

LOVE YOUR MOTHER

by Peter Holmes

June 3, 2018

This is not intended to be a lecture. Rather it represents my annual opportunity to try to get clear about the state of my thinking and feeling with regard to my relationship with our living planet Earth. I hope it will be useful to you too.

I would imagine that most of you have seen the bumper sticker displaying the words: LOVE YOUR MOTHER accompanied by a picture of the planet Earth. I want to talk about the deeper meaning of this message. How it is calling for nothing less than a spiritual renaissance in our culture - a spiritual renewal centered on rediscovering the sacred in everyday life on our beautiful planet.

With the old religions failing and church attendance dropping people are desperately seeking something that gives them a solid sense of meaning and belonging.

We can trace the beginnings of our current sense of being spiritually bereft back to the Enlightenment in the 18th Century where logic and reason began to emerge as the preferred story to create meaning in our culture. Newtonian physics subscribed to a story of humans being separate from the physical world, which in turn was seen as unfeeling matter, a clockwork mechanism whose workings it was our right and duty to understand and control. While this view has given us the development of science and technology, it has severed us from any relationship to the Earth as a living whole of whose cycles we are an integral part.

There was a push back against this thinking during the subsequent Romantic Age but eventually science and reason became the preferred paradigm through which most people saw the world. Since that time there has always been a tension between reason and romanticism between science and spirituality that is at the root of our struggles to make sense of what is happening in our world today.

I find this tension/conflict within myself having chosen, at an early age, to embrace rationality and reason and reject the airy-fairy stories of the romantics. I was a curious child, wanting to understand how the world worked and the stories of mathematics and science seemed to have the best explanations for me. However

my reasoning over the years, has led me to the conclusion that scientific logic is also just one story that gives us meaning and like all stories it has its limitations.

Scientific Logic assumes inquiry is value free

A naturalistic paradigm, in contrast, sees inquiry as inherently value bound.

In other words the questions that science asks and tries to answer come out of a certain perspective with certain values.

Scientific logic assumes that there is one reality that is measurable and can be understood by fragmenting the whole and studying pieces

A naturalistic paradigm, on the other hand, sees reality as multiple, constructed, and holistic (Everything is related and cannot be understood in isolation)

Scientific logic hypothesizes that knower and known are independent

Naturalism sees knower and known as interactive and inseparable.

In other words, there is no such thing as objective observation

Teasing these details out can get complicated but you can see that the assumptions of scientific logic tell a particular story with particular consequences. A very useful and compelling story but still a story. I value the insights and usefulness of the scientific story but I crave the balance that the naturalistic paradigm can provide me.

So humans, being conscious animals, live in this dichotomy between science and mysticism informed by two conflicting stories. Just to give you a sense of this dichotomy, for a moment, consider Scott. I could use my scientific techniques to describe Scott: his height his weight, his photograph, his history, his relationships, the food he eats, the rate of growth of his toe nailsetc., etc. I could come up with a thousand descriptors of all his various parts but could the combination of all these measures give me a real sense of what it is like to experience a relationship with Scott in all his magnificence? Suddenly feelings are important and it is no longer just Scott that I am observing but a relationship between the two of us, observer and observed, that is moving and changing and renewing itself in every moment.

We do the same thing with how we view our Earth and other living creatures. We objectify. We have lost and entirely forgotten any spiritual relationship to life and the planet, a central reality to other cultures for millennia. Where for indigenous peoples the world was a sacred, interconnected living whole that cares for us and

for which we in turn need to care - our Mother Earth - for our western culture it has become something "other" to exploit.

So the bumper sticker Love Your Mother calls for nothing less than a spiritual renaissance - a new story for the 21st century that gives as much importance to seeing the Earth as sacred as it does to the perspective of science, technology, and materialism.

I believe that Unitarian Universalism is well placed to take a lead in this project but I think we could do better. I think that our church could give more priority to promoting a profound reverence for nature and the wider Universe and an awed recognition of their power, beauty and mystery.

At the UU General Assembly 2 years ago I found no presentations about this issue and there are none scheduled at this year's GA in Kansas City. I also think we could improve on the statement of the UU 7th principle. This promises: *Respect for the interdependent web of all existence*. This strikes me as a cold, intellectual, objective statement that does not say anything about Love, Belonging, Connection, Passionate Embrace, Oneness

I would also like to amend our own UUCC vision statement that currently reads: **UUCC grows in environmental consciousness and advocates for the health of the earth (no cap e) and all living things** to read something like:

I pledge to love my Mother Earth (capital E) with all my heart and all my soul and all my mind and to constantly remind myself of the oneness of all life.

When using the slogan Love Your Mother to refer to the Earth just for a moment consider using it to refer to your real mother. Immediately it brings up strong feelings for me of relationship, belonging, vulnerability, connectedness, family, nurturing, gratefulness, security. Does "UUCC grows in environmental consciousness and advocates for the health of the earth and all living things" bring up those sort of feelings for you?

My wish is that we can begin to have conversations in our church about the deeper meaning of Love Your Mother Earth and about how we can begin to spiritually reconnect with our deep Earth roots.

There is an energetic and growing ecological movement that reminds us that we are guardians of our planet and it is our responsibility to look after the Earth's

physical environment and its myriad inhabitants. This movement is doing tremendous work in trying to turn back the devastation of humanity's plunder of the planet but it rarely addresses our inherent responsibility for the sacred within creation. Instead, in only relating to our planet from a physical, scientific perspective, much of the environmental movement perpetuates the concept of Earth as something solely physical, without sacredness or soul, and so reinforces the divorce of matter and spirit. While we may remember the sacredness of human beings, we have forgotten that the Earth is also sacred and that its soul can speak to ours. We are not realizing that our guardianship of the planet means taking responsibility for its physical *and* its sacred nature, and their interrelationship.

It is only through awakening to an awareness of the sacred within creation, and its relationship to our own sacred nature, that we can begin to redeem the primal imbalance that lies at the root of our present predicament. Any awareness of the world as a living whole needs to include its sacred dimension. Otherwise we are just treating the symptoms rather than the cause. We cannot afford the split between spirit and matter - we cannot afford to ignore life's sacred nature.

Our neglect and dismissal of the sacred within Creation is, in turn, creating an inner wasteland as real as the Tar Sands in Alberta. The globalization of our soulless, materialist culture is having disastrous effects on our inner world, polluting it as much as the outer environment. And like the danger of climate change and the extinction of species, this inner wasteland is growing faster than we realize.

How do we respond to this hidden crisis? How can we awaken from our dream of forgetfulness? If we have a sense that something deep within our being, and within the being of the world, is out of balance, we can listen. We may then hear the cry of Mother Earth, its call to us. And hearing this cry we might begin to awaken to sense a lack of the sacred, of this primal substance that gives meaning to all of life.

We cannot return to the simplicity of an indigenous lifestyle, but we can become aware that what we do and how we are at an individual level affects the global environment, both outer and inner. We can mindfully and bodifully connect with our Mother Earth on a daily basis. Sometimes it is easier to feel this connection when we work in the garden tending our flowers and vegetables. Or when we cook, preparing vegetables that Mother Earth has given us. The divine oneness of life is within us and all around us. We just need to pay attention in a particular way. Sometimes walking alone in nature we can feel its heartbeat and its wonder and our steps become an act of worship. The simple practice of walking mindfully,

with every step feeling the connection with our sacred Earth - is one way to reconnect with the living spirit of the planet.

There are so many other ways to reconnect with the sacred in our daily lives. When we hear the morning chorus of birds, or gazing up in wonder at the night stars. Watching the simple wonder of dawn or sunset can be a sacrament in itself.

Mother Earth needs our attention and prayers, needs our love and support, just as it has always given us the love and support that we need. May we remember our role as guardians of the Earth and custodians of its sacred ways, and may we return once again to live in harmony with its natural rhythms and laws.