

Sermon *Revering Mother Nature*
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It is great to be part of this summer series on a core part of our UU LIVING tradition for several reasons. One is that the story of this source about earth based spiritual traditions is connected deeply to the story of my adult life in particular. So let me begin with once upon a time.....

Once this core UU structure of Principles and Sources was NOT part of UU tradition; in fact it was 1984 when this core structure was adopted unanimously. To me, that's not so long ago, and well after I became a UU. All parts were adopted 1984, that is, except for the source we are reflecting on today. This was the last source added and it happened in 1995. By then the Women's Movement had gained some general acceptance and the environmental issues were emerging. Liberal UUs no longer considered Western culture as the only model for life.

Now about the Women's Movement: picture a few years earlier in 1973 or 74. I am in the kitchen watching our 2 kids ages 1 and 3. My husband is meeting in the living room with the Manchester Unitarian Universalist Society:East nominating committee of which he is chair. He comes into the kitchen muttering and looking for refills. They are doing great except they can't find a President Elect. I stand there and say, "What about me?"

Now mind you we had never had a woman in that level leadership role. But I was desperately tired of running pot luck suppers, RE programs and fund raisers. They were desperate too. I got the job. Women were moving up in UU churches here there and everywhere, many becoming ministers. The whole Women's Movement was about women claiming our full human capacities and contributing as equals with men, and at its best, for BOTH men and women to claim their full capacities. This movement happened in my coming of age as an adult woman and it played out in a UU Society near you.

How did the women's movement lead to this last Source addition in 1995?

Here's my version: Women who were now Biblical scholars reading source documents, and reviewing and conducting archeological studies of pre-patriarchal times, said "Whoa, there is an unknown, untold story about when the Divine was female, when humans revered the Goddess as their source of life." And so after much study and debate, the UUs added "Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature." Well, even this was code for Mother Earth. Perhaps the Goddess smiled.

Fast forward in my life, past a divorce, remarriage, spiritual dryness and coming to USH in the late 1980's before any of the UU votes I mentioned. One of the first activities I joined was "Rise Up and Call Her Name", a UU curricula about the Earth based spiritual traditions around the world. It was all about Goddesses. We were goddesses too; we embodied the divine life force. We moved beyond the "Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man" which had grounded both the Universalist and Unitarian traditions for centuries. That was right here.

I could hardly wait to turn 55 in 1996 so I could create my own Croning ceremony welcoming me into a post menopausal time, reclaiming my body, crown/crone wisdom, personal creativity. I wanted to re-image an engaged older woman, full of life past family roles. My Croning ceremony was a fun, outrageous, and for me, a transformative event. Maybe this seems silly to some of you. But I can't emphasize how important and difficult it is for women to reclaim themselves from the dehumanizing commercial propaganda about womanhood over age 40.

The Earth centered traditions, so at hand in our UU hymnal readings and adult curricula help women, including little girls, to claim their sacredness and wholeness as humans. That's why some of us here have started to offer the 8 sun based rituals starting recently with the summer solstice and soon on August 1 with the first harvest festival of bread. If you are interested men and women, see Diane Cadrain. All this is connected to this source we are exploring this morning.

Meanwhile In 2001, I turned 60 and fell in love with outer space. I had another transformative experience with images from the Hubble Space Telescope which I have shared previously with you. Now the rhythms of nature grew larger for me to include billions of stars in galaxy formations, star birth and star death. Our whole solar system is the product of one single huge super nova star explosion and death. This is my resurrection story now. And I find it grounded in this source we are exploring today.

I felt such enormous, heart bursting wide open gratitude to be alive, to be me, at a time when life had evolved to create the intelligence to explore, to put the Hubble in orbit and for me to see the images on my own computer and then paint them on canvas. Wow, what a wonderful world, as Louie Armstrong reminds us. It still gives me a high to think of it.

And this gratitude for being alive is at the heart of the source we are exploring this morning. The rhythms of nature include life and death. We as conscious beings struggle to find our place in those cycles. Which brings us to the final focus of our exploration for this morning.

Humans have overstepped their place on earth, increased greatly in numbers, consumed too much that can't be replaced, live out of "harmony with the rhythms of nature" and the sustaining "sacred circle of life." So we go from Women's Movement, to Goddess rituals to Green Sanctuary as part of my story and this Source.

Enter the work of Joanna Macy - eco-feminist, environmental activist, Starr King divinity school teacher. I had heard of Joanna Macy over the past 25 years. But last month, my daughter in law Kendra, the UU minister in Exeter, NH, tipped me off to Joanna Macy's work for change in humans' relationship with our world. For her Macy's approach related to Earth Centered spiritual traditions. It happens Kendra went to the same workshop on Macy's process as our own Rev Heather and at least one Green Sanctuary member, Lisa Galinski.

Macy's workshop teaches "The Work That Reconnects" and this process begins inside with each person. While action based, it is grounded emotionally and moves toward new perspectives. Deep heart, wide mind and focused action.

Macy's process resonated with my personal experience of dark times, struggles and challenges, when I needed to find the way within to change and grow.

And don't we all feel we are in dark times in relation to the environment and sustainability of life? Don't we all feel despair somewhere within that it may be too late and that we can't do anything that will make a difference? How do we "celebrate the sacred circle of life and...live in harmony with the rhythms of nature"?

I recommend Joanna Macy's work to you. Our Green Sanctuary folks are already on board with her very participative approach. She has developed a process for moving forward in the face of challenging and over whelming situations that we all face, especially environmental ones, ones affecting Mother Nature.

She describes The Work that Reconnects, this way:

"The activist's inner journey appears to me like a spiral, interconnecting four successive stages or movements that feed into each other. These four are:

- 1. opening to gratitude,*
- 2. owning our pain for the world,*
- 3. seeing with new eyes,*
- 4. going forth."*

She continues, "The sequence repeats itself, as the spiral circles round, but ever in new ways.... The spiral begins with gratitude, because that quiets the frantic mind and brings us back to source. It reconnects us with our empathy and personal power. It helps us to be more fully present to our world. Grounded presence provides the psychic space for acknowledging the pain we carry for our world."

Here's where all this gets wonderfully intertwined. Macy rejects the environmental social action. She starts with reconnected self, self as one part of all that is, a CIRCLE of life not a LADDER.

Frankly this is a radical shift in perspective. It is NOT how western culture has organized and developed, nor our western culture's way of seeing things. And – no surprise –the Western way is NOT how the spiritual teachings of Earth based traditions usually see the place of humans in the circle of life. Hence Joanna Macy and our morning Source are united on this one.

My spiritual journey has led me to see to this place in the circle, my place among equals, to showing up with thankfulness and kindness as much as I can. This practice outlined by Tich N'hat Hahn in this mornings meditation fits with our Earth centered source and Joanna Macy's work in the environment.

Let's walk through her steps, not to learn them but to taste. At some level it might help us remain hopeful as we struggle to live more in harmony, to do something we can do to sustain the environment. That is the point of this Source for me – Revere Mother Nature, sustain life.

On our OOS cover there is a delightful image of Macy's spiral process. Of course it is a spiral – a dynamic circle! Four parts: Gratitude, owning pain, new eyes, going forth.

1) How do we practice this gratitude?

There are many ways, formal and informal. I keep a journal I write in almost everyday. There is no rhyme or reason to it. But very regularly I write what I am grateful for. What do you do to stay in touch with your gratitude? Do you practice it every day? Macy is correct that grounding ourselves in gratitude calms us.

2) How do we face our pain?

Sometimes our pain is personal like a husband with slowly eroding dementia. Sometimes it is a larger issue like Orlando with an assault rifle blasting through a fun loving crowd.

Sometimes our pain surfaces in ugly videos on Face Book about the mess of Styrofoam and other trash, killing fish and sea birds.

Meantime we are aware that the meat and vegetable trays we just bought will add to the problem.

By experiencing our pain we become TRULY PRESENT, TRULY PRESENT. Real clarity of mind for reality comes to us only when we are truly present. All spiritual teachings guide us in this way.

Are you willing to face your pain so that you are present to full reality?
If not, why not?

3) How do we see with new eyes?

We begin to see with a clearer perspective because grounded Presence is the ONLY clear place we have access to. From that clearer space we may be moved to learn more about the issue that caused our pain – Alzheimer's, assault gun violence, industrial and consumer pollution or a whole host of other issues that might touch you.

When were you able to explore and learn new truths and options from this clear space?

I can tell you from my own experience with the terrible pain of seeing my husband decline with dementia, that by facing his situation honestly, we found little pleasures and the grace to make the most of what we were still grateful for to his very last peaceful breath.

4) Finally. how do we go forth?

“I am only one, but I am still one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.” That's a quote from Helen Keller.

It may be a small step we take. It may seem it won't be enough, it is not sufficient. And then we come back to gratitude. We let our hearts fill and our minds calm. And from that we spiral on with the courage to do what we can.

Here at USH we have gone forth together these last couple years in many important, meaningful ways – with our new solar panels; our work in the community gardens beyond our parking lot; our expanding welcome to people often marginalized people whether the LGBTQ community or Muslims refugees and many others, to our participation in the “Black Lives Matter” movement to name just a few.

We have much to be grateful for. We have a place to begin again as we take our place in the ever moving spiral of life. Blessed be.