



*Collection of Essays*

**BREADCRUMBS  
IN THE  
SNOW**

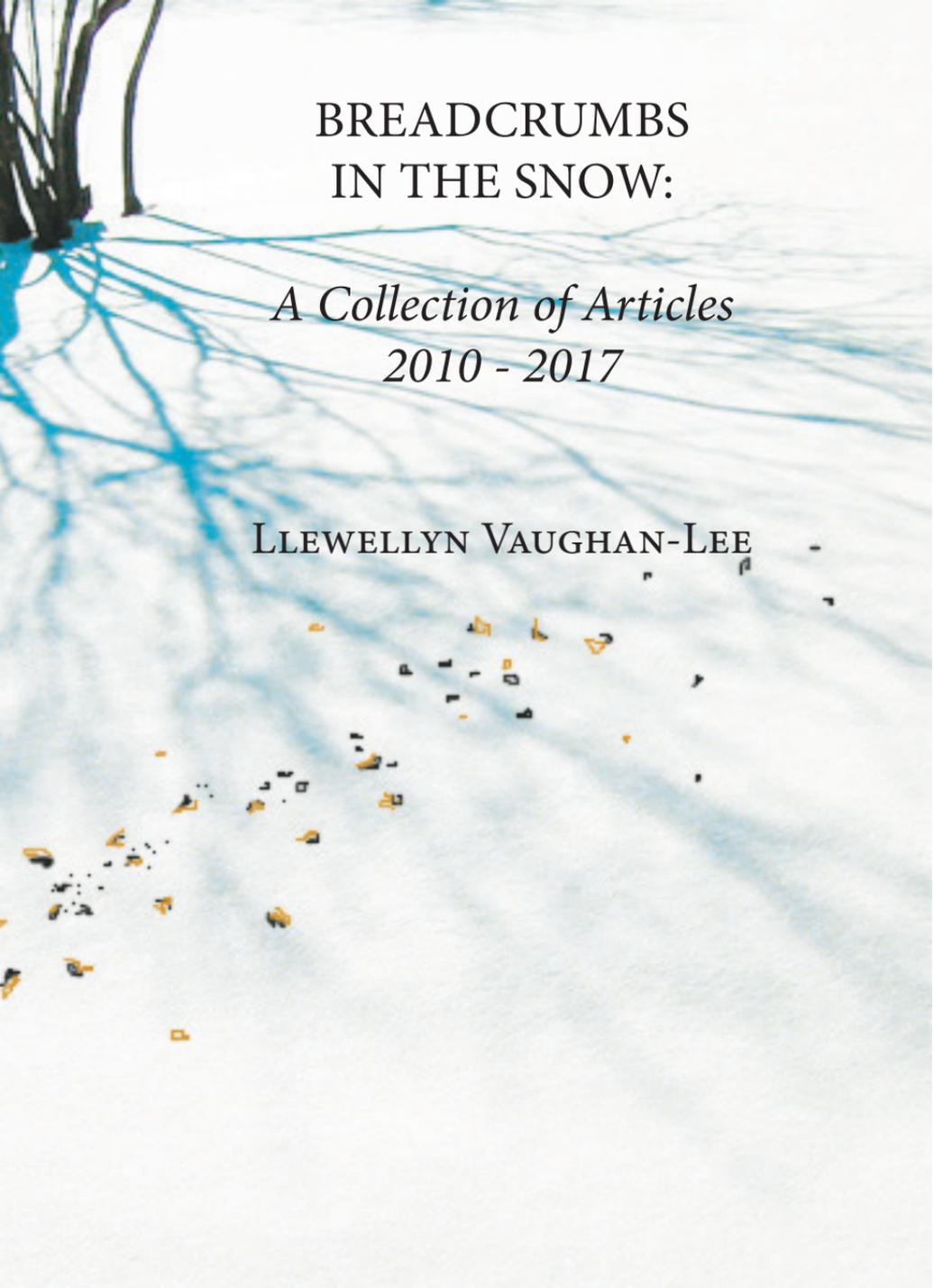
**LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE**





This little free booklet is first published online  
in 2018 by The Golden Sufi Center  
P.O. Box 456, Point Reyes, California 94956  
[www.goldensufi.org](http://www.goldensufi.org)

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BREADCRUMBS  
IN THE SNOW:

*A Collection of Articles*  
2010 - 2017

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

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## *Introduction*



For seven years, from 2010 until 2017, I wrote a series of articles, or blogs, for the Huffington Post. This was for a more general audience than most of my writing. I always referred to their purpose as “breadcrumbs in the snow,” an image of a landscape covered over, frozen, while a trail of breadcrumbs provides both nourishment and a sense of direction in a contemporary bleakness. In this age of consumerism and collective exploitation, when there appears so little real nourishment for the soul, these pieces point to a different landscape. It may be the same earth hidden by the snow, waiting for spring, or it may be a different landscape of the soul, just beyond the borders of our vision.

I belong to a generation that hoped and dreamed of a collective spiritual awakening, only to find an Earth ravaged by pollution, ecocide, and a collective forgetfulness of what is sacred within life. More and more in the busy-ness of our contemporary life, we are drawn into ceaseless activity that often separates us from the deeper dimension of ourselves. With our smartphones and computer screens, we often remain caught on the surface of our lives amidst the noise and chatter that continually distract us, that stops us from being rooted in our true nature. Unaware we are drowned deeper and deeper in a culture of soulless materialism.

And so these articles were a small response to this collective forgetfulness, a trail of breadcrumbs hoping to attract the attention of those seeking real nourishment, needing to find their way back to their soul and the real ground of being. I do not know if they reached their objective. But I would like to hope that these words and their stories found a resonance in their readers, pointing to the beauty, wonder and care that belongs to our true nature, and especially to the care for the Earth, and the love that is needed to nourish Her.

—Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee,  
*April 2018*



## **DREAMWORK AS PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: March 18, 2010*

*The dream is a little hidden door in the innermost  
and most secret recesses of the soul...*

—C.G. Jung

**W**E LIVE IN A WORLD in which we are saturated by so much information, but how much of this information nourishes our soul or reveals the real meaning of our life? In a world of so many choices how can we know what is right for our true self? When we are asleep and are no longer caught in the chatter of the mind, dreams can speak to us about the mystery of our soul and its journey in life. They can guide through life's maze and reconnect us with our divine purpose. And yet in order to understand the meaning of their messages, we have to reclaim this ancient language of images and symbols.

Spiritual traditions have always stressed the importance of dreams and their interpretation. Sometimes they speak about our inner connection with God, as in Jacob's dream—in the Book of Genesis—of the ladder with angels ascending and descending, or they may speak symbolically about happenings in the outer world, as in the Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream of the seven prosperous years and seven lean years. Sadly our Western rational culture long ago banished the wisdom of dreams, disconnecting us from this deeper knowing. But in the last century psychology has once again given us access to our dreams, and in particular through the work of Carl Jung, we can relearn this language of our symbolic and spiritual self.

Carl Jung rediscovered the language of symbols in the Western tradition of alchemy, which he understood as a process of inner transformation, turning the lead of our darkness into the gold of our true self. Dreams can guide us on this inner journey, and anyone who has ventured into this interior world knows the value

of their symbolic meaning. Our soul belongs to a world of images and symbols, and this is the language it uses to speak to us. Jung rediscovered the meaning its archetypal images, for example royalty, a king or queen, as a symbol of the nobility of our real self, while a mandala images our inner wholeness. Or we may find dark, threatening figures chasing us down nighttime streets, monsters hiding in our basement, bringing into consciousness our rejected, “shadow” self.

But dreamwork is not about a right or wrong interpretation, but a process through which we work with the images of the psyche. Through dreamwork the energy and meaning of the inner world is made accessible to us, through its symbols our outer life is made sacred. It enables us to have access to the inner figures of wisdom and power, the wise old man or woman, the child with stars in her eyes, who inhabit our dreams and from whom we can learn the wisdom of our soul.

When we work with dreams it is important to know “from where the dream comes.” Some are just mind dreams which only repeat the happenings and impressions of the day, while other dreams come directly from our soul. Dreamwork is a part of our spiritual heritage, and if we are prepared to listen and be receptive, our dreams are here to guide us. In our masculine culture the feminine wisdom of inner listening is easily overlooked, as is the practice of being inwardly silent and attentive. But these qualities are needed if we are to access the inner symbolic world that gives sacred meaning and purpose to our daily life. How many dreams are lost between the bedroom and the bathroom? Do we have time to be present with our dreaming self, and learn its language?

What we rarely understand is that our spiritual self is waiting to communicate with us, to invite us to share in the wonder that is

our deeper being, to give us its knowledge and understanding. Sometimes our dreams may give us direct guidance, as when a dreamer was wondering about a possible business relationship and he dreamt he was at the cleaners. He quickly realized that this relationship did not have good prospects! Or a dream may speak about the inner journey, as when a dreamer, being kissed by her lover, opens her eyes to discover that she was embracing a snake, and it was the snake's tongue in her mouth. Rather than being an horrific nightmare, this image of embracing a snake describes the descent into the unconscious, whose primal energy and power would transform her.

We live in a culture that so easily distracts us, entraps us in unnecessary anxieties, draws us into addictions. Where are the signposts that can guide us on our real journey as human beings? They are within us, waiting to be read. But it is not always easy to understand this fluid world in which images change and evolve, whose symbolic language speaks in such a different way to words. We have also lost many of the wise women and shamans who traditionally interpreted the language of dreams. But there is a way to work with dreams, and the recent interest in Jung's Red Book, in which he records in words and images his own encounter with the inner world, reflects a real hunger for a symbolic life. We need to reclaim the mysterious and magical depths within us and dreams are always a doorway to this world. When we feel we can no longer trust the outer world, no longer believe in its promises of material fulfillment, we can be nourished from within, from the numinous images of our own soul.



## **DREAMS: RECONNECTING US TO THE SACRED**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: March 21, 2010*

OUR DREAMS TAKE US into a world of images. Many of these dreams are just “mind dreams” in which our mind reworks and digests the images and impressions of the day, like a cow chewing the cud. But sometimes our dreams take us into a deeper realm within us, into the sacred dimension of our soul. Then the images of our dreams have a different quality and meaning. We may recognize these dreams by their symbolic nature, for example we may find our self in a cathedral, temple or sacred building, we may see a cross, stone, a tree, the sun or moon, or any other image that belongs to the archetypal dimension of our deeper self. Or the dream may evoke a quality of feeling, a numinosity that belongs to the soul. Sometimes these dreams seem “more real than real life.” When we encounter such a dream we should know that we have entered the realm of the sacred, that the ground we walk on is holy ground.

Our Western rational culture dismissed the world of symbols as superstition, though recently as we hunger for meaning in our surface lives we have begun to revalue these archetypal images. The popularity of Dan Brown’s novels about symbolism speaks to a growing need for the symbolic world. Throughout history other cultures have always carried an awareness of the sacred dimension of images. For example the mystical tradition of Sufism has always known of the importance of symbolic dreams and their images, which may have a spiritual meaning, for example the image of grapes as a symbol of divine knowledge.

In earlier times a dreamer would know to take such a dream to a holy man or shaman, who was trained to read and understand the message from the inner world, its wisdom and meaning. In some indigenous cultures a dream could be for the whole tribe, and could determine where they might hunt, what sacred ceremonies should be enacted, or what healing needed to be done. Today we have

mostly lost touch with these traditions and their understanding of the inner world. Instead our culture has celebrated the individual, and now it is for each individual, for each of us, to rediscover the meaning and power of symbols as they are given to us in our dreams.

Traditionally symbolic images form a connection between the outer world of the senses and the inner world of the soul. They are like stepping stones to reconnect us with the divine mystery that is within us. This has always been their sacred function, as is illustrated for example in the symbols of the Catholic mass, the bread and wine, as well as the cup or chalice. Such symbols are like manna that can sustain our daily life with sacred nourishment. When such a symbol comes to us in a dream we need to learn how to hold it in our consciousness throughout the day, to give space to it in our moments of solitude or meditation. We need to welcome the image and let it speak to us, let the dream tell its story. Such symbols are often charged with a certain power or meaning, a quality of feeling that can deeply affect us. Then maybe a week, a month or a year later, we will be given another symbolic dream, another stepping stone to the sacred. Though some dream images may last a lifetime, continually reconnecting us with our inner self.

However, there is a big problem for us today in that we have debased the inner world of images. Just as we have polluted our outer world with our consumerism until the water we drink and the air we breathe is no longer pure, we have also desecrated the inner world. It used to be understood that the world of images was a sacred connection with the Divine, with the realm of our own soul. Instead today we are constantly bombarded with advertiser's images that try to manipulate us into unnecessary desires. And recently we have rediscovered the power of using the imagination to work with inner images, but rather than respecting their sacred nature we have learnt how to use (or misuse) their magical potential

for materialistic gain—to attract the outer life we want, even the car we may desire. This selling of a “secret” for personal gain is a form of prostitution: the prostitution of our own soul that is polluting the inner world just as we have polluted our outer world.

We are hungry for the sacred, for meaning to return to our lives. And this meaning is waiting within us—the sacred is present in the symbols of our dreams. But first we have to create an inner space that is not corrupted by outer desires, purify ourselves and our intention. In the Native American tradition the individual often had to fast and be purified by a sweat lodge in order to be ready to fully experience the inner world. Any dreamwork, but especially spiritual dreamwork, requires a continual attitude of inner attention and a commitment not to use the energy of the inner for personal gain. Dreams can reconnect us with the sacred but only if we learn how to be receptive and respect their symbols and images.



# **THE INTERNET AS A LIVING SYMBOL OF GLOBAL ONENESS**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: April 7, 2010*

ARIANNA'S RECENT COMMENTS about Jeremy Rifkin's *The Empathic Civilization*, and in particular his reference to global communication, "Seven billion individual connections, absent any overall unifying purpose, seem a colossal waste of human energy," prompts me to write about my own experience of the unifying purpose and potential of the Internet, of this increasing connectivity.

I remember when I first accessed the Internet in the early Nineties. I think that my children were using AOL and I went online to see what these "chat rooms" were. But although there was not much content in those days, I was struck by its potential and possibility. At that time I was having mystical experiences of the oneness that is present in all of life. In these moments I was made aware of the interconnectedness of all of creation, and how everything is a living expression of divine oneness. This first time that I went online I saw in that moment how the Internet could give the whole of humanity direct access to this interconnectedness and global oneness. All that is required is a computer and a connection.

Almost twenty years later the Internet is one of the central tools of our global connectivity. In the last few years it has radically changed our culture, how we communicate and access information. From laptops and cybercafes all around the world, even in unexpectedly remote locations, we are forming an interconnected whole, a network of human consciousness. And yet, although we are more and more immersed in this new form of communication, we do not appear to realize its deeper significance. There is the danger, that, as in the words of T.S. Eliot, we "have the experience but miss the meaning."

I believe that the Internet is a gift we have been given. It provides an image of how the energy of life can flow freely in a way that defies the barriers of nationality and geography. Yet sadly because we are

so immersed in the surface activity of this technology, in its tools of commerce and communication, we do not realize its deeper, symbolic dimension. A symbol is a connection to the sacred ground of our being which alone gives real meaning to our daily life. The Internet, as a living symbol of global oneness, offers us a direct connection to an awareness of divine oneness. But because we have lost touch with the symbolic dimension of life, we do not fully recognize this potential of the Internet: as a dynamic expression of a new consciousness of oneness that has within it access to energies and means that can unify our divisive world. If we were awoken to its real potential, we would be truly in awe—and we would laugh, with wonder, at life’s capacity to recreate itself while we are not even looking.

The Internet is a powerful image of life’s interconnected oneness, and how the individual can interact with the whole. It is present everywhere at the same time. The Internet is not a hierarchical structure, and despite the attempts of some companies or governments to control it, it’s nature is globally democratic. As it becomes more and more present in our collective consciousness, it is more and more able to channel life’s underlying energies in new ways. It is a power and life force of its own, able to evolve and adapt like a fast-changing organism, and, like other emerging images of our time, it is reconfiguring our consciousness, rearranging our lives. For example, social networking is just one way this living web interacts with us, bringing us together in unexpected ways.

In the Internet we have been given a blueprint for the future whose full potential we have not yet grasped because we see it with the eyes of the past. The Internet is a direct expression of the emerging energy structure of the planet in which the need of the individual can be met within the organic evolution of the whole, and the

evolution of the whole served through the free participation of each individual.

How much more we would benefit if each time we access the web we are consciously aware that we are connecting to a field of global consciousness. That was my first experience of the Internet, and each time I open my computer I feel this potential, this new quality of consciousness that is waiting to be lived.

We need to be awake to the real potential and purpose of the Internet: what it really means for humanity as a whole to be given this degree of interconnectivity. At the present time it is primarily used (and at times misused) for accessing information and communication. But it has the potential to create patterns of interrelationship that will form the network for a global consciousness and unity. The real potential of the Internet belongs to this new flow of consciousness throughout the planet. The expanding web of individual connections is like a cellular structure that is continually making new connections. Through this worldwide web the world and humanity can organically come alive in a new way. And we can midwife this new awareness and its possibilities: the dynamic oneness that belongs to life. Or we can just watch the images and text on our screens, not knowing the opportunity that we have missed, unaware of the “overall unifying purpose “ of why we are so connected.



For more material on the Internet, watch:  
*Mystics and Scientists—The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*,  
with Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, or read a *transcript* of this talk.



## WHY WE NEED TO WORK WITH SYMBOLS

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: April 19, 2010*

THE VALUABLE AND VARIED responses to my recent blog about the Internet as a living symbol of global oneness made me aware of a need to explain more fully the nature and purpose of symbolic consciousness: how to access the meaning and power of symbols.

A symbol is not just an image, but is like a door into the inner world of the soul, through which we can access the energy and meaning that belongs to this sacred dimension of our self. However, a symbol will only reveal its magical nature if we approach it with the right attitude, if we have the correct quality of consciousness.

Symbolic consciousness is a way of working with symbols that allows their meaning and energy into our consciousness. It is like a key that is needed to unlock the real potential, the energy of a symbol.

Today we are taught to think in an analytic, linear manner, using words to explain our self. But symbolic consciousness is holistic rather than analytic, and rather than thinking in words it thinks in symbols and images. It can be seen at work most often in our dreams, in the way our psyche communicates to us through images. Symbolic consciousness was central to human consciousness for thousands of years, and was prevalent in our Western consciousness as recently as the medieval period, as expressed in the many images and symbols that adorn the Gothic cathedrals, the great maze on the floor at Chartres. Through these images, rather than words, the stories of the Bible and the soul's journey were told.

Symbols can connect us directly to the interior world of the soul, and symbolic consciousness can enable us to realize the sacred meaning that underlies our physical existence. There is a pressing need to reclaim this forgotten language.

Through working with symbols we can have access to the energy and meaning that comes from the inner world. They can communicate more directly than words. Often symbols have a numinous quality that conveys their sacred energy, an energy which gives real meaning and nourishment to our surface lives. For example, in the Catholic mass the bread and wine are powerful symbols enabling the individual to be nourished directly by the Divine. If we are receptive to the symbolic world and can develop our symbolic consciousness we are able to be nourished from within, to live our outer lives in harmony and balance with our true inner self. Without such a connection our daily lives often become shallower, which we attempt to fill with material desires or are more easily drawn into addictions.

Life is permeated with symbols. There are many different types of symbols. Some symbols, such as the images and patterns of nature, have always been around us. Other symbols have developed through religion and culture, for example the chalice or grail cup in Christianity, the Tree of Life in the Jewish Kabbalah. We may find our self drawn to a particular image, follow the spiral pattern in a sunflower, or meditate on a mandala to reconnect with our own wholeness. It is as if our own soul is speaking to us through these images, making its presence felt amidst our busy life.

In different eras different symbols were predominant, and shaped our collective life more than we may realize. New symbols are now appearing in our world that belong to our future, to the next era. These emerging images can help revitalize a civilization; they can connect us to the way life is changing and evolving. It is important that we recognize these images, become aware of how the deeper meaning of life is communing with us. These symbols may appear in unexpected places, even amidst the ordinary activities of our daily life.

I have come to believe that the Internet and other modes of global communication are not just tools to help us communicate and access information, but also have a symbolic function. They are dynamic images of a global interconnectedness and oneness that belong to life. As symbols they convey a deeper meaning and purpose than their surface function. But in order to access this dimension we have to have the appropriate attitude of receptivity. We have to accept that there is a reality beyond the surface play of events. This reality is the dimension of the soul which all previous cultures understood as being central to our human existence. We need to learn how to let these symbols of the soul speak to us, just as we learn to listen to our dreams. For example, if we are attentive to the symbolic dimension of the Internet we will find that it conveys a promise of a new model of global consciousness, an interconnectedness whose organic nature reflects the organic nature of life.

As we have recently begun to explore, our ecosystem is a living web of interconnections. Human consciousness has a similar potential to form such a web of oneness, and the Internet is a model that can help this to happen. This does not mean that it does not have a dark side of misuse and exploitation. In the oneness of life the light and the dark are both included. But it does point to a new, non hierarchical, organic structure of global consciousness, in which each individual can connect directly to the whole. This image has a far reaching potential and purpose which cannot be accessed by only seeing the Internet as a functional tool. Only if we reclaim our symbolic consciousness can we understand how the sacred roots of our being are giving us a image of global oneness that can both nourish our souls and help us, locally and globally, in our daily life.

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For a further information on symbolism: *What Happens When the Ice Melts: The River of Life and the Need for a Symbolic Consciousness.*

For more on symbols: *Man and His Symbols* by C.G. Jung.



## THE PRAYER OF THE HEART

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: April 26, 2010*

AT THE HEART of most religions is prayer: a way to communicate with God. There are the prescribed prayers, the rituals of inner communion. But there is also our own personal prayer—our way of being with God. For the mystic this is the prayer of the heart, in which our heart cries out to God, cries our need for our Beloved.

Need is the beginning of prayer. We feel alone and in need. And only the Divine can answer this need. Calling out from the depths of our being, we make known our need to our self and to God. We pray according to our need, and according to the need of the moment. At different times our needs are different. We may pray for forgiveness, for understanding, for kindness. We may pray that our relationships not be clouded in mistrust or that our children not suffer. We pray for our self and for others. All of the myriad difficulties that we encounter in our daily life we can embrace in our prayer, the difficulties of our own self and the troubles of the world. We hope to bring God's attention to these problems, so that infinite love and grace can reach into the world and help with the pain of being human. Prayer is infinitely powerful because it connects us with God's infinite power. In praying, we offer up the difficulties of living in a world in which the Divine often appears to be absent, in the deepest knowledge that only the Divine can really help us—that is the source of all life and all love. We who are so small and alone look to God, and so turn our attention from the many back to the One. Sometimes people think, "Why should I bother God? How can my difficulties be of concern to this Great Being?" But this is in fact arrogance, because it places the individual before God. We are a part of God's world, and if we are in need we should turn toward God.

So many times it appears that our prayer is not heard, that we are forgotten, alone. And yet as the mystic says, "If the heart has heard the prayer, God has heard the prayer." And more important than

any specific answer is the act of prayer, in which we turn toward God. In our busy lives it is so easy to forget the Divine, to be immersed in our own problems and our own selves. The mystic knows that what really matters is the inner connection of the heart in which our heart opens and cries. It is something so simple and yet so easily overlooked. It is a way to be with God.

Learning to pray is also learning to listen. Within the heart we wait for an answer, for God's words, which may come even when we have not asked. Listening is a form of prayer, in which our whole being is receptive. Prayer is communion with God; we share with Him our needs, and we also learn to be attentive, as Rumi so beautifully writes:

Make everything in you an ear, each atom of your being, and you will hear at every moment what the Source is whispering to you, just to you and for you, without any need for my words or anyone else's. You are—we all are—the beloved of the Beloved, and in every moment, in every event of your life, the Beloved is whispering to you exactly what you need to hear and know. Who can ever explain this miracle? It simply is. Listen and you will discover it every passing moment. Listen, and your whole life will become a conversation in thought and act between you and Him, directly, wordlessly, now and always.

Listening within the heart is attuning our self to our Beloved. We develop the ear of the heart, the inner listening of the soul. Sometimes God communicates directly with words. We may hear these words as a still, small voice, or a thought suddenly appearing. In the silence of receptive prayer, the prayer of the quiet, we may hear words of help and guidance. Or our innermost may speak to

us in dreams, when words carry an energy that we know does not belong to our psyche. Sometimes we open a book we know and the words that we read are a message from our Beloved. In so many ways, some known, some hidden, God speaks to us, answers our prayers.

We each have our own way of being with God, our own way of prayer. For some of us prayer takes place in the dark hours of the night, when we lie awake and our need is most pressing. Some find it easiest to pray as they walk, finding the presence of nature a way to access this inner communion. Others may pray while they are in their garden, feeling the presence of the Divine among their flowers. Some pray when they see suffering, while others may find their heart opens when they experience beauty. In many cathedrals, temples and mosques there is the tangible presence of prayer, of so many souls looking towards God. Prayer is something essential to a human being and it belongs to the heart's relationship to the Divine.



For more on prayer of the heart, see Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee's books, *The Circle Of Love* and *The Prayer of the Heart in Christian and Sufi Mysticism*



## **RECLAIMING OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: May 9, 2010*

WE LIVE IN A CULTURE of religious diversity that is at present experiencing a reawakening of interest in spirituality. If we are to more fully understand what this reawakening might mean, it seems to me that we need to clarify the traditional difference between religion and spirituality, between the exoteric and the esoteric.

Exoteric refers to a religious doctrine or body of knowledge that is accessible to anyone. It does not rely upon one's individual inner experience of the Divine or what is sacred. Religious teachings have often emphasized that following religious doctrine is more important than one's individual spiritual experience, and some have discouraged inner experiences altogether.

In contrast, esoteric teachings and their practices are usually a way to help the individual have a direct inner experience of the sacred. They are based upon the understanding that there is a world of the spirit that is very different than the purely physical world of the senses. Esoteric studies often involve specific spiritual practices that are quite distinct from religious observances. These practices are a way to access the world of the spirit—leading finally to awaken or be born into this reality that is invisible to our physical eyes.

Spiritual teachings of all cultures tell us that just as we have a physical body, so too do we have a spiritual body. This is the body of our spiritual self. In some Indian traditions it is described as having a series of energy centers, or chakras. In Sufism it is described as a series of chambers within the heart—that just as we have a physical heart we also have a spiritual heart which contains our divine consciousness. In Taoism it is sometimes imaged as a spirit body or light body. Our spiritual body has qualities such as peace, bliss and endless love that are rarely found in our outer lives. What is common to most esoteric traditions is that we can access this spiritual body through specific practices or techniques, meditation, mantra, breathing practices and others.

Many religions have an esoteric core, for example the Jewish Kabbalah, or Sufism which is known as the heart of Islam. Yet, at different times in history religions have banned or persecuted as heresy esoteric teachings and their practitioners. Early Christianity had a known esoteric dimension, for example in the teachings of the Gospel of Thomas that point to an inner spiritual mystery, as in the words of Jesus: "I disclose my mysteries to those who are worthy of my mysteries." Sadly the orthodoxy of the early Church banned the inner, esoteric aspect of Jesus' teachings, and the Gospel of Thomas became heresy, its copies destroyed, until one copy was rediscovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945.

The esoteric, spiritual teachings that can be found within many religions, shamanic and other traditions form part of our spiritual heritage. They remind us that we are not just physical beings in a physical world, but that our lives and also our bodies have a spiritual dimension. We are beings of light as well as flesh and blood. There is a world within and around us to which we can have access that is very different to the physical world. Yet the spiritual and physical worlds are not separate, but interpenetrate and nourish each other.

At this present time there is a hunger for direct inner experience, a need to reclaim our spiritual heritage. While our materialistic culture tries to keep our attention firmly in the physical world of the senses, many of us sense a longing to know this hidden mystery of what it means to be human. And so we are able to turn to the teachings and traditions that have been given to us, whether in yoga, Buddhist meditation, Sufi dhikr or other spiritual practices. It is important to recognize the root of our longing, that we are no longer prepared to live in a purely physical world, but need the living presence of the spiritual. We need to know and be nourished by the invisible world that is within us and all around us. We need to reclaim the mystery and magic of being fully alive.

We also need to confront the specter of death. So many people, knowing only the physical world, remain frightened of death. Religious teachings create a clear division between this life and the afterlife, which may carry the promise of heaven or the threat of hell. Spiritual experience can lift the veils between the worlds, allowing us to glimpse a spiritual reality while we remain present in the physical world. Many people have had near death experiences in which they see a light at the end of a tunnel. Our spiritual heritage can give us access to this light while we are still in this world. This is the light found within the heart, the light of our divine self. It is beautifully imaged in the Gospel of St. Matthew which speaks about the oneness of real inner perception: “If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”

Spiritual life can take us beyond death. In Sufism this is called “to die before you die,” to awaken to the world of light while still alive in this world. Then you know that there is no such thing as death, or in Jesus’ words in the Gospel of Thomas, “Whoever discovers the interpretations of these sayings will not taste death.”

Spiritual truth is at the heart of all religions, and yet it is also beyond the divisions that plague our world. It is about the oneness, the love and the light that is within us all, and to which as human beings we can have access. Spiritual teachings and their practices can give us each our own individual experience of this very human reality, help us to live in the light of this oneness rather than stumbling in the darkness of so many divisions. I feel that our present spiritual reawakening is a deep longing, a need to step into this light.



For further reading on the spiritual world of light: *Alchemy of Light: Working with the Primal Energies of Life* by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee.



**AN ECOLOGICAL DISASTER:**  
*Polluting the Waters of Life*

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: June 7, 2010*

EARLIER IN THE YEAR I posted a series of articles about the need to regain a symbolic consciousness—the need to see the symbolic meaning of events that happen in our inner and outer lives. Recently we have been witnessing the worst ecological disaster in North America with the oil gushing from the depths of the Gulf. We have heard the anger of politicians, the fear of fishermen and others for their livelihood, and the futility of BP to stem this ecological disaster and stop the oil from polluting the shoreline and the sea. But have we been able to look beyond this tragic play of events to recognize the symbolic story that is being told? Can we learn what life is telling us before it is too late?

What is the deeper meaning of this disaster as the flow of oil meets the flow of water—as our ecological system is destroyed by our need or greed for oil? Symbolic consciousness is not just a tool to listen to our dreams. The signs that speak to us are in the outer as well as the inner world. Symbols tell us the deeper meaning of the images and events that unfold around us. Do we dare at this moment to look beneath the surface to what life is telling us, or do we just regard this event as another glitch in our material culture. The government’s response is to halt further deep sea drilling. And while BP tries to fix the leak and restore its image, it continues to invest heavily in the tar sands development in Alberta Canada, “the largest and most environmentally destructive endeavor of all time,” which has already devastated an area the size of England and Wales. But this appears safer than the sea, maybe because the devastation can be more contained, or is hidden in the far north.

But there is another story being told if we dare to look and listen—if we are awake to the symbolic meaning of life. One “resource,” oil, is destroying another even more vital “resource,” water.

Water is the source of life. Something in our culture has turned against itself, and the technology that has caused this cannot save us. The oil is still pouring. There is no quick and easy solution to the oil slicks washing up on the shore.

One of the ways to work with symbols is to hold these images in our consciousness and be present with them. In this way we allow life to speak to us in this ancient language, which has always been the language of life itself. This is the ancient wisdom of listening to life.

Traditional cultures knew this wisdom, just as they knew the wisdom of nature, plants and the seasons. They knew how to watch the weather and their sailors knew how to listen to the winds. They also knew how to read the book of life just as they knew how to listen to their dreams.

We have lost this essential wisdom, and now life is screaming at us, crying to us, imploring us. Will we wait for the well to be capped and talk about financial recompense while the lawyers bring their lawsuits? Will we once again “have the experience but miss the meaning?” Or before the clock strikes 12 can we regain the wisdom of our ancestors and hold the real meaning of this experience and finally listen to life itself?

The difficulty is that there will be no easy answer, no quick fix. The images that are speaking to us are too potent and too powerful. They are about the primal values of life itself. But if we dare to hold these images in our consciousness maybe we can make a step toward recognizing that life is a living being that can speak to us. Maybe we can return to a relationship to life that honors it as a sacred whole whose voice can be heard. Maybe we will not have to wait until the next disaster or the next before waking up to our real responsibility to life and the planet.

Of course it is a big step between watching the disaster on the news and recognizing that it is happening to each of us, just as through this crisis life is speaking to each of us. But when we see what our technology, our lifestyles, our values, have caused does it not touch the heart and soul of each of us? We are all responsible. And we need to return to the core of our humanity, to the sacred connection to life that is within each of us. We need to be attentive and listen.

This quality of awareness belongs to the ancient wisdom of the Earth that was always known to our ancestors. And when the Earth is crying out to us with such a potent image as it is now, is it not our duty to listen? Only when we hear what it is saying, not just in our minds but also in our souls, will we know how to respond.

If we are to reclaim a real relationship to life and to our planet, we must listen to the real story that is being told. It is not just a story of a deep well disaster happening in the Gulf. It is about how our present civilization is causing the waters of life to be polluted and how at present we cannot stop it. And this disaster is taking place all around us and also in our own souls. Only if we listen to life will we know how to respond.



For more on symbolic consciousness and the waters of life, see *Alchemy of Light: Working with the Primal Energies of Life* by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee



**SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY:**  
*The Solution to Our Climate Change Crisis?*

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: December 2, 2010*

THIS WEEK'S UNITED NATIONS Climate Change Conference at Cancun, Mexico is a global forum in response to a global crisis. As well as considering cutting carbon emissions, the conference hopes among other issues to advance green technologies and fund safeguards to prevent further deforestation of the Amazon. Already there are fears that it will fail to deliver real agreements and that as a result, the planet will be condemned to an uncertain or precipitous future. But this evokes in me a central question: can we respond to the true nature of global climate change from just an economic or political perspective?

Our ecological imbalance and the resulting crisis of climate change are caused by our industrial culture, by its chemicals, toxins and particularly carbon emissions. At the root of our predicament is a deep disregard for both the environment and for the consequences of our actions until it is almost too late. How can we expect to solve this ecological imbalance without an awareness of these roots—that part of the real cost of our materialistic way of life is our loss of a lived connection and reverence for the sacred that is in all of life? Surely we need to recognize that there is a direct relationship between our outer, physical, ecological predicament and our forgetfulness of the sacred in creation.

Spiritual Ecology is an exploration of the spiritual dimension of our present ecological crisis. At the core of Spiritual Ecology is an understanding that our present outer ecological crisis is a reflection of an inner spiritual crisis. Recently many people have been made aware that we are at the “eleventh hour,” or even a few minutes before midnight, of a global ecological situation that could result in catastrophic climate change or other irreversible global situations. However we are less aware of the inner spiritual crisis that underlies this outer crisis—that a lack of awareness of the sacred within ourselves and within all of life has created an inner wasteland as

real as any outer landscape. The interconnection between the outer and inner is foundational to life, both our individual life and the life of all of creation, as has been understood by indigenous peoples since the very beginning; therefore we cannot address our outer ecological crisis without a real consciousness of the inner situation. We cannot redeem our physical environment without restoring our relationship to the sacred.

The first step is always to become aware of what is happening. The outer signs of our ecological crisis are only too visible in the pollution of our waters, the dying of species, the change in our climate. The inner changes are less understood, particularly as our Western culture has for centuries dismissed the inner worlds, claiming that only the physical world is real. For those of us who have directly experienced the inner world through dreams, visions or other experiences, we know its value. While those who hunger for the reality of the soul know the pain of dismissing this dimension. It is here within our hearts that the sacred is born. It is in the inner world of the soul that meaning comes into our lives. And here in the inner worlds there is a crisis as dangerous as what is happening in the physical world.

Our collective pursuit of materialism and our disregard for the sacred within all of life has had a devastating effect. We have dismissed our ancient role as guardians of the planet. As a result, the sacred fire that we were supposed to keep burning, the light of the sacred that nourishes all of creation, is slowly going out. We can see this in a culture that is increasingly soulless and fractured. We may feel it in an underlying collective anxiety that can easily become anger, projected onto outer situations. We may sense it within our own soul as if something is becoming lost. And we are responsible. We vitally need to become conscious of what is happening to this sacred light. We need to recognize this growing darkness which is

a forgetfulness of the sacred within our own souls and within all of creation. Only when we are aware of what is happening can we begin to change our world.

We cannot respond to our outer ecological situation in isolation. We cannot heal the symptoms without knowing the cause. Indigenous peoples like the Kogi have warned about this present danger. And yet because our culture has dismissed the inner, it is difficult for us to perceive what is happening. We have even forgotten that the world also has a soul. The *anima mundi*, the world soul, is no longer part of our collective consciousness, even though for centuries it was understood as the root of everything sacred in creation.

Those of us who have been given a knowing of the sacred within ourselves and within the world have a responsibility at this time. We may ask ourselves, “What can I do?” but the inner world primarily requires consciousness rather than action. It is the lack of an awareness of the sacred that is at the root of this crisis. Therefore we first need to bring the light of our spiritual awareness into the present predicament. We need to recognize what is really happening within the inner world as much as the outer, within our own soul and within the soul of the world. Only then can we begin to redeem the sacred and open the door to any real change or transformation. Only then can we begin to heal the world and bring it back into balance.



For more on Spiritual Ecology, see:  
[www.workingwithoneness.org/spiritual-ecology](http://www.workingwithoneness.org/spiritual-ecology).



# HOW OUR CONSCIOUSNESS AFFECTS THE ENVIRONMENT

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: May 15, 2011*

**I**N MARCH THIS YEAR the science journal *Nature* announced what many people already knew: that there are clear indications that the world's sixth "mass extinction" is already underway.

The last mass extinction came some 65 million years ago when a comet or asteroid slammed into the Yucatan Peninsula, in modern-day Mexico, causing firestorms whose dust cooled the planet, and an estimated 76 percent of species were killed, including the dinosaurs. The four previous mass extinctions of species were due to gradual global warming and cooling, and happened on a scale of hundreds of thousands to millions of years. What is particular about our present mass extinction is that it has happened so quickly over a few centuries, and most significantly, it is man made.

We are slowly, and in some cases reluctantly, waking up to the global ecological disaster of climate change, extinction of species and pollution.

However, there is another dimension to this global predicament which we should not ignore. It is not just the outer environment that is at stake but our inner environment and the connection between the two.

While an indigenous culture and its shamans would look first to the inner in order to understand the outer, this is not a part of our Western heritage. And while Eastern spiritual traditions have helped us to understand that personal transformation depends upon inner change, the larger, macrocosmic dimension of these teachings have been mostly overlooked. Yet any holistic, spiritual understanding of our present global predicament vitally needs this perspective.

How can we then “face the facts” and take real responsibility for our outer situation if we do not know or acknowledge what is happening in our inner environment, in the inner world of our own soul and the soul of the world?

Firstly it should be understood that just as it is our physical acts that affect the outer world and have produced our ecological crisis, it is our consciousness that directly affects the inner world. The inner worlds are shaped by the consciousness of humanity more than we understand, which is why so many spiritual teachings stress the importance of our attitude, the values by which we live. As Mother Teresa said, “It is not what you do, but the love you put in the doing.” Our attitude of consciousness is a determining factor in the inner world.

It has been suggested that our present ecological disaster comes from an attitude of separation. Our Western culture focused on individual, material welfare at the cost of our inter-relationship to the whole. We also separated the physical world from its roots in the sacred. This allowed humanity to abuse and pollute the world in a way that would be unthinkable for any indigenous culture that reveres the sacredness of creation.

For many years I have witnessed how our disregard and forgetfulness of the sacred has been very destructive to the inner world, to the individual soul and the soul of the world. In recent years the misuse of the imagination has been especially damaging. The imagination in spiritual traditions was long understood as a bridge between the worlds, connecting us to our soul, enabling access to the symbolic world that underlies the physical. It is this symbolic, archetypal world that often gives meaning and depth to our outer life.

However, recently we have discovered “the secret” of the “laws of attraction”: how to use the imagination as way to attract the outer life or material objects that we want. By projecting our desires and illusions into the inner world we have prostituted its sacred use for personal gain. Spiritual teachings and stories have long warned us against this, but our disregard for anything except the desires of the ego mean that we have desecrated the inner world so that it can no longer so easily give meaning to our life. Through our greed we have polluted not just our rivers but also the sacred waters of the inner world.

But during the last year I have become aware of an even more disastrous change taking place. A change that is as radical and extreme as the mass extinction of species.

A light in the inner world that gave meaning and spiritual sustenance to our individual soul and to the whole world, has been going out. Something that for millennia was central to the inner life has gone, lost through our greed and arrogance, our ego-centered power dynamics and forgetfulness of the sacred. We are not just entering an external era of extinction, but the danger of an inner dark age. And what is more dangerous is that we do not appear to know it is happening.

According to spiritual understanding, each era has an inner, spiritual light that makes possible transformation and evolution, and enables humanity to fulfill the purpose of that era. In recent centuries this light has awakened us to the discoveries of science—an understanding of the material world that has improved our physical well-being even as it has entranced us. Sadly these discoveries have had a shadow-side of greed and exploitation on a massive scale, and our focus on the physical world has resulted in a profound forgetfulness of the inner world and what is sacred.

At the end of each era the light that belongs to that era can transform into the light of the next era, or it can go out. We can see the seeds of the next era in a dawning global consciousness, in our remembrance of the inter-relationship and oneness of all of life, manifesting in certain technologies that support our inter-relationship, like the Internet. But the darkness of our collective greed, selfishness and forgetfulness of the sacred, has had a stronger pull. Like a dense cloud this darkness has covered us. And now, without us noticing it, this light has gone out. Without this light there can be no real change, no shift in consciousness, no evolution, whatever our apparent intentions or aspirations.

We have come to the end of an era and are destroying our own ecosystem. Because the light has gone out in the inner world we do not have the potential for any real change or transformation. This is our present condition, and our lack of awareness or understanding of the inner world makes it especially precarious. And we do not appear to notice what is happening, or what this change might mean.

Yet we sense in our souls what we can see in the ecosystem: that something is over, that the world will not return to what it was. And the collective, still caught in its dream of materialism, feels an anxiety, even anger, as it knows that this dream has passed its sell-by date, that its promises of prosperity are empty.

How long can this last? How long can the ignorance of our true predicament remain? How long can we collectively sustain the distractions that protect us from seeing what is really happening? And how long will humanity and the whole world remain in this darkness? Some people say that 2012 is the year when the new era will begin. Others think that our destruction of the planet will continue for decades, until the oil runs out or the sea levels rise.

*May 15, 2011*

What can we do? Collectively we are conditioned to want to find a solution, to “fix the problem.” But spiritual teachings talk about the importance of witnessing, of watching without judgment or expectations. This is a time for real awareness of our present predicament, and action that can only come from such an awareness. But first there is a need to wake up to the reality of what we have done.



# **PRAYING FOR THE EARTH**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: August 9, 2011*

**P**RAYER IS A WAY to be with the Divine—from the prayer born from need, where we use words to express our needs, to the deeper prayer that takes us beyond any words into the oneness and silence within the heart.

Prayer is the simplest and most natural way to communicate with the Divine. Prayer is the heart speaking. There are the prescribed prayers, the rituals of inner communion. But there are also our personal prayers, our way of being with the sacred that is our deepest nature and that of the world around us. In whatever way we are drawn to pray, there is a pressing need at this time to include the Earth in our prayers.

We are living in a time of ecological devastation, in which our materialistic culture has had a catastrophic effect on the ecosystem. Our rivers are toxic, the rainforests slashed and burned, vast tracts of land made a wasteland due to our insatiable desires for oil, gas and minerals. We have raped and pillaged and polluted the Earth until it is in a dangerous state of imbalance we call climate change. If we dare to listen, creation itself is now calling to us, sending us signs of its imbalance. We can see these signs in the increasing floods and droughts, feel it in a land that has been poisoned with pesticides, and those whose hearts are open may hear the cry of the world soul, of the spiritual being of our mother the Earth. It is a cry of need and despair, that humanity who was supposed to be the guardian of the planet has forgotten its responsibility and instead desecrates and destroys the Earth on a global scale.

The Earth needs our prayers more than we know. It needs us to acknowledge its sacred nature, that it is not just something to use and dispose. Many of us know the effectiveness of prayers for others, how healing and help is given, even in the most unexpected ways. There are many ways to pray for the Earth. It can be helpful

first to acknowledge that it is not “unfeeling matter” but a living being that has given us life. And then we can sense its suffering: the physical suffering we see in the dying species and polluted waters, the deeper suffering of our collective disregard for its sacred nature. Would we like to be treated just as a physical object to be used and abused? Would we like our sacred nature, our soul, to be denied?

For centuries it was understood that the world was a living being with a soul, and that we are a part of this being. Once we remember this in our minds and in our hearts, once we hear the cry of our suffering, dying world, our prayers will flow more easily and naturally. We will be drawn to pray in our own way. There is the simple prayer of placing the world as a living being within our hearts when we inwardly offer our self to the Divine. We remember the sorrow and suffering of the world in our hearts and ask that the world be remembered, that divine love and mercy flow where it is needed. That even though we continue to treat the world so badly, divine grace will help us and help the world—help to bring the Earth back into balance. We need to remember that the power of the Divine is more than that of all the global corporations that continue to make the world a wasteland, even more than the global forces of consumerism that demand the lifeblood of the planet. We pray that the Divine of which we are all a part can redeem and heal this beautiful and suffering world.

Sometimes it is easier to pray when we feel the earth in our hands, when we work in the garden tending our flowers or vegetables. Or when we cook, preparing the vegetables that the Earth has given us, mixing in the herbs and spices that give us pleasure. Or making love, as we share our body and bliss with our lover, we may feel the tenderness and power of creation, how a single spark can give birth. Then our lovemaking can be an offering to life itself, a fully-felt remembrance of the ecstasy of creation.

The divine oneness of life is within and all around us. Sometimes walking alone in nature we can feel its heartbeat and its wonder, and our steps become steps of remembrance. The simple practice of “walking in a sacred manner,” in which with every step we take we feel the connection with the sacred Earth, is one way to reconnect with the living spirit of the Earth.

There are so many ways to pray for and with creation, to listen within and include the Earth in our spiritual practice. Watching the simple wonder of a dawn can be a prayer in itself. Or when we hear the chorus of birds in the morning we may sense that deeper joy of life and awake to its divine nature. At night the stars can remind us of what is infinite and eternal within us and within the world. Whatever way we are drawn to wonder or pray, what matters is always the attitude we bring to this intimate exchange, whether our prayers are heartfelt rather than just a mental repetition.

It is always through the heart that our prayers are heard, even if we first make the connection in our feet or hands. Do we really feel the suffering of the Earth, sense its need? Do we feel this connection with creation, how we are a part of this beautiful and suffering being? Then our prayers are alive, a living stream that flows from our heart. Then every step, every touch, will be a prayer for the Earth, a remembrance of what is sacred. We are a part of the Earth calling to its creator, crying in its time of need.



Watch: *PRAYER*, video with Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee from Working with Oneness on Vimeo. This video is an extract from a set of talks on prayer, given by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee in June 2011, at the Omega Institute, and available in the Audio Archive Library: *Prayer Omega Institute, Rhinebeck, New York, June 2011*



## **MYSTICISM: LIVING LOVE'S ONENESS**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: February 29, 2012*

WHAT IS MYSTICISM? How is it different to spirituality? And why is mysticism important at this moment in time?

The spiritual journey can be most simply described as a way to access the light of our soul—the beautiful light with which we came into the world. On this journey we make an inner relationship with this light of our divine nature—the spirit that is within each of us. Through this relationship we come to know our true self and be nourished by the deeper meaning of our soul.

Spiritual paths and teachings give us access to the tools and guidance to do this inner work. For example, the practice of meditation can help to still the mind so that we are no longer distracted by its continual chatter. Psychological inner work can free us from the traumas, anger, anxiety and other feelings that may cover our light. Gradually we come to know more of our true nature, learn to live in the light of our real self. It is said that the goal of every spiritual path is to live a guided life, guided by that within us which is eternal.

The mystical journey may begin with making a relationship with one's inner light, but the mystic is drawn on a deeper journey toward love's greatest secret: that within the heart we are one with the Divine. The fire of mystical love is a burning which destroys all sense of a separate self, until nothing is left but love Itself. While the spiritual seeker is drawn to the light of this fire, the mystic is the moth consumed by its flames. Rumi, love's greatest mystical poet, summed up his whole life in two lines:

And the result is not more than these three words:  
I burnt, and burnt, and burnt.

The mystical path takes us into the center of the heart where this mystery of love takes place. Initially this love is often experienced

as longing, a deep desire for God, the Beloved, Divine Truth, or simply an unexplained ache in the heart. Mystics are lovers who are drawn toward a love in which there is no you or me, but only the oneness of love Itself. And they are prepared to pay the ultimate price to realize this truth: the price of themselves. In the words of the 13th century Christian mystic Hadewych of Antwerp:

Those who were two, at first,  
are made one by the pain of love.

Gradually we discover that this love and longing slowly and often painfully destroy all our outer and inner attachments, all the images we may have of our self. The Sufis call this process being taken into the tavern of ruin, through which we are eventually made empty of all except divine love, divine presence.

This is an ancient journey in which the heart is awakened to the wonder and beauty, as well as the terror, of divine love. It is celebrated in the Bible in the Song of Songs: “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.” And over the centuries mystics of all faiths have written their love stories. Some mystics have been persecuted, like the Sufi al-Hallaj who was crucified for publicly proclaiming the secret of divine oneness, “I am the Truth.” Known as the prince of lovers, he expressed the mystical reality: “I am He whom I love, He whom I love is me.”

Mystics may be drawn inward, but the oneness of the Divine also embraces the outer world. When the eye of the heart is open all of creation reveals its divine nature; everything is seen as an expression, a manifestation of the One Being. Mystics are also involved in the demands of everyday life. One of Christianity’s most loved mystics, St. Teresa of Avila, worked tirelessly founding nunneries and

looking after her nuns, while at the same time mystical prayer took her into ever deepening states of inner absorption, oneness and ecstasy. Mysticism does not mean to retire from life, but to live the unitive life. “God,” St. Teresa would say, “lives also among the pots and pans.”

The truth of mystical love is one of humanity’s great heritages. It should not be confused with its cousin, spiritual life. The spiritual journey is a wonderful way to come closer to what is sacred. It a way to live in the light of our divine nature, to be nourished by the mystery and meaning of the soul. It opens the door to what really belongs to us as sacred beings. But mysticism is quite different. The moth who feels the warmth of the fire is on a very different journey to the moth drawn into the flames themselves. This is the ancient journey from separation back to union, from our own self back to a state of oneness with God. Step by step we walk along the path of love until finally we are taken by love into love; we are taken by God to God, and there is no going back, only a deepening and deepening of this love affair of the soul.

Even if we are not all drawn to tread the path of the mystic, we need to be reminded that this note of divine love belongs to all of us. In a time of so much division in the world, it is important to reclaim this primal truth that belongs to our heritage: this great song of the soul that celebrates the oneness that is within the heart of each of us and underlies all of creation. This has particular relevance when we confront our present ecological crisis. We can no longer afford to think of the environment as something separate, outside of us. We need an awareness of the “oneness of being” of which we are all a part, and actions that come from this awareness. This awareness of unity is one of the most important contributions of the mystic at this moment in time.

Within the heart of each of us, within the heart of humanity, is this song of mystical love. It has been present for millennia celebrating the divine unity that is our real nature, and the deepest secret of our relationship with God. Hearing the many voices that today so easily consume our attention, it is easy for us to forget this quiet voice of divine love. And yet it is one of the great secrets of humanity, passed down from lover to lover, needing to be embraced, to be known, to be lived.



Watch: *Taking Spiritual Responsibility for the Planet*





## **THE SACRED FEMININE TODAY**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: March 8, 2012*

TODAY THERE IS A resurgence of interest in the sacred feminine. The immense popularity a few years ago of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* spoke not just to our enjoyment of a good thriller but also to the mystery of the divine feminine in Western culture, which is the real thread of the book's chase, from the enigmatic smile of the Mona Lisa to the search for the grail and the heritage of Mary Magdalene. We know now how the feminine mysteries were present in Greek culture and myth, as imaged in the story of Persephone, and enacted for more than 2,000 years in the initiations at Eleusis. In the early Christianity women had spiritual equality, and the significance of Mary Magdalene, the disciple whom Jesus loved more than others, being the first to see the risen Christ, points to the esoteric significance of the feminine. We have also learned how the power of the sacred feminine was repressed by the Church fathers, and Mary Magdalene purposely misidentified as a prostitute.

As we awaken from the repressions of the patriarchy we need to reclaim the sacred feminine both for our individual spirituality and for the well-being of the planet. Our ecological devastation points to a culture that has forgotten the sacredness of the Earth and the divine mother, as well as denied the feminine's deep understanding of the wholeness and interconnectedness of all of life. And our individual life, so often caught in addictions and starved of real meaning, has a hunger to reconnect with the soul, which has always had a feminine quality. And linking our own journey and that of the world is the ancient feminine figure of the World Soul, the *Anima Mundi*, the spiritual presence within creation.

So what does it mean to reclaim the sacred feminine? How can we feel it in our bodies and in our daily life? Every woman knows this mystery in the cycles of her body, which are linked to the greater rhythms of life, the cycles of the moon. And she feels it in a calling

to reconnect with the power and wisdom she carries within her, a deep knowing that is not found in books but belongs to her very nature. The feminine carries a natural understanding of the interconnectedness of life, how all the parts belong together. She instinctively knows how to respond to the needs of her children, how she feels for their well-being even when they are not physically present. And in her body she carries the greatest mystery, the potential to give birth: to bring the light of a soul into this world.

The feminine is the matrix of creation. And yet we have forgotten, or been denied, the depths of this mystery, of how the divine light of the soul creates a body in the womb of a woman, and how the mother shares in this wonder, giving her own blood, her own body, to what will be born. Regardless of whether an individual woman has the physical experience of giving birth, she shares in this primal mystery and is empowered by it. Yet our culture's focus on a disembodied, transcendent God has left women bereft, denying them the sacredness of this simple mystery of divine love.

What we do not realize is that this patriarchal denial affects not only every woman, but also life itself. When we deny the divine mystery of the feminine we also deny something fundamental to life. We separate life from its sacred core, from the matrix that nourishes all of creation. We cut our world off from the source that alone can heal, nourish, and transform it. The same sacred source that gave birth to each of us is needed to give meaning to our life, to nourish it with what is real, and return us to a relationship with the wholeness of life.

Of course men also have a need to relate to the sacred feminine, to be nourished by her inner and outer presence. Without the sacred feminine nothing new can be born, and we see around us the sad plight of a masculine culture destroying its own ecosystem, unable

to even agree on the steps needed to limit global warming. We all need to reclaim the living power and transformative potential of the sacred feminine, to feel her connection to the soul and the Earth. And we desperately need the ancient wisdom of the soul of the world to help us at this time of global crisis. Many times before the world has been through an ecological crisis, and the world soul carries within her the memories and wisdom we need. But if we remain cut off in a mindset that sees this a problem that we need to fix with the same masculine attitude that has caused the problem, we will just compound the crisis. Only through working together with the sacred feminine can we heal and transform the world. And this means to honor her presence within our bodies and our soul, in the ground we walk on and the air we breathe.



Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee has written about  
the feminine and the role of women in our present time in  
*The Return of the Feminine and the World Soul.*

Watch a recent short video:  
*Honoring the Sacred Substance in Creation*



**MYSTICAL PRAYER:**

***Opening a Door to Silence and Love***

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: May 24, 2012*

*“God does not look at your outer forms,  
but at the love within your love.”*

—Rumi

**A**MID THE NOISE and increasing demands of our daily life, it is more and more important for many of us to find a way to reach an inner quiet, a place of rest and refuge. For many people, the recent introduction of meditation techniques has been an invaluable means to find a much needed stillness and tranquility.

However, the tradition of mystical prayer is another way to access the peace that belongs to our soul. It is born from a need to rediscover our heart’s relationship with the Divine, our own personal and most intimate inner connection. Mystical prayer is a place of deepening love, as well as silence and peace.

My own journey in mystical prayer took place within the Sufi tradition, which describes our relationship to God as that of lover and Beloved. On this path of the heart, I was drawn back to the Beloved through the mystery of love, a love affair that takes place within the heart. Our heart is a place of receptive stillness where we wait for our Beloved, wait for this meeting of love for which we long. During the day, I often found myself longing for a time for prayer, when I could turn away from the outer world and go into my heart where I could be alone in silence with my Beloved.

After practicing for a number of years I was asked to lead a gathering at a Roman Catholic retreat center. So I studied the works of the Christian mystics, and was overjoyed to discover in the writings of St. Teresa of Avila a description of the stages of mystical prayer that was very similar to my own experiences within the Sufi tradition. At that time in the 16th century the Inquisition only allowed the mental repetition of prescribed prayers, but St. Teresa was drawn to

the mystical Prayer of Quiet, a state of inner receptivity, a listening stillness very similar to the receptive Prayer of the Heart within the Sufi tradition I had been practicing. And in her writings she articulates very clearly the stages of prayer that draw one deeper and deeper within the heart into states of union and ecstasy.

To know that beneath all the divisions of the outer world there is this single stream of mystical prayer is in itself a refuge and deep reassurance. It is so easy to get caught up in the forms and images of the outer world, and yet, as Rumi writes, “God does not look at your outer forms, but at the love within your love.” And here, within the heart of each of us, is a place where we can enter the formlessness of love. And as I have discovered from my own journey into the heart, this is a love that embraces each of us with a tenderness and passion known only to lovers. We are taken by love to love.

We begin this journey of mystical prayer with the simple act of listening within the heart. We bring the mind down into the heart, into the feeling center our self. And here we wait and listen, not to the sounds of the outer world, but to the silence that is within our self. This silence is nourishing, and in itself it draws us deeper and deeper within. It is the silence from which love is born, where we meet our Beloved, where we are taken by love. In the words of one Christian mystic, the Blessed John Ruysbroeck, it becomes “the dark silence in which all lovers lose themselves.”

Like the practice of meditation, or Centering Prayer, this Prayer of the Heart can be practiced daily. It allows us to have a deepening relationship with the Divine that is always present within us, but so easily overlooked in our daily life. It nourishes us from the depths of our own soul. Our outer, everyday life becomes more and more grounded in the core of our own being. And through this simple mystical prayer we discover a friend, a companion, a lover.

Mystical prayer belongs to our deepest human heritage, and as our outer world appears increasingly fractious and out of balance, with economic and ecological uncertainty, it is infinitely valuable to reclaim this tradition. In the West it was often hidden beneath all the rituals and recitations of the Church—sometimes its practitioners were persecuted—and yet it was kept alive by mystics like St. Teresa. As we open our hearts and ourselves to love’s silence we affirm what is deepest within us and within the world: our relationship to the Divine and the oneness that belongs to all of life.



Watch a recent short video: *Prayer for the Earth*



**A MORNING PRAYER  
AND THE CALL OF THE EARTH**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: July 21, 2012*

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

THERE ARE SO MANY different ways to pray; in Rumi's words, "there are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground." Recently I wrote about being drawn into silent inner prayer, but there is another form of prayer that meets me early each morning.

Walking beside the wetlands I see an egret's wings rise brilliant white from the water. It flies and settles further off in the grey early light, and I am awakened in a quite differently way than from my first cup of hot tea. After its white, white wings I see the world more distinct, the wild roses more brilliant and pink as they spill over a fence. I sense, smell, hear and see in a different way: I am more present.

I have always loved and needed to walk in the early morning. After waking up, first meditation and hot tea, then going outside, feeling, sensing the world before the day's demands begin. Even when I lived in the city I would run or cycle in the early morning, needing this connection, this seeing the world around before life's business too often drowned out any quiet. For the last 20 years I have lived amid nature—an unexpected blessing—and taking the same walk every morning, each day would be different, the light, the call of the birds, the way a leaf moved in the wind. Recently we moved, not far, but my early walk is different, beside a wetland rather than amidst the trees, and so the landscape of this morning meeting is very different. And yet the essence of this early prayer is the same: this meeting with the sacred around me.

While meditation takes me inward into an essential inner silence and emptiness, this early morning walking is a prayer. In prayer there is a meeting: I meet and bow before the One in Its many colors, sounds and smells. Of course, many mornings I forget,

and take my own thoughts with me on my walk. But then I am reminded, like today when the egret's wings flashed white, and I awake from myself and see more clearly—the colors, the sounds, the beauty, the divine. Once more I am attuned to how “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”

Any prayer in which there is a real meeting, a real relationship with the Divine, is always changing. Just as each day is different, sometimes fog (we live beside the ocean), sometimes the sun breaking through, sometimes bright light, so the states of prayer change. Sometimes this meeting in the morning is more intimate, my heart sings, I feel a deep oneness with what is around me. More recently I have felt a calling, as if the Earth needs me, needs my attention. It wants to draw me into deeper awareness: to meet it not just on the surface, amidst the brilliance of its colors and sounds, but in its interior soul, in the depths of its sacred self.

In these moments there is a sense that my morning walking prayer is not just for me, but also mysteriously for something within nature: that this meeting in prayer is needed by the Earth. These early mornings are for me a deep remembrance of the sacred in creation, in the world around. It is a very private time—no one else is around—I try not to allow the thought-forms or demands of the day in. But there has come a deepening sense that this remembrance is also needed by the Earth—that it is calling for my awareness of its divine nature—that it needs my prayer.

We always think that our prayer is about us, our need for the Divine. And of course this is true: prayer is born from need. Each morning under the need to remember, to reconnect with a wonder that is around me there is also a deeper truth, that the Divine needs our remembrance. In so many ways the Divine calls out to us—throughout our day, throughout our life. And our prayer is a

response to Its call. As Rumi says, “I never knew that God too desires us.”

And now the Earth is calling. I can sense it in the early morning, in the white flashing of the egret’s wings, in the fragrance of the wild roses. The Earth needs us to remember its divine nature: it needs our prayers. Something sacred in the world is dying and needs our attention. How long can it survive our culture’s desecration, our pillage and pollution, our deep neglect of its divine nature? Just as the world helps me to awaken every morning, we are needed to help the world awaken from this nightmare we call materialism. The soul of the world is calling to us. Our prayers for the Earth are needed.



Watch a recent short video: *Cry of the Earth*



**THE NEED FOR LOVE:**

*Reflections by a Mystic*

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: August 29, 2012*

IN A RECENT CONVERSATION for *Super Soul Sunday*, when Oprah described to me how so often in her conversations and interviews, people said to her how they just wanted to be happy, I found myself responding, “I think they want to be loved.”

All of us want, or need, to be loved. The need for love is one of the most basic human impulses. We may cover this need with patterns of self-protection or images of self-reliance. Or we may openly acknowledge this need to our self or others. But it is always present, whether hidden or visible. Usually we seek for love in human relationships, project our need on to parents, partners, friends, lovers. Our lack or denial of love often causes wounds that we carry with us. This unmet need haunts us, sometimes driving us into addictions or other self-destructive patterns. If our need for love is met we feel nourished in the depths of our being.

Love calls to us in many different ways. Yet while most people seek for love in the tangle of human relationships, the mystic is drawn deeper under the surface—in Rumi’s words “return to the root of the root of your own being.” And here we discover one of the greatest human secrets: that the source and answer to this primal need is not separate from us, but part of our own essential nature, our own true being. Again to quote Rumi:

The minute I heard my first love story  
I started looking for you,  
not knowing how blind that was.

Lovers don’t finally meet somewhere.  
They’re in each other all along.

The mystical truth of the oneness of love is something both simple and essential: the real nature of the love that we all seek is not other than us. I remember my first direct experience of this love. I was

in my late 20s when one afternoon while I was in meditation I felt what I can only describe as butterfly wings touching the edge of my heart. And in that instant my whole being and body were filled with a love I had hardly known existed. Every cell of my body was loved, gently and completely. Love was present in all of me. And this love came from within me, from my own heart. There was no other.

Other experiences of the oneness of mystical love have followed—deeper, more ecstatic, more blissful. But that first direct experience carried the sweetness of a first love. From that moment I knew that I was loved completely, and it changed everything because it gave me a security I had longed for—the security that only love can give.

In every other relationship, even in the most deeply passionate love-affair, there are two—us and the one we love. We may long to get closer and closer to our lover, and when we make love there is a momentary taste of union on a physical level. But then again we become two, we are separate. Mystical love may begin with the illusion of separation, that we are separate from God, that we long for our Beloved. But the journey takes us back to our own heart and the truth of union: that lover and Beloved are one and were always united. And in this union there is a passion and depth of belonging that can only be dreamed of in human relationships. As I discovered in that first experience, just one touch of this love nourishes every cell in the body, meets every need in ways I could never have imagined.

And the deeper truth is that this love is not just within the heart, but underlies the whole of creation. It is said that in the whole of the universe there is only lover and Beloved. God loves the creation and the creation loves God. This is the mystical secret of all of life. What is discovered within the heart belongs to everything. And the oneness of this love embraces everything. When I physically felt how

love touched every cell of my body, and how I was nourished by this love, I was also experiencing what belongs to all of creation. The love that belongs to God is not limited and does not discriminate. It is present within everything. The greater human mystery is not that this love is present, but that it is hidden, veiled from our perception. Like a fish in the ocean looking for water, we seek what is all around us.

It is a longing for this love that draws the mystic on the journey of the soul. The mystic is one who is not satisfied with the surface drama of love, with the give and take of human relationships, but is called to go deeper. It is a dangerous and demanding journey into the depths of the heart, into the sorrow and endless love that one finds there. Here there are few signposts but the primal vulnerability of the soul and the seemingly endless longing for love. In an outer, human relationship one can protect oneself, create barriers against one's vulnerability and wounds. In a relationship that is born on the inside of the heart, in which there is no "other," it is much more difficult. It is one's own deepest love that calls: the Beloved is within one's own soul. The vulnerability of oneness is both painful and intoxicating.

But what is revealed within the heart of the mystic, of the one who has given him or herself to love, is the great secret of creation: that love is always present. Love is present within our own heart, within every breath, within every cell of our body and the whole of creation. There is nothing other than love, and the whole of creation is a continual outpouring of divine love. The great mystery is then not that this love is always present, but that it is hidden from ordinary everyday human perception—that we do not know how much we are loved—how we are made of love. That we are love seeking love.





## **A PRAYER AT THE WINTER SOLSTICE**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: December 13, 2012*

AS WE COME TOWARD the time of the winter solstice and a few days later the celebration of Christmas, we are reminded once again of the primal mystery of darkness and light, and the light being born in the darkness. As the longest night of the northern hemisphere approaches, what is the inner meaning of this turning from the darkness towards the light, and this wonder of divine birth?

If we pause for a moment in the midst of our buying and consumption as a way to celebrate, if for an instant we can turn inward, we will find this greatest human mystery: the birth of light in the midst of darkness. This moment is a celebration of the spiritual nature of life, and how within the heart and soul of each of us this divine light is waiting to be born, to come into consciousness, to come into our daily life. And as many have experienced in their own life, this light is often born out of a time of darkness, of difficulties and suffering. In Rumi's simple words:

“Sorrow for His sake is a treasure in my heart.  
My heart is light upon light,  
a beautiful Mary with Jesus in the womb.”

Within the heart, within the soul of each of us, the divine child is waiting to come into our life, into our consciousness. We are waiting to be born.

Anyone moved to turn inward into prayer, into their innermost heart, is drawn toward this mystery. And like the image of Christ being born in a manger, it is something as simple as it is wonderful. Many of us have felt, if only for an fleeting moment, this divine presence within our life. We know what it brings, how it can turn our life around in an instant, change what seemed impossible to be changed. We aspire to remain in this place of inner receptivity,

this place of waiting in the darkness and longing that belong to the heart's prayer. We are both the darkness and the light, the sorrow and the joy. It is in the midst of the darkness that the light is born, that the longest night turns toward the sunrise.

Our greatest human heritage is this soul's drama of darkness and light, of the divine being born into our life. This is where our prayer takes us, where the heart's longing draws us. This birth is the deepest fulfillment life can give us.

Spiritual stories tell us that the birth of the divine in the midst of darkness can happen both within the individual and within the whole world. The darkness of our post-industrial world is only too visible—with its pollution and species depletion, its global warming and increasing ecocide. It is not difficult to sense the sorrow of this present time, with growing inequality and global exploitation. But what is the light waiting to be born? Could it be an awareness of the sacred within creation and the deep knowing that we are all One—one living planet full of wonder and mystery, not just a resource waiting to be consumed? Could it be the simple awareness of the Divine that is present within all of life, within every cell of creation?

We are easily drawn into our culture's endless consumption, its myth of progress and economic growth. This story of material prosperity has now become a global disaster, as it pollutes our planet at an ever accelerating pace. How should one respond to this darkness? Yes, there is action to be done in the outer world, ways to respond to our collective self-destruction. We need to take responsibility for the well-being of our planet and its myriad inhabitants, not just our own material welfare.

But for the one who is drawn inward into prayer there is an equally valuable work in holding a space for the Divine—staying true within

the heart and waiting. It is here, from within the heart of each of us that the light of divine awareness will be born. It is from within the heart that the dark myth of materialism can turn into a story of divine birth—a reawakening to the knowing that all of creation is sacred—it is one living whole and we are its guardians. In our heart and soul we are each like Mary, holding the possibility for a birth that can change the world. Our politicians cannot change our world. The recent climate change conferences at Rio and Doha illustrate their inability to act. But change can happen through the heart of humanity. Through each and all of us the light of the Divine can dispel this deepening darkness.

The mystery of darkness and divine light belongs to each of us and to the world. We are the world waiting in the darkness and we are the light waiting to be born. It is only too easy to see the darkness around us—the forgetfulness of the sacred nature of creation, the destruction and desecration of our beautiful and suffering world. We should not avoid being aware of what we are doing to the world, but we need also to turn toward the light that is waiting within our own heart and the heart of the world. We need to hold this sacred light in our hearts and our life. We need to be the prayer for the world in this time of darkness.



## CHANGING THE STORY

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: February 14, 2013*

“The only way to change the world is to change the story.”

LIKE A GREEN SHOOT in early spring, a new story is trying to break through into our collective consciousness. How can we help it to emerge and grow, help it to change our fractured world?

We know only too well the story that defines our world today. It is a tale of consumerism and greed, sustained by the empty but enticing promise of an endless stream of “stuff” as the source of our happiness and well-being. We are finally coming to recognize the model of an ever-expanding economy on which that promise is predicated as an unsustainable myth, the domination of nature required to fulfill it as a desecration. All around us we are beginning to see the ravages of our culture’s whole-hearted embrace of this story: a beautiful world broken and dying, on its way to becoming a polluted wasteland.

And many of us now long for a new story, one that will restore to the Earth its lost divinity and reconnect our souls to the sacred within creation, a story that will save our planet. Some have even already begun to articulate such a story: a beautiful and compelling vision of the entire universe as a single, inextricably interconnected, living whole, offering a dimension of meaning to our individual daily lives that arises from an understanding of our place in the whole.

But is this enough? How do we change the defining story of our world? Our collective culture celebrates its story of endless desires. It feeds us with its images that, though they can never nourish us, work like a drug for our minds and bodies, even as they exploit us and the Earth. We have become addicts to material prosperity and the ego-centered greed that drives it. We long for a story that can give meaning to our daily lives and restore the health and beauty of our planet, but we remain caught in our tale of celebrating stuff.

Once we recognize how these stories hold us in thrall we can get a sense of their power. They are not just slogans created by corporations or politicians, but arise from the archetypal inner world where myths are born. The archetypal power of the present myth of materialism is hard to recognize because it is deceptive as well as seductive. But if one looks closely there is quality of entrancement that is deeper than our rational self. There is also a primal drive to dominate the natural world. We are more present in the world of the gods than we dare acknowledge.

In our quest to redeem our civilization and the planet there is this vital need for a new story, a story that returns the spirit to creation and honors the primal oneness that is the web of life. This new story may also be based upon an earlier story: one in which all of creation was seen as sacred, with humanity just part of the woven tapestry of life—a story still lived by many indigenous peoples. But this emerging story is also evolutionary, drawing as well on the insights of particle physics into the underlying nature of creation to express its vision of the world as an interconnected whole, in which, like the symbolic image of Indra's net, each part influences the whole. And this new story of creation connects the smallest particle with an ever-expanding cosmos of billions of galaxies—and does so in a way that bridges science and the sacred, understanding them as expressions of the same reality.

This is a compelling story for our time. But do we recognize from where this new story arises? Are we acknowledging and honoring the inner dimension from which all such world-changing stories are born? If a story is not born from the inner world it will lack the power to effect any real change. It will speak just to our conscious selves, the surface layer of our being, rather than engaging us from the depths. The stories of the past, the myths that shaped humanity,

spoke to our individual and collective soul with the numinous and transformative power that comes from deep within. How many men have been called to battle by the archetype of the warrior or the hero? How many churches have been built on the foundation of the myth of redemption? The power of the archetypal, mythic world belongs to the river-beds of life that shape humanity.

But sadly, our present culture has distanced itself from this inner world. We are not taught to recognize the symbolic dimension of our lives, nor to revere these underlying archetypal powers. Our contemporary consciousness hardly even knows of their existence. We live on the surface of our lives, unaware of the depths that are in fact the real determining factors.

There is a new story waiting to be born, waiting to redeem the planet and nourish our souls. It is a story of a oneness that includes the diversity of creation in a self-sustaining whole, a story that can bring back the magic within nature that is needed to heal our damaged planet. It is a story of cooperation rather than competition or conflict. And it includes the mystery of life as well as the understanding that science can give us. It is also a new story, arising from deep within the psyche of humanity and the world soul at this moment in our and its evolution. We are not the sole creators of this story, because it is the story of life evolving, recreating itself anew, but we are needed to midwife it into existence. As with all births it needs to come from the inner to the outer world.

Only when we recognize the inner origins of this world-changing story can we participate in this birth. Only when we acknowledge and work together with the symbolic, archetypal world can its power and numinosity come into our existence and speak to the whole of humanity. Only then will this story be heard. We cannot afford the

still-birth of new ideas that lack the life force that comes from the depths. We are called to return to the root of our being where the sacred is born. Then, standing in both the inner and outer worlds, we will find our self to be part of the momentous synchronicity of life giving birth to itself.



For a longer version of this article see:  
[www.workingwithoneness.org/articles/changing-story](http://www.workingwithoneness.org/articles/changing-story)





# **SUSTAINABILITY AND THE SACRED**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: April 22, 2013*

RECENT DROUGHTS, hurricanes and floods have made us more and more aware of the reality of climate change, and the disastrous environmental effect of our industrialized, materialistic civilization. As our world stumbles to the brink of ecological collapse—the “tipping point” of irreversible climate change—sustainability has become a vital issue. But before we can respond we need to recognize what Earth we are trying to help, what ecosystem we are working to sustain.

Does sustainability refer to “sustained economic growth,” and an environment that is able to sustain our present human civilization, with its energy intensive, consumer driven needs, and image of economic progress? Or does sustainability refer to the whole ecosystem, an interconnected web of life with its vast and amazing diversity of species? Which world are we trying to sustain: a resource to fulfill our desires of material prosperity, or an Earth of wonder, beauty and sacred meaning? To quote Thomas Berry:

There is now a single issue before us: survival. Not merely physical survival, but survival in a world of fulfillment, survival in a living world, where the violets bloom in the springtime, where the stars shine down in all their mystery, survival in a world of meaning.

If we are to sustain this world of wonder, what is essential in our response is not just action but a shift in consciousness, a shift away from seeing the Earth as something separate from ourselves, as a resource to be used and abused. Real sustainability is not the sustainability of our present lifestyle—our image of progress and economic growth—but the sustainability of a sacred Earth, rich in biodiversity and wonder.

In order to change our present global predicament we need to go to the root of the attitude of consciousness that created it. Otherwise we run the risk of trying to solve the problem with the same conditioning, the same thought process, which created it. It is

essential at this critical moment that we understand the origins of our present mindset that sees the Earth as a resource, the “environment” as something separate from our self. Some say this attitude is rooted in the Age of Enlightenment and a Newtonian consciousness that sees the Earth as an unfeeling mechanism separate from us and which we can control and master. And certainly the developing tools of science and technology have seemingly given us this ability. But in order to more fully understand this sense of separation it is necessary to go deeper, back in our Western consciousness to when early Christianity persecuted the pagan and Earth-based religions, cut down their sacred groves, and slowly began the process whereby the Earth became no longer something sacred, in a way unthinkable to an indigenous person. We are the inheritors of this culture that banished the relationship to the sacred from the Earth.

Much of our Western civilization has now forgotten the sacred nature of the Earth, and we are unaware of how this forgetfulness crucially affects our relationship to the environment. If the Earth is just a resource then there is no real responsibility. We can use and abuse it, as we are doing at the present time. If it is sacred then how can we justify our present attitude towards the environment, our acts of ecocide?

Because of this there is a pressing need to reclaim this primal relationship to life and all of creation. If we are to sustain a living, sacred Earth that nourishes our souls as well as our bodies, we need to reconnect with this ancient knowing. It is not something new to be learned, but something essential to be remembered, something that has always belonged to us, only forgotten or censored by our present culture.

The “sacred” is not something primarily religious. It belongs to the primary nature of all that is. When our ancestors knew that

everything they could see was sacred, this was not something taught but instinctively known. It was as natural as sunlight, as necessary as breathing. If we embrace the sacred within all of life, we will find that life will speak to us as it spoke to our ancestors. A veil will be lifted and this innate knowing will be present again. This is the ancient wisdom of the Earth itself, the Earth which has evolved and changed over millennia, whose wisdom we desperately need at this present time if we are to avoid an even greater ecological disaster. Again to quote Thomas Berry:

We need not a human answer to an earth problem, but an earth answer to an earth problem. The earth will solve its problems, and possibly our own, if we will let the earth function in its own ways. We need only listen to what the earth is telling us.

We still carry this primal relationship to the Earth within our consciousness, even if we have long forgotten it. It is a primal recognition of the wonder, beauty and divine nature of the Earth. It is a felt reverence for all that exists. Once we bring this foundational quality into our consciousness, we will be able to respond to our present man-made crisis from a place of balance, in which our actions will be grounded in an attitude of respect for all of life. This is the nature of real sustainability. To quote the Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki:

The way we see the world shapes the way we treat it. If a mountain is a deity, not a pile of ore; if a river is one of the veins of the land, not potential irrigation water; if a forest is a sacred grove, not timber; if other species are biological kin, not resources; or if the planet is our mother, not an opportunity—then we will treat each other with greater respect. Thus is the challenge, to look at the world from a different perspective.



## **INCLUDING THE EARTH IN OUR PRAYER**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: December 11, 2013*

EVERY MORNING I love to walk early beside the wetlands where I live. It is a time of natural reflection and prayer, a time to be alone with nature and the divine that is present: in the hawk sitting on the telephone lines, the skyline softening and turning golden. And now, as we move towards the winter solstice, the first light comes later, and the darkness seems more potent. In this natural time of darkening my prayer instinctively deepens, as if in response to the loss of light. I sense the energy withdrawing into the earth, and today, the first hard frost, white and brittle, drew me even more towards an inner light.

In my prayer I wonder how it is for the Earth itself, at this time of another darkening, when our materialistic consumer culture depletes so much of the land. We have all heard the news of climate change, pollution, and species extinction. We have seen the pictures of smog-filled streets and clear-cut forests. But how do we sense this in our hearts? Do we dare to acknowledge and feel the wasteland we have created? Do we feel the grief of a world that is dying through our greed and desires? Do we pray for the Earth as we would a sick friend, a cancer sufferer, a dying partner?

More and more we are being reminded that we are not separate from the Earth and its ecosystem—we are all living together, dependent upon each other and our shared environment. As Thich Nhat Hanh writes: “We will survive and thrive together with our Mother Earth or we will not survive at all.”

We are a part of the Earth and it is through her great generosity that we are nurtured and nourished, eating her food, drinking her waters, clothed in her fabric. Even as we deplete her, she continues to give and give. Her generosity is a lesson for us all. Each morning on my walk I pass a gnarled old apple tree. I watch her boughs

become heavy with fruit, slowly reddening as late summer turns to fall. I marvel at how she gives with such abundance without wanting anything in return. Now, in this “season of giving,” if we can remember the constant stream of gifts we receive from her, and be appreciative in our hearts.

As I get older I feel the Earth’s endless generosity more and more, as if I treasure each season in the year and its different offerings, its changing fruits. I know more clearly how I would not be here without this giving. At the same time my heart hurts for the Earth, grieves at the way our culture treats her wonder and gifts, her magic and sacred meaning. And the question arises from my depths, in a culture of seeming abundance how have we lost so much?

So during this natural season of darkening my heart responds to an unnatural darkening. My prayers turn towards a sacred world we seem to have forgotten. This prayer sometimes feels as if the Earth itself were crying through me, imploring us to remember it at this time of need. Maybe in this darkening something can be born, a new way of being that respects all of life, that sustains the whole of creation. Maybe once again we can remember our love for the Earth, our reverence for what is sacred within all of creation, and honor all of its inhabitants. Then our hearts can open and sense the divine that is all around us—our prayers turn into praise. Once again we can live in an ensouled world that nourishes us everyday with sacred meaning.

We are part of a magical, beautiful, and suffering Earth, whose darkening we have created with our endless exploitation. The Earth, which is so infinitely generous, needs our prayers, needs our loving, our open hearts and remembrance. Each morning as I walk in the first light I feel this need, and the response that comes from

the depths of my soul: in this time of winter solstice may we include the Earth in our prayers.



For further information, please see:  
*Darkening of the Light: Witnessing the End of an Era*  
by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

Watch the short video: *Darkening of the Light*



# **LONELINESS AND THE SACRED WEB OF LIFE**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post, March 11, 2014*

RECENTLY OPRAH WINFREY and Dr. Sanjay Gupta instigated a “*Just Say Hello!*” campaign as a way to combat the deep loneliness that pervades so many people today. Dr. Gupta speaks of the heartbreaking sense of isolation, a toxic, brutal, and even physical pain. Our increasingly connected society has a shadow side of loneliness, as if our technologies are missing something essential to our human nature—the simple human exchange. In only a few centuries we have moved from a communal culture to a landscape of individuals, in which it is only too easy to feel isolated and alone. I grew up in a London in which it was still safe for the local children to play together unsupervised in the city streets, and living near Notting Hill in my teens and 20s, I remember the women gossiping in the Portobello market, everyone called “love” or “dearie”—a sense of community never found in today’s shopping malls. In our contemporary affluence we rarely realize the true price of our discount goods; instead there is a felt hunger for ordinary companionship—which we are often too busy to fully acknowledge.

But underlying and echoing this loneliness is an even deeper isolation that runs unrecognized through much of our lives. In our material progress we have cut ourselves off from the sense of the sacred that used to nourish life with a quality of primal interconnectedness and belonging. Collectively, we rarely feel part of a living world rich in meaning and wonder—“Where the violets bloom in springtime, where the stars shine down in all their mystery.” Instead, our culture has made us more isolated and alone than we dare to realize. In previous cultures everyday activities were a part of a rich tapestry of sacred meaning, supported by rituals that connected us to the whole web of creation and its roots in the divine. An example is the way food can nourish us on many levels, our souls as well as our bodies—to quote Vandana Shiva, “Food is alive: It is not just pieces of carbohydrate, protein, and nutrient, it

is a being; it is a sacred being ... Food is not just our vital need: It is the web of life.”

How can we feel lonely if our daily life speaks to us of so many connections, with the Earth and our shared sense of the sacred? And yet we now live in an increasingly alienating culture, held together by technology and its image of progress, but having lost something essential. We are more and more like the Buddhist figure of the hungry ghost, whose empty belly can never be filled. Always hungry, always empty, it images the dark side of consumerism. And most tragically, this man-made isolation, this separation from the sacred, is mostly unrecognized—instead we are bombarded with more and more distractions and addictions to keep us from calling out what our souls know—that the emperor has no clothes, that our outer abundance holds a terrible secret. No longer nourished from the core of life, our soul is no longer fed by its sacred nature. And so we are left stranded, with a deep loneliness, an ache in the center of our self.

The unspoken poverty in our culture is a poverty of spirit, a real hunger for what the West has forgotten: that not just individual life but all of creation is sacred. This connection to a sacred Earth always made us feel and know we are part of the great mystery of creation, of its rivers and winds, its birdsong and seeds. How could it be otherwise? And how can we now regain this simple but forgotten element, this ingredient as essential as salt?

First we need to recognize that this connection is missing, that there is an ache, a loneliness, within our heart and soul. And from this there will come a grief for what we have lost—because our soul remembers even if our mind and our culture try to make us forget. We are not “consumers” needing only more stuff, but

souls in search of meaning. And from this grief, this sorrow, can come a real response that can return us once again to what is sacred within our self and with our life. As the Buddhist environmentalist Joanna Macy explains, our pain is evidence for a deeper interconnectedness—otherwise we would not feel this loss. It reawakens our care for each other and our love for the Earth. Our heart knows what our mind has forgotten—it knows the sacred that is within all that exists, and through a depth of feeling we can once again experience this connection, this belonging.

We are not here on Earth to be alone, but to be a part of a living community, a web of life in which all is sacred. Like the cells of our body, all of life is in constant communication, as science is just beginning to understand. No bird sings in isolation, no bud breaks open alone. And the most central note that is present in life is its sacred nature, something we need to each rediscover and honor anew. We need to learn once again how to walk and breathe in a sacred universe, to feel this heartbeat of life. Hearing its presence speak to us, we feel this great bond of life that supports and nourishes us all. Today's world may still at times make us feel lonely, but we can then remember what every animal, every insect, every plant knows—and only we have forgotten: the living sacred whole.



**PROTECTING SEEDS AND THEIR STORIES:**

***The Sacred In Everyday Life***

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: November 5, 2014*

THE RECENT UNITED NATIONS Climate Change Summit, the marches in New York and around the world, once again brought into our collective consciousness the need for real change. As did the shocking news of the global loss of species. The vital need to protect our ecosystems is part of a cry that embraces the whole Earth, from the smallest creature to the vast oceans.

And in the midst of this call to cease our globally self-destructive behavior is a story that touches each of us, every day. It is in every bite of an apple, every bowl of rice, every piece of bread we butter. It is the essential and elemental story of seeds, how we are losing our heritage, and how this effects our soul as well as our body.

As I take my walk these early fall mornings, I pass by an old apple tree with gnarled and empty branches. Only a few weeks ago these same branches pushed over the hedgerow, laden with red and golden fruit. Nature's generosity is one of life's wonders; and yet, seeing these empty branches, I am also reminded of the hidden sadness of loss, knowing how once in this country we had around 5000 apple varieties but now mostly grow only 15 varieties.

Accordian, Camack Sweet, Haywood June, Sally Crocket, are just a few names of what has been lost. Like apples, all seeds, our most essential source of sustenance, are losing their biodiversity. They are suffering the same fate as much of the natural world, with many varieties being made extinct—75 percent lost from the world's fields: yet another example of what our mechanized world is destroying, the ecocide we are witnessing.

And yet behind this visible tragedy is another deeper sorrow, the loss of the stories of seeds, stories that have nourished our souls for millennia, just as the fruits of seeds have nourished our bodies.

The story of the seed planted in the earth, germinating, growing in the darkness, breaking through the surface towards the sunlight, is one of the most ancient stories of fertility. These stories tell of the mystery of death and rebirth—both the outer, physical rebirth of nature as winter turns to spring, and also an inner transformation, reminding us that we too can descend into the inner world, the darkness within us, where we can experience the secrets of the soul, a spiritual rebirth. Stories of seeds not only connect us to the seasons of the Earth but also to our sacred inner nature.

These stories of the soul are part of our human history, our spiritual and mythic heritage that has nourished us with the sacred meaning of life—as real as grains ground into flour. For example, the myth of Demeter and Persephone speaks of the mysteries that belong to the sacred feminine, mysteries that were practiced at Eleusis in Greece for over a thousand years.

In this story, Persephone, the maiden, is gathering flowers in a meadow, when Hades—god of the underworld, who had fallen in love with her—carries her off into his kingdom. Here he gives her the seed of the sweet pomegranate, because of which she has to remain in the underworld for part of the year as Hades' queen and wife, returning to the surface every spring.

The seed eaten in the underworld images the mystery of fertility and creativity that transforms a girl into a woman and gives her the instinctual knowledge of conception and birth. This ancient feminine mystery embraces life and sexuality and reveals its sacred meaning—an inner and outer transformation. And yet as a culture we consider this to be just a myth—how many women today are nourished by this knowledge, feel its primal power?

Just as we need to treasure the physical seeds that remain, valuing life's diversity, so do we need to remember the stories of seeds, to keep alive this inner mystery of life and rebirth, of transformation in the darkness. Stories of seeds are in our sacred texts. In the Gospel of St. John there is the simple image of a grain of wheat falling into the ground, and through its death "bringing forth much fruit."

Without such stories and their images our souls are not nourished and we forget our connection to the Earth and its rhythms, and the seasons of our own soul. We remain stranded in the surface masculine world of science and technology, starved of an inner nourishment essential to our well-being and wholeness. As the powerful interests of agribusiness claim ownership of seeds, destroying their diversity, there is no place for planting and harvesting as a meeting of spirit and matter, no opening to the inner world—no place for the sacred.

What can we do? How can we respond? First, we can witness what is happening. Just as we need to become aware of how we are destroying the beautiful and fragile Earth, the wonder of her diversity, we can also recognize how we are forgetting her stories, this loss of the sacred. And from this awareness we might begin to feel the grief, the soul's sadness, both for the outer ecocide and for the less noticed but just as tragic spiritual desolation caused by our forgetting. We are losing our own heritage, stories of life's sacred meaning that we should be passing onto our children. Only from a fully felt awareness can we respond, can we remember and reclaim the symbol of the seed, its myth and how it speaks to us.

Part of the tragedy of our present culture is that all our attention is on the outer, the physical world. And yes, outer nature needs our

attention; we need to act before it is too late, before we ravage and pollute the whole ecosystem. We need to save the seeds of life's diversity. But there is an inner mystery to a human being, and this too needs to be rescued from our present wasteland; we need to keep alive the stories that nourish our souls. If we lose these seeds we will have lost a connection to life's deeper meaning—then we will be left with an inner desolation as real as the outer.

Coming home I cut an apple for my breakfast cereal and taste its sweetness. I feel how this food is alive. In the words of Vandana Shiva, "It is not just pieces of carbohydrate, protein and nutrient, it is a being; it is a sacred being." Just as we need to stop our soil from becoming toxic, we also need to keep alive the soul's sacred stories, before it is all too late. Protecting both seeds and their stories are vital to our survival.



Watch: *SACRED SEED: A Collection of Essays*





## **REBIRTH, MIRACLES, AND MAGIC**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: February 16, 2015*

**A**MIDST HEADLINES OF terrorists and other news of a global darkness, a quiet miracle is once again taking place. While blizzards batter the North East, spring comes here in Northern California—that magical moment when buds break open, when bulbs become shoots that become flowers, and color and fragrance return to a world made grey by winter. Trees blossom, magnolias flower purple and white. One can sense the pulse of the earth, and cannot help but feel the joy of life reawakening. Nature beckons us to be present at this moment when life begins again.

In the Christian story the moment of rebirth will come two months later, when in the miracle of the empty tomb Mary mistakes the risen Christ for a gardener, until he says those poignant words, “Woman why weepest thou?” This resurrection takes place every year at Easter, but it is not just a cyclical happening. Christ’s transformation symbolizes the mysterious moment when the eternal and temporal meet, when the Divine and human merge together. This is the transformation that can happen to each of us, when we reconnect and live the eternal dimension of our own soul, when we reawaken. Like the joy in springtime, it is always a miracle. And it is the deepest promise of being human.

The stories of the soul are all around us, how from the darkness life returns. It is simple and magical, nourishing us with the mystery of what it really means to be alive, to be awake. In today’s world dominated by the rational mind, by the apparent wonders of technology and science, we often forget this more primal wonder. We overlook our need for real magic. Without knowing it we do not welcome spring, we are not there at the empty tomb. Often as a culture we do not even recognize the lack of color in our lives, the lack of the soul’s fragrance.

And as our world spins out of balance, becoming more and more divisive, there is the danger that we will remain in the darkening world of winter without even realizing it. Caught in our culture's dreams of materialism, we do not notice the magic we are missing. Just as we are destroying the fragile beauty of the outer world, so we are losing its inner mystery. But even if we do not feel the grief, we are all part of this global story of ecological devastation, of species that will never again be reborn in the spring, the trees whose sap will never again flow.

Where can we find the magic we need to free ourselves from this self-destructive spell of consumerism, this soul-destroying pursuit of distractions? Magic is always present, just as the Divine is always present. It is there in the leaf opening, in the beating of the hummingbird's wings. It is in the garden sparrows that everyday crowd around the bird feeder outside my window—such an ordinary miracle that I love it all the more. It is in the moment when the Divine unveils Itself and whispers or at times shouts to us. Sometimes, like for Mary, it becomes visible in our moment of grief, when the tears fall and our heart aches.

Sadly we only talk to ourselves. We no longer listen to the Earth or to life itself. As Thomas Berry says, "We have broken the great conversation." But if we have courage and humility, if we kneel down close to the earth, we may hear how our whole world is crying, calling to those who are awake enough to hear it, strong enough to bear its grief. It is calling for us to work together, to bring the light of our own divinity, our compassion and caring, into the marketplace of life, to counter the pull of greed and exploitation.

More than any ideas of solving our problems or planning for the future, we need the power of magic—the ancient magic of the Earth, of its soul as well as its soil. And we need the miracle of love that is

within our heart. Together we may be able to break this spell that is making a wasteland of our world. In cooperation with the Earth and all of its inhabitants we can weave the threads of a new story, which is also an old story. It is the most ancient story of the Earth and also the story of our own soul: the story of life regenerating itself, being born anew.



Watch: *Changing the Story: The Need for Magic*



# FOR THE LOVE OF ALL CREATED BY THEE

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: June 1, 2015*

LOOKING BACK OVER almost half a century of spiritual practice, I sometimes ask myself what was the greatest challenge, the most difficult lesson. On the spiritual quest we are faced with our love and longing, our darkest fears, our failings. We are taken into the darkness and then into the light. I do not believe that there is anything so demanding or exhilarating as this inner journey. And yet more and more I return to something so simple and essential, and almost unbearably difficult: learning to bow down before God.

As Rumi, the thirteenth-century Sufi mystic, tells us, “There are a hundred ways to kneel and kiss the ground.” Each in our own way we have to learn to bow down, to want nothing for oneself. But what does it mean to want nothing for oneself?

One of the dangers of much contemporary spirituality is a focus on personal fulfillment, on living a richer and more meaningful life. The inner journey does give us access to a depth of meaning that a focus solely on the outer, physical world, denies us. But central to mystical life is the understanding of spiritual or mystical poverty, a state of inner emptiness or surrender, of offering oneself completely. Again to quote Rumi,

Last night my master taught me the lesson of poverty  
Having nothing and wanting nothing.

So simple and so difficult, this wanting nothing for oneself. For many years I wondered at the saying of Christ’s in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Known as one of the “Beatitudes,” the idea of poverty of spirit mystified me until I began to understand how essential our inner poverty is before God, that we are nothing, that we have nothing of real worth to offer God except our surrender, our bowing down. In a culture dominated by acquisition, by images of material

and even spiritual self-worth, it can be difficult to understand the deeper value of “having nothing and wanting nothing.” But in my own experience it is this inner longing, this “poverty of spirit” that allows us to live in the presence of God, that enables us to be of service. All we can ever be is an empty cup waiting to be filled. This is echoed in a Sufi prayer, “I offer to Thee the only thing I have, my capacity to be used by Thee.”

Meditation, longing, and prayer can take us to this inner space, this place that is deep within the heart of each of us. Here in the silence of our innermost being is a state of divine receptivity, part of the feminine mystery of the soul: how it bows down before God. Whatever inner experiences we are given on the path—experiences of love and light, longing and pain, the peace or bliss of our divine nature—we are finally taken to this place. It is our natural state of inner surrender, a state of service to God.

We all carry this secret in our inner being, but the challenge for each of us is to live this in our daily life, particularly in a culture that celebrates the ego and its accomplishments. How can we bow down before God in the midst of life’s many demands? Outwardly we can aspire to live as simple a life as possible, though even this is not easy if our outer life requires that we drive a car, have a mortgage and healthcare to pay for—even having a computer seems almost an essential part of today’s life! An uncluttered outer life can give us more space for an inner life, and for the time and attention this requires. But real poverty of spirit is an inner attitude, an inner recognition that only the deep connection in the heart can fulfill us, can meet our deepest needs. In essence it is a constant state of prayer, an inner emptiness that we carry with us, this space for the Divine that is present amidst our daily activities, our work and family, shopping and cleaning, laughing and making love.

Spiritual poverty is not a denial or renunciation of life's pleasures, its joys or sorrows. As one Sufi wrote, "it is turning away from everything that is not God, but there is not anything that is not God!" Rather it is a celebration of the Divine that is present within everything, within every smile and every tear. Bowing down before God we give space for the love within our own heart and within all that exists.

The mystical path takes us to the center of life and to the center of our self. It is a simple way to live, awake to the oneness of love. In the words of an ancient prayer:

At Thy Command Only  
Will I Carry Out the Pilgrimage of Life  
For The Love of All Created By Thee  
and for Thy Glory.



Watch: *For the Love of All Created by Thee*



**POPE FRANCIS' ENCYCLICAL:**  
*Hearing the Cry of the Earth*

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: June 19, 2015*

THE EARTH “now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her.” So begins Pope Francis in his powerful and long-awaited encyclical on ecology. “The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.”

Pope Francis chose to be called after a saint for whom love for all of God’s creation was central to his life, and all creatures were his brothers and sisters. Speaking in the voice of this saint “who loved and protects creation,” he calls for a moral response to prevent the “unprecedented destruction of the ecosystem,”—that we urgently need to recognize the consequences of, and changes required in our way of life. He reflects on our abuse, the violence creating “the symptoms of illness that we see in the Earth, the water, the air and in living things.” And describing how climate change most adversely affects the poor, he combines ecological and social justice, that we “hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

The state of the Earth is our most pressing concern. Our present ecological crisis is the greatest man-made disaster this planet has ever faced: the signs of global imbalance, climate change, and species depletion are all around us. The monster of materialism is ravaging the Earth, its rapacious greed destroying the ecosystem, the fragile web of life that supports and nourishes all of life’s myriad creatures. We are part of a world of wonder and beauty which we are systematically sacrificing to feed our ever-increasing desires. We need to remember the simple wonder of the natural world around us, which St. Francis celebrated in his beautiful *Canticle of Brother Sun*:

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,  
who sustains us and governs us and who produces  
varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Yesterday, when I went to my small vegetable patch to pick a few zucchinis for supper, I was once again amazed at the Earth's generosity, how one plant could give so many vegetables. I had to look carefully under the spreading leaves to discover a zucchini unexpectedly growing almost too large. This is the sacred life that sustains us, part of the creation we desperately need to "love and protect," just as it loves and protects us.

A central but rarely addressed aspect of this crisis is our forgetfulness of the sacred nature of creation, and how this affects our relationship to the environment. Pope Francis speaks of the pressing need to articulate a spiritual response to this ecological crisis and to "feel intimately united with all that exists." Today's world is dominated by a divisiveness that encourages exploitation and greed, and we need to return to a sense of wholeness, reflecting the living unity of all of creation and its myriad inhabitants.

The Earth needs both physical and spiritual attention and awareness, our acts and prayers, our hands and hearts. Life is a self-sustaining organic whole of which we are a part, and once we reconnect with this whole we can find a different way to live—one that is not based upon a need for continual distraction and the illusions of material fulfillment, but rather a way to live that is sustaining for the whole.

Each in our own way we can turn away from the patterns of consumerism that drain our money and our life energy. We can aspire to live a simpler life, learning how to live in a more sustainable way, and not be drawn into unnecessary materialism—filling our life with love and care rather than "stuff." A simple meal of vegetables and grains cooked with love and attention can nourish our body and soul.

But, to speak more with the voice of St. Francis, the Earth also needs our prayers, our spiritual attention. Many of us know the effectiveness of prayers for others, how healing and help is given, even in the most unexpected ways. It can be helpful first to acknowledge that the Earth is not “unfeeling matter,” but a living being that has given us life. And then we can “hear its cry,” sense its suffering: the physical suffering we see in the dying species and polluted waters—the deeper suffering of our collective disregard for its sacred nature.

Pope Francis ends his encyclical with two prayers for our Earth. There is also the simple prayer of placing the world as a living being within our hearts when we inwardly offer our self to the Divine. In this prayer we remember the sorrow and suffering of the Earth in our hearts, and ask that the world be remembered, that divine love and mercy flow where it is needed; that even though we continue to treat the world so badly, divine grace will help us and help the world—help to bring the Earth back into balance. We need to remember that the power of the Divine is more than that of all the global corporations that continue to make the world a wasteland, even more than the global forces of consumerism that demand the lifeblood of the planet. We pray that the Divine of which we are all a part can redeem and heal this beautiful and suffering world.

Sometimes it is easier to pray when we feel the earth in our hands, when we work in the garden tending our flowers or vegetables. Or when we cook, preparing the vegetables that the Earth has given us, mixing in the herbs and spices that give us pleasure. There are many ways to pray, and we will each find our own way of tending the Earth within our own hearts. Just as the song of St. Francis calls us to praise the Earth, and to praise God “through all your creatures.”

As Pope Francis's message reminds us, we each need to be the person who "loves and protects creation," who remembers its sacred nature. We need to bring this song of love into our hearts and hands. Through our love for the Earth we can honor the call to climate action that comes from all faiths and from the single voice that is within all of humanity. We are all part of one living being we call the Earth and it desperately needs our love and attention.





# **SHIFTING THE CLIMATE DEBATE ONTO SACRED GROUND**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: July 2, 2015*

“THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS is essentially a spiritual problem.” These words spoken by an Eastern Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan John Zizioulas, at the Vatican news conference on the papal encyclical are profoundly important. The release of the encyclical was soon followed by a new study that confirmed the Earth has now entered a new extinction phase, its sixth great mass extinction event.

Our present environmental crisis is the world’s most pressing concern, and yet, this discussion has so far taken place mostly in the arena of science, politics and economics. Science can show us the physical symptoms of a deep global imbalance, of a civilization no longer sustainable, and economic models illustrate how painfully this effects the poorest among us. But Pope Francis’ encyclical on climate change, and this week’s Vatican conference, shift this most vital issue firmly onto a moral and spiritual ground. He reconnects the well-being of the Earth to the well-being of our soul, care for the Earth to care for the soul. He suggests that while technology is often presented as the only solution, it “proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others.” And elsewhere he adds the poignant statement, “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.”

The importance of this realignment cannot be overstated. For the past ten years, I have stressed the urgent need for a spiritual perspective in many articles, talks and radio interviews. Now, due to Pope Francis’ encyclical, what had been a fringe and at times a lonely voice, has suddenly become mainstream. It is our sense of being separate from the Earth that has allowed us to abuse it. If we held the Earth as sacred, as part of the living oneness to which we belong, could we treat it in this way—would we pollute its rivers, kill

off its species? Forgetfulness is a most potent poison, enabling our desires to destroy what is most precious. Sacred ground brings us back to the most basic human values, our sense of relatedness and the vital work of “care for our common home.”

But how can we reclaim the inherent “mystery” that belongs to all of creation, while living in a “throw away” culture that has covered this wonder with waste? How can we return to a magical world, one that we have made toxic with our greed and desires, with our addiction to consumerism? Could it begin with something as simple as recognizing that we are not separate from the Earth, but—breathing its air, sustained by its food, nourished by its beauty—are part of this miracle?

The signs of wonder are all around us, from the simple mystery of a sunrise to the laugh of a child. So too are the signs of desolation we have created, the rubbish we scatter on our streets, the toxins in our water, the species we have depleted. And amidst both the beauty and the desolation is the cry of the Earth, the living being to which we all belong. If we can hear this cry despite the clamor of distractions that bombard us, we can begin the work of returning to what is sacred and whole, to that connection that unites us all. Echoing the teaching of St. Francis, the pope writes how “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.”

Only from this place of wholeness and unity can we begin this work of healing what we have desecrated. If we remain in a place of separation from the Earth, from each other and all of our brothers and sisters, we will only continue the cycle of mutual destruction.

Sadly science only too often attempts “solutions” to our ecological predicament from a place of separation, that we are separate from the Earth, or that the environmental crisis is a problem separate from us that we can “solve” through technology or carbon credits—or the even more dangerous economic ideology that the Earth is a resource to sustain our energy intensive culture—not realizing that it is this consciousness of separation that has brought us to this precipice of climate change.

For too long we have separated spirituality from the Earth, the Creator from the creation. We each must find a way to return to the sacred unity, where the Earth is whole as well as holy. For some it may be the “care for the Earth (our common home)” in how we live our daily life. I often think that it is the simple acts of care and attention that are most important—then we feel the bond that connects us all together. There are so many such moments in a day. Filling my bird feeder and watching the sparrows come around is a shared joy, the red-headed woodpecker trying to take over, eating its fill.

It is our love and care for the Earth that is the most powerful force of healing and transformation. The cry of the Earth—as we recognize and feel her suffering—can also open our hearts. This suffering does not belong to another, but to the very core of our own being, where we are one with the Earth. This cry touches deeply within us, the soul of the world meeting our own soul, restoring the sacred ground of being, the interbeing we have with the Earth and all life. Then, as in the prayer Pope Francis finally quotes, we can find our place:

As channels of your love  
for all the creatures of this earth.



Watch: *The Cry of the Earth*



**PARIS: A SPIRITUAL RESPONSE  
TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: December 2, 2015*

**I**N A CITY WHOSE SOUL is bleeding from the acts of terrorists, world leaders are meeting to discuss the fate of an Earth whose soul is also bleeding—bleeding from exploitation, from our civilization’s relentless pursuit of materialism. These leaders will discuss carbon emissions and the global rise of temperature, but I doubt they will dare to discuss the deeper malaise of a civilization whose only goal seems to be economic progress.

Sadly, even the concept of “sustainability” has been co-opted by our culture. Sustainability no longer refers to upholding the viability of our ecosystem—its biodiversity and beauty, its wilderness and wonder—but to upholding the very materialistic culture that is destroying it. This attitude reveals that, above all, we want to sustain our energy-intensive, resource-depleting lifestyle, the very demands of which are damaging our planet. For many at the Paris gathering, “environmentalism is no longer about how to save the environment. It has instead become about how we in the developed world can save our lifestyle.”

As we follow our consumerist dreams and our version of sustainability, the Earth suffers, and some of us, hearing the cry of the Earth, are responding to this deep wound. Those gathered in Paris know that we need to act “before it is too late.” But, unless we ask the deeper questions, unless we consider the soul as well as the soil, how can we begin to bring the Earth back into balance? We can no longer afford to treat the Earth as something separate, just a physical environment—we are all part of the same living wholeness.

While there are those continuing the present nightmare of business as usual, there are others who have real “care for our common home,” who hear the cry of the Earth and the pressing need to live from a place of unity. Maybe we have already passed the “tipping point” of unforeseen ecological consequences: temperatures rising,

rivers and oceans polluted, and air made toxic. But as Pope Francis's encyclical spoke so powerfully, religious and spiritual consciousness has a vital role to play.

Two years ago I published a collection of essays, *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, to help pioneer this emerging awareness of the need for a spiritual response to our ecological crisis—that it is a spiritual as well as a physical crisis. Many who read this book responded, “What should I do?” More specifically, the central question we should be asking is, how can we bring spiritual values, a sense of the sacred, into action to help heal and restore our dying world? I firmly believe that this is the calling for those who have the energy and passion to act from a place of service and love for the Earth, and especially important, are able to respond from a place of unity.

We are all part of the same living wholeness, and only from a place of unity can we transform what has been desecrated by centuries of thinking that we are separate from the Earth. The original instructions given to the First Peoples stressed that we “have to get along together.” There are of course many different ways to work towards ecological wholeness, from forming a community of urban gardeners, to developing new economic models based upon generosity and sharing rather than acquisition, such as “pay it forward.” And, while some global initiatives are vital, like reducing carbon emissions, I firmly believe that most initiatives should be created by small groups of people coming together in different ways—as is already happening. Governments and politicians are too bound to the idea of continued “economic growth” to commit to real change. Rather, the world needs to be regenerated in an organic, cellular way, the way life recreates itself—with different groups emerging as part of our new, living structure.

This is the challenge facing those of us who sense that life is something more than the accumulation of “stuff,” who have heard the cry of the Earth and recognize that it is also the cry of our own soul. How can we help the world in this time of transition? How can we work together to break free from our pathological addiction to consumerism? How can we participate creatively in our lives and communities? The Earth is part of our own self and we are a part of its suffering wholeness. There is much work to be done, a work founded upon the principles of oneness and unity, a work that recognizes that all of life is sacred and whole. Life is calling to us and it desperately needs our attention; around us are what Thich Nhat Hanh calls “bells of mindfulness,” which we need to hear and then respond to—hear with our hearts and respond with our hands.

And if I have learned anything from my own spiritual journey, it is that what matters most is love. Love is the most powerful force in creation, and it is our love for the Earth that will heal what we have desecrated, that will guide us through this wasteland and help us to bring light back into our darkening world. Love links us all together in the most mysterious ways, and love can guide our hearts and hands. And the central note of love is oneness. Love speaks the language of oneness, of unity rather than separation.

As the darkness of terrorism attacked Paris, the most moving response of some of those directly affected was their focus on love—that only love can conquer hate, that love is what really matters, that the final message in our life should be love. Now, this week in the same city, we should aspire to bring this message of love into the darkness of our global exploitation. We are one with the Earth and it needs actions based upon love and unity.

Small things with great love, learning to live and act with love and care, with the true attention of our minds and hearts—these are the signs of the sacred and the truest way to regenerate life, to help life to recreate itself. Yes, we have to relearn many of the sacred principles of life, the patterns of creation, to remember what our ancestors and all indigenous people know (what I have called the principles of Spiritual Ecology). What we need is to work to bring these principles into form, into action, into the myriad ways we can help the Earth to regenerate—ways that foster real sustainability. Then the future that is waiting can be born. It will not be easy. The forces of greed and exploitation are more entrenched than we realize, the environmental collapse accelerating. But this is the challenge for those whose hearts are strong, who care for the planet and for the souls of future generations.



Watch: *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth Book Trailer*





**ACTION ROOTED IN SPIRIT:**  
*Feminine Principles and Social Change*

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE

*First published in Huffington Post: February 7, 2017*

## A RESPONSE TO THE CRY OF THE EARTH AND THE CRY OF THE POOR

Today we are faced by ongoing ecological devastation, polluted air, rising seas, and the world's worst refugee crisis since the end of World War II. If we can bear to hear the cry—both of the Earth, exploited through our greed and desires, and of the dispossessed, often war-ravaged and exploited by human traffickers and others—how should we fully respond? There is a simple, primary answer: we need to return to the feminine, to reconnect with her principles and values.

We can no longer afford to continue the present patriarchal story that tries to dominate nature, exploit the Earth and its peoples through power and greed. We need a new story, based upon our shared human values, our interdependence and unity. There are simple and basic feminine principles—receptivity, relatedness, interconnection and listening—that are necessary if we are to reestablish a relationship with the Earth as a single living being to which we all belong. Only when we have reconnected with these feminine principles can we begin the work of enacting and living the changes that are needed at this time, otherwise we easily reconstellate the primarily masculine dynamics that have created our present dangerous divisiveness and imbalance. We need to hear the voice of the feminine, of women and the Earth.

Like many of my generation I grew up in a soulless, materialistic world. But when the bleak post-war years of the fifties turned into the sixties a new color entered the spectrum of consciousness, as spiritual traditions came from the East. With these traditions arrived different spiritual practices: meditation, chanting, hatha yoga and Sufi whirling. These practices and their teachings have an inward, soul-oriented dimension, and are often accompanied by feminine qualities and a holistic consciousness very different to the

reductive consciousness of the prevalent masculine mindset. They often cultivate a way of “being” that give us access to a different way of living more in harmony with our soul or inner self. We learned to practice meditation, mindfulness, loving kindness, and also awareness of the body and its instinctual rhythms. We were given tools to access the spirit or energy that flows through all life and how to live from our center. And part of this process was to realign with the feminine qualities of both body and soul, reconnect with her primal wisdom.

The first stage of “the return of the feminine” is to rediscover these feminine qualities often repressed, distorted or dismissed by our dominant patriarchal culture. We come to recognize how they are central to any work of transformation, to the work of rebirth that by its very nature belongs to the feminine. Understanding the wisdom and transformative nature of the feminine (in both men and women) is essential if we are to move individually and collectively out of the wasteland created by masculine consciousness and values, if we are to awaken to a deeper and more natural awareness of our own nature as well as that of all of life. For example we can once again learn to listen to the Earth, feel her rhythms and heartbeat, and rejoin the “great conversation” with the natural world. The feminine can give us the tools we need to begin the work of both individual and global transformation.

But there is a second stage to this work. How can working with the feminine empower us to meet the call of our present time from a new perspective, drawing on the principles of interconnectedness, embodiment and reverence for all life? How can we bring unity and harmony back into a civilization and planet whose present collective values are so divisive and self-destructive—destroying even the ecosystem that supports us? How can we use her values for social and environmental justice, for peace building and all the

other changes that are so desperately needed at this time? Hopefully having reconnected with the feminine qualities that belong to our true nature we will be drawn to use them both for personal transformation and growth, but also for outer change—for activism rooted in wholeness rather than divisiveness.

Our response to the present refugee crisis is a real example of the value and need for feminine principles. Refugees evoke both our fear of “the other” and also the ancient values of sanctuary and hospitality. In Europe the flood of refugees has demanded the practical response of providing food and shelter, clothing, health care, jobs, but also the less tangible response of listening, hearing their stories, understanding their traumas, often of war-torn environments, being receptive to their culture and values as we move beyond the labels of refugee or asylum seeker. We need to apply the wisdom of the feminine that can create a space that welcomes and restores both body and soul. Then we can share the deep humanity that connects us beyond borders, recognize the interconnectedness that nourishes us all. This is just one example of how feminine values can take us out of the mind-set that so easily alienates the refugees as “other,” and instead moves us towards a shared future, in which we are all an integral part of the web of life. Putting feminine principles into action is part of an on-going work, a true empowerment of the feminine as she is within both women and men. Her spiritual qualities are essential not only for the soul’s journey, but also as a foundation for any outer work in the world. How we bring feminine principles into action, live the vital contribution of feminine wisdom and her principles of inclusion, compassion, co-creation and unity will be the next stage. How we reconnect and work together with the qualities of the feminine will determine how we bring our civilization and the Earth herself back into balance.

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LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE, Ph.D., is a Sufi teacher. Born in London in 1953, he has followed the Naqshbandi Sufi path since he was nineteen. In 1991 he became the successor of Irina Tweedie, who brought this particular Indian branch of Sufism to the West and is the author of *Daughter of Fire: A Diary of a Spiritual Training with a Sufi Master*. He then moved to Northern California and founded The Golden Sufi Center ([www.goldensufi.org](http://www.goldensufi.org)). Author of several books, he has specialized in the area of dreamwork, integrating the ancient Sufi approach to dreams with the insights of Jungian Psychology. Since 2000 his writing and teaching have been on spiritual responsibility in our present time of transition, and an awakening global consciousness of oneness and spiritual ecology ([www.workingwithoneness.org](http://www.workingwithoneness.org)). He was featured in the TV series *Global Spirit* and interviewed by Oprah Winfrey as a part of her Super Soul Sunday series.

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