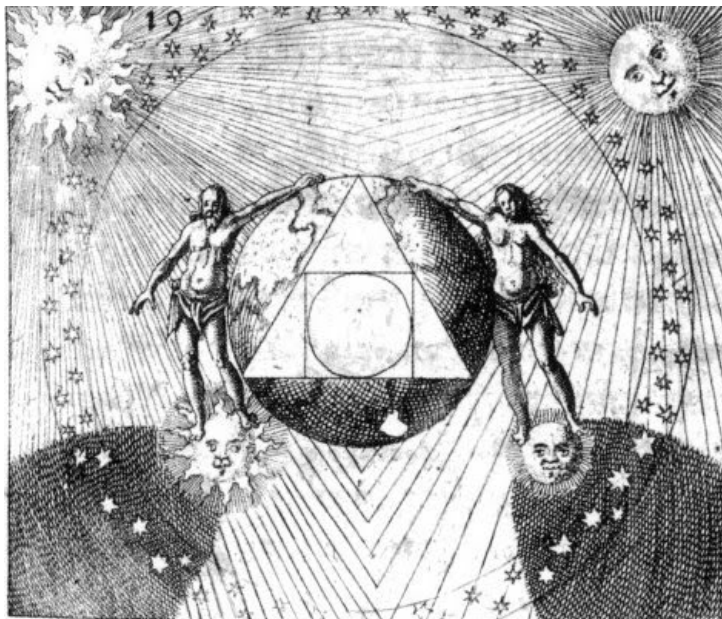
It has been my intention with this dissertation, among other things, to offer possible narrative frameworks for transforming our meta-narrative regarding our place in the world and cosmos and our subsequent relationship to Mother Earth. Transforming such narratives is essential for Restoring a Kindred Relationship with Mother Earth because the stories we tell ourselves about who and what we are profoundly shape how we embody our ultimate purposes and the ways in which we create and organize institutions to fulfill on those.

In way of a blessing, I close with this thought from the Irish poet John O'Donohue. In speaking of the power of blessing he says, "A friend is a loved one who awakens your life in order to free the wild possibilities within you." (Casey, 2017, p. 75). May this dissertation be such. And may all of us, you the reader and I the author, be those friends, those loved ones, who awaken the lives of our friends and loved ones, indeed the lives of people throughout our society and around the world.



APPENDICES A. and B.

A. Dance of Sacred Feminine and Masculine – Becoming “Truly Human”



From a seventeenth-century alchemical work (Lance, 1994)

One of the most intriguing and significant teachings of Mary Magdelene, the Beloved Companion, is revealed, in my mind, in the *Gospel of the Beloved Companion* (GBC) in chapter 30, verse 12. In replying to a question from the disciple Levi (“whom some have called Mattithyahu”) about how they shall attain the kingdom, Yeshua.¹⁹³ replies, in part: “*when you make the two into one, and when you make the inner like the outer and the outer like the inner, and the upper like the lower, and when you make male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male nor the female be female ... only then shall you gain the kingdom*” (DeQuillan, 2010, pp. 58 and 96, emphasis added). Of interest, this passage is virtually identical to the Gospel of Thomas, verses 22 and 23.

I was immediately struck by the similarity to the alchemical sacred marriage. Jehanne de Quillan comments, “the teacher reveals his ‘blueprint’ for Consciousness,” that, not surprisingly, is both startling and controversial, for both first-century Jewish society as well as for many contemporary readers. In addition to any metaphysical or spiritual implications, there are strong implications from such teaching on a social level. Jehanne de Quillan tells us Yeshua implies that “in the

¹⁹³ Yeshua is the Aramaic name for Jesus.

process of attaining the Kingdom, male and female are held in equal standing, both being called upon to enter the spiritually androgynous state necessary to know God” (p. 100).

Author and theologian Cynthia Bourgeault understands the integration of the masculine and feminine, of the finite and the infinite on a cosmic level. Indeed, such integration is not merely “within one’s finite humanity”... it involves “learning how to anchor one’s being in that underlying unitive ground: that place of oneness before the opposites arise.” One becomes “a single one”... an enlightened or “fully human” being (Bourgeault, 2010, p. 55). Of significance here, Jesus is speaking not of leaving the world or achieving some sort of heavenly realm removing oneself from the world. Rather, this union of opposites of which he speaks “pertains to the union of the finite and the infinite within oneself, or the bringing together of the vertical axis with the horizontal so that there is ‘one Heart, one Being, one Will, one God, all in all’ (as Bourgeault quotes medieval mystic Jacob Boehme). When this happens, the world does not pass away, but one is able to live in it as master, re-creating its external forms... out of the infinite generativity of the One” (p. 55).

The concept of becoming “truly human” comes into play in 41:3 of the GBC as Miryam, the Migdalah, greets the gathered disciples and begins sharing. It is a phrase easily overlooked. In the last sentence of the verse, Miryam encourages “her brethren” saying they should not grieve at Yeshua’s death but rather be filled with praise for his greatness because “he has prepared us and *made us truly human*” (Bourgeault, p. 115; 41:3. Emphasis added). This notion of being made or becoming truly human is one of which some of the early church fathers also spoke.¹⁹⁴ There was something about engaging with the way of Yeshua through or by which one became truly human. Becoming truly human was not simply a matter of being a follower of Jesus, it was a result of actively engaging the spiritual practices, of doing the work, as Cynthia Bourgeault puts it. Here Miryam, the Beloved Companion, not only states this maxim but proceeds to provide a guide map of the path to follow including the steps and obstacles one will encounter.

From its earliest days the Eastern Church has affirmed the idea of *deification*, the process of realizing spiritual unity with God, which was seen as the purpose of human life.¹⁹⁵ Russian philosopher Georges Florovsky describes

¹⁹⁴ It has been over 40 years since I read Patristics and accounts from the early church, yet upon some research I was pleased to discover my memory correct in identifying both Irenaeus (c. 130-202) and Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662) as two of those using the term.

¹⁹⁵ This perspective (theology) is in contrast to what is known as atonement theology, which the Western Christian Church didn’t formally adopt until 1054. “Followers of atonement theology believe that every person has sinned and that we can never repay God for all that we have done. They also believe that God required repayment of some kind, but knew that humanity could never bear the actual burden of their collective guilt. So to save us from ourselves, he sent his son Jesus to die in our stead — for our sins. All humankind is responsible and is guilty for the death of Jesus. By sacrificing his son, God paid humanity’s debt. Viewed through the lens of atonement theology, Jesus, through his death and dying, became a sacrificial victim.” From an article, “Atonement and

deification thusly: “The deification of man [*sic.*] is not his absorption or dissolution. On the contrary, it is in this Godlikeness that the human truly becomes himself. For man is created in the image of God and is called to Godlikeness.... Deification means inseparable connection, perfect harmony, and unity” (Florovsky, 1995).

Please note, it is imperative the reader include women in these readings and quotes. We are addressing the topic of masculine and feminine as equals coming together as one. God includes both even if some Christian theologians do not.

Church fathers used a variety of expressions to speak about *deification* and *theosis* (which has a similar meaning as deification: a transformative process whose aim is likeness to or union with God). In the first couple of centuries of what became known as Christianity there was much ferment and a wide variety of views about human nature and what was/is possible for humanity. For example, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), wrote: “Yea, I say, the Word of God became a man so that you might learn from a man how to become a god.” Clement further stated that “[i]f one knows himself, he will know God, and knowing God will become like God. . . . His is beauty, true beauty, for it is God, and that man becomes a god, since God wills it.” He also stated that “he who obeys the Lord and follows the prophecy given through him... becomes a god while still moving about in the flesh” (Wikipedia. Divinization (Christian) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divinization_\(Christian\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divinization_(Christian))).

As strange as such thoughts may be to much of modern Christianity, and to others raised in the West who have what I would call a general cultural understanding of Christianity but who may or may not consider themselves Christian, these thoughts come from some of the major and most influential Christian theologians of the first few centuries, that is, before the onslaught of orthodoxy and heretical labeling with the Councils of Nicaea (325) and following councils. Such a lack of understanding is more a reality in the Western Church (Roman Catholic and Protestant), than in the East, although a strict orthodoxy tends to limit all Christian persuasions from hearing things outside the norm or “master story”¹⁹⁶ – even if directly in the tradition’s written and accepted record.

The scope of deification is quite broad, not only are individual persons united with the divine, but all of creation is transformed in (into) such a harmonious and connected unity. Indeed, it is understood as a spiritualization of the earthly world in such a manner that both matter (the human person) and spirit are equally and fully present; a full realization of both, no separation. “The human activity in transforming themselves and the created world on the way of deification is symbolically

Theosis Theologies: Original Sin and Original Blessing,” on a link on the Holy Wisdom community website: <https://www.holywisdomicc.org/easter/> .

¹⁹⁶ Scholar Karen King makes brilliant use of the term “master story” (in her 2003 book, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*) to describe the received and accepted “of course it is this way” (my words) version of the Christian message and story that has come to us through the canonical gospels and epistles as well as orthodox tradition. Cynthia Bourgeault quotes King and uses “master story” in her 2010 book *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene*, which is how I know of this particular use of the term.

described by Maximus in his work *Mystagogy*. Deification is the central goal of man, and everything created by God contributes to the unification of the earthly world with the Logos so that God is present in the whole human race. In this conciliar nature, St. Maximus saw the destiny of the free and intelligent deification of all beings. Above all, however, the individual must accomplish deification in himself, for he is a certain microcosmic image of the universe” (Chistyakova, 2021).

Mary Magdalene was given a direct teaching from Yeshua on how such deification is accomplished. Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence that these early church fathers (and mothers?) knew of Mary’s gospel, although given that the GBC came from Alexandria one can surmise that the Catechetical School of Alexandria¹⁹⁷ may have inherited her teachings. So, too, the fact that a similar term was used by both her and others points to the possibility of a shared teaching. This teaching being left out of Christian scripture and nearly disappearing from the Western Church is a tragedy of immense proportion.

Continuing with the theme of deification and becoming truly human, I was intrigued when reading Jehanne de Quillan’s translation of the Gospel of Mary with the phrase “put on perfect humanity” (p.127). She translates the phrase “perfect humanity” the same in both the Gospel of Mary and the GBC (43:6). Cynthia Bourgeault, on the other hand, gives us another translation of this phrase: “...we should be clothed instead with the cloak of True Humanity...” (Bourgeault, p. 76). I wish I knew ancient Greek, for the immediate pressing question raised for me is what if any relationship does this phrase have with “truly human”? Are they the same? Jehanne de Quillan’s English rendition of the two is so close and yet she uses different words. She also offers the parenthetical note that “perfect humanity” is the Kingdom of God, Enlightenment (GBC, p. 130). She offers no such interpretation when using “truly human.” I am left wondering how she interprets that, and how she would describe the difference between the two.

Likewise, Cynthia Bourgeault provides no explanation or further interpretation of her rendition of the phrase. However, she does provide key interpretive insight on the terminology and understanding of what it is to become fully or truly human. “‘To become fully human’ is a modern translation of the words ‘to become an *anthropos*,’ a complete human being.” Furthermore, “both here and in the Gospel of Thomas this notion is at the very heart of Jesus’ vision of transformation” (Bourgeault, p. 54). Furthermore, as author and scholar Kayleen Asbo stated in her lecture on the GBC (July 21 and August 11, 2020), it is the essential quality that Mary Magdalene embodied.

¹⁹⁷The Catechetical School of Alexandria was a school of Christian theologians, bishops, and deacons in Alexandria, Egypt. The teachers and students of the school were influential in many of the early theological controversies of the Christian church. It was one of the two major centers of the study of biblical exegesis and theology during Late Antiquity, the other being the School of Antioch. According to Jerome the Alexandrian school was founded by St. Mark the Apostle.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catechetical_School_of_Alexandria

I find Cynthia Bourgeault extremely pertinent in helping us moderns grasp the full import of this ancient, traditional perspective. According to her, what is often interpreted from a psychological perspective in our contemporary world, “building on a Jungian foundation,” sees the concept of *anthropos* as an individual integration of opposites, of the masculine and feminine principles within the human psyche. While this is *partially* true, Bourgeault says that perspective is *much* “too limited to contain the cosmic sweep of Jesus’ meaning.” Indeed, this [Jesus’] integration “is accomplished through learning how to anchor one’s being in that underlying unitive ground: that place of oneness *before the opposites arise*” (Bourgeault, pp. 54-55, emphasis added). We must note that the concept of opposites here is the limited one of our contemporary world; Jesus’ cosmic sweep is one of unity and oneness. This greater definition of *anthropos* is a fundamental shift in perception, and important to remember because “it is the key to everything in this gospel [of Mary]” (p. 55).

It is pertinent to briefly comment further on this “concept of opposites”. The idea of opposites is ancient and fairly universal; in addition to both Eastern and Western alchemical solar and lunar opposites, consider the Chinese “Yin” and “Yang”, and the universal human experience of night and day. Alchemy views the eclipse of the Sun as a mystery of psychic opposites (of the sun and the moon); its strength can be in the dialectic between the two, a confrontation and collaboration at the same time (Elsner & Wikman. 2021). While some opposites seem to be unflexible, others seem quite mutable. For example, as related in the main body of this dissertation, Doug Good Feather provides guidance on the distinction and relationship of masculine and feminine. He writes:

“The spiritual concept of masculinity has very little to do with being male. Certain concepts and beings, such as heaven, fire, hunting, and planting, are energetically rooted in the masculine. And certain concepts and beings, including earth, water, gathering, and harvesting, are energetically rooted in the feminine. Almost no concept or being is fully masculine or feminine all the time – sometimes we’re connecting with our feminine energy and sometimes we’re in connection with our masculine energy. Each of us has a natural resting point somewhere on the masculine-feminine scale.” (p. 87)

Yet, while such opposites exist in the natural world and/or as a way of perceiving reality, there is a possibility of moving beyond the idea of opposites altogether. Author Sophie Strand employs a fundamental dynamic of the natural world in proposing such a movement. She states: “That mischievous symbiotic wedding of fungi and algae,” which at first appears simple but upon closer examination reveals “...not a marriage of equal opposites, [but] a mixing bowl of multiplicities.” She concludes, “This is no dualistic marriage of opposites. Lichen seems to be a fertile alternative to the old heterosexual *hieros gamos*, otherwise known as ritualistic sacred marriage” (Strand, p. 118).

However arrived at, it is this sense of unity and wholeness – whether of a mixing bowl of multiplicities or a union of opposites -- that exhibits what Cynthia Bourgeault calls Jesus’ cosmic sweep, and which both he (Jesus) and Mary Magdalene exemplified. As much as I rely in this appendix upon concepts related to the archetypal dance of the sacred feminine and masculine, with the possibility of becoming truly human we are into realms and states of being way beyond concepts of gender identities and what social roles we play. Here we touch on “the union of the finite and the infinite within oneself, or the bringing together of the vertical axis with the horizontal so that there is ‘one Heart, one Being, one Will, one God, all in all’...” (Bourgeault, p. 55).

Cynthia Bourgeault offers the following commentary on Mary Magdalene’s state of being, having become fully human.¹⁹⁸ Mary Magdalene moves among the other disciples as one who has “become fully human.” She does not merely parrot the Master’s teaching back to them, flaunting her specialness. Rather, she serves the situation. Flowing through the spiritual energy of her own alignment is a *baraka* – a grace that is able to actually shift the other disciples’ emotional state. She is able to “turn their hearts to the good” (p. 55).

Thus, Bourgeault concludes, Mary Magdalene is not just the first among the apostles, as church tradition correctly has it, “...but in fact, the only one of them to authentically merit the title.” She has earned her special place, “...because she has been able so deeply to absorb and integrate [Jesus’] spiritual methodology. She has learned the secret of unbroken union with him across the realms, and she teaches from the same font of living water that flowed in him – in fact, *still* flows in him, only now in a different energetic form. And thus, doing as real apostles do, she is able to lift her brethren out of their psychological paralysis and focus them once again on ‘the meaning of the Savior’s words’” (p. 56).

SOW faculty Matt Syrdal provides a glimpse of this sacred marriage through a lens of archetypes and wild nature. Viewing Mary Magdalene as an archetype of the Wild (Divine) Feminine we see her “and the Christ conjoin the cosmic energies of erotic love and death, an anointing that is both indelibly sensual and fragrant as it is medicinal and healing for the more-than-human world.” Furthermore, he proposed that Pattiann Rogers expresses in her poem “This Kind of Grace,” “a return to erotic incarnation that reunites the sacred feminine and masculine through a ceremony of

¹⁹⁸ Cynthia Bourgeault’s illuminating commentary and analysis is based solely on The Gospel of Mary (GM), apparently she did not have access to the Gospel of the Beloved Companion. That in no way diminishes the import of her conclusions, in fact, I would argue it enhances her work because even without the more detailed and complete GBC, Bourgeault was able to distill and articulate an incredible and hugely important portrait of “the woman at the heart of Christianity,” as her book’s subtitle states. And, as Jehanne de Quillan provides evidence, what with the GBC being an earlier work it is most likely the source of the GM. Another point of interest, while Jehanne de Quillan includes some theological and what could be called spiritual reflection and commentary, her commentary is primarily one of textual analysis. Bourgeault is almost the opposite, providing theological and spiritual commentary.

wild anointing reminiscent of the Magdalene and the Christ, the sensual body of Earth and the tender embrace of Heaven, the human and more-than-human world entangled in conjugal conversation of pure ecstatic delight” (Syrdal, November 2020, p. 1).

B. Findings from Neuroscience Research – We are what we think -- Waking up

Findings from neuroscience research complement the possibilities ancient ways provide of waking up from our sleepwalking or lack of attention. If, as neuroscience holds, the brain takes its shape from what the mind focuses on, contemporary human brains would seem to be focused and thus shaped by frequencies of electronic technology more so than by “natural” frequencies of the planet let alone internal frequencies of spirit. Accumulation of experiences as much as material things, is a guiding force of much contemporary human life. Different groups and individuals focus of course on different things, one standard or stereotype cannot be applied indiscriminately across everyone, but it seems safe to say that contemporary society is not generally focused on qualities that enhance the overall wellbeing of each other or the planet: love, compassion, cooperation, joy, mutuality.

There is hope, of course, that the tide may be turning, that more and more people are changing the focus of their thinking and thus their lives, that a tipping point may be reached to shift the societal drift from destruction to a more harmonious way. Fundamental to any such shift in behavior and actions are the beliefs people hold, how we think, the ideas that form the basis of our identities and behaviors. If the brain takes its shape from what the mind focuses on, then change (especially of the evolutionary and transformational) is about taking responsibility for who we are, so we can become who we want to be. Directed mental activity can systematically alter brain structure and function. If we would change, we must begin to break the negativity virus that has come down to us over the millennium, we must begin to focus on the positive, on what we desire and envision. In practicing positivity, we are actually taking care of ourselves; taking in the good is treating yourself as if you matter. Combining attention with intention is an active use of imagination. It is like we are creating a backpack for this changing world. As someone said on the Ubiquity University Applied Neuroscience course, “inner strengths are the stable traits to grow within and to keep with you at all times” (September 9, 2021).

Another way to speak of this is with the popular term “mindfulness.” Mindfulness involves a certain way of paying attention to one’s thinking, to one’s mental sensations. Whether in meditation or anytime throughout the day, one

practices mindfulness as one notices one's mind wandering (this is the default reality), thus becoming aware of distractions. From this distraction awareness one can then reorient one's attention back to the original thought or focus, thus sustaining one's focus. Significant here is that *this whole cycle is mindfulness* training or meditation, it is not merely focusing on some thing or thought. Jordan Quaglia of Naropa University put it succinctly when he commented that what meditation is all about is "getting better at waking up out of thought!", especially so when moving from the first to second step of this cycle.

There is a correlation between this awareness and practice of the active focusing and direction of the mind, and all its many ramifications, and the awareness that Pachamama (Mother Earth) is realigning her nature with herself, and this means lots of changes for humans (The awareness and teaching of Earthtribe and WHQ). (Personal Note, September 9, 2021, Applied Neuroscience; and PhD journal, December 13, 2023).

In order to change our beliefs and habits we must change our minds, but in order to change our minds we must change our beliefs and habits.



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Joanna Macy: May 5, 2020 - "The Power of Our Belonging"

Bill Plotkin: June 16, 2020 - "Wild Mind, Wild Self"

Mirabai Starr, June 21, 2020 - "The Feminine Web of Interbeing"

Andreas Weber, July 14, 2020 - "Matter & Desire: An Erotic Ecology"

Michael Dowd, July 21, 2020 - "God and Evolution"

Lisa Dahill, August 25, 2020 - "Rewilding Spirituality"

Matthew Fox, September 22, 2020 - "The Cosmic Christ Today"

Brian McLaren, October 13, 2020 - "Wild Theology"

Veronica Kyle, December 3, 2020 - "The Gifts of Eco-Womanism For the Church"

Michael Meade, January 28, 2021 - "The Genius Myth"

Laurie Ferguson, February 2, 2021 - "Wild Coaching"

