



Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

July 2022

The Circle of Life

Wisdom Story



ly and metaphorically, as does the liturgical year through which we observe holidays and holy days, the turning of the year, and the passing of the seasons. Our rites of passage including naming ceremonies, coming of age, wedding ceremonies and memorial services, serve as essential markers in the circle of life.

A Circle of Life

It was early October and the apples were finally ripe. The tree, an Albemarle Pippin, stood by itself in the pasture of the family farm. The Baker farm had been in the family since 1752. It was located just 30 miles east of Monticello in the area of Virginia called the Piedmont. No one knew when the tree had been planted, but it was very old.



The apples were just plain green, but they tasted so good. Everyone on the farm loved them: the family, cows, rabbits, squirrels, field mice, and cardinals. The Baker children, Susan and Daniel, helped to pick the apples each fall. They kept some of them in the cool basement of the farmhouse where they would last for months. While some farmers used the Pippin to make apple cider, it was best for making apple pies.

Introduction to the Theme

The Rev. Forrest Church often said, "Religion is the human response to being alive and having to die." This places the circle of life at the center of our religious concern. Our seventh principle and sixth source reinforce the importance of the circle of life, both literal-

None of this is new. Ancient religions attended to the circle of life. Unitarian Universalist minister Jacob Trapp often quoted the Dutch Theologian Cornelis Miskotte who wrote, "To despise the pagan is to despise the human. Paganism is everyone's first religion." Paganism is notable for its reverence for, attention to, and celebration of the circle of life.

Anthropologists have tended to describe cultures as having either cyclical or linear notions of time. The cyclical idea of time was true with prehistoric and pre-literate cultures, and survived to the present time within indigenous cultures and paganism. Thomas Cahill, author of *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels*, has suggested

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Circle of Life & Repairing the World

The process of repairing the world involves the circle of life, which is the natural process of renewal, of day and night, of the water cycle, of seasons, of birth, life, and death, of aging and the wisdom that sometimes emerges, of adaptation, and when operating over eons, of evolution. The circle of life is reflected in the aftermath of wild fires as ecosystems are recreated slowly, but inevitably. It is illustrated in the garden of flowers or vegetables aided by imagination, loving hands, and the deep connection to the circle of life that is experienced. The circle of life is reflected in the mystery and miracle of our own bodies when repair occurs after a serious injury or illness.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

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The next spring, Susan discovered a

Susan, who was in eighth grade, did a science project about the Albemarle Pippin. She learned that the apple had been grown by both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. At Monticello, Jefferson's plantation, there had once been 50 of these apple trees growing in the south orchard. Susan wondered if that had been where their tree came from as a seedling. She also learned that the Albemarle Pippin tree could live to be between 100 and 150 years old.

The next spring, Susan discovered a

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Repairing the World

Wisdom Story

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small seedling about 40 feet north of their apple tree. It must have grown from a seed. To protect the tree, she encircled it with a small fence. Every time Susan was in that part of the pasture, she tended the tree. By the time she left for college, the tree was four feet tall. When she graduated from college, it was eight feet tall. That year was the first time that the tree had



apple blossoms. Susan was so excited. Back home and working on the farm, she paid even more attention to the tree.

In the fall, she picked all of the apples from the tree. There were just eight apples. She gave two each to her father, mother, and brother. Susan took a bite of one of the remaining apples. It was so delicious.

By mid-November all of the leaves on both trees had fallen to the ground. Susan thought the trees looked so beautiful with their bare branches reaching skyward.

That was when a terrible thunderstorm came roaring through the valley in the middle of the night. The lightning lit up the nighttime sky and the thunder was so loud it shook the farmhouse. Early the next morning, Susan and her father went out to see if there was any damage. That's when they saw the old apple tree. It had been hit by lightning and the trunk was split in two. Susan was in shock and began to cry. She couldn't believe that the tree that she had known all of her life had been destroyed. She looked up at her father and saw tears in his eyes as well. They walked up to the tree and rubbed their hands over the bark of the tree trunk. Such sadness!

Susan turned around to see if the young tree had been damaged. It was unharmed. She ran to the tree, surprised by all of the things that she was feeling: grief and gratitude, sorrow and joy, anger and relief. Living on a farm, she knew all about the circle of life. Looking at both trees, however, the circle of life touched her heart in a new way.

Source: Touchstones

Rolling Dice

Sixes and Sevens

Trying to roll "sixes and sevens" is not considered wise given the difficulty, but it eventually happened within Unitarian Universalism. This 14th century idiom originated in response to a game of dice called *Hazard*, because these were considered the riskiest numbers to roll. Those who tried were considered to be either careless or confused.



In terms of rolling the dice, our tradition rolled a seven first. When the process to revise the principles was launched at the General Assembly in Philadelphia in 1981, the original 1961 principles did not include any reference to life beyond humanity.

The seven-person committee empowered to fashion new principles worked for three years before preliminary adoption in 1984 at the GA in Columbus, Ohio. The first version presented in 1983 included the words, to defend and promote "the integrity of the earth and our responsibility to protect its resources for future generations." In 1984, this was changed to read, "respect for Earth and interdependence of its living systems." A motion by the Rev. Paul L'Herrou, "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part," was adopted. By rolling a seven, we agreed to acknowledge and reverence the circle of life writ large. Final adoption came at the 1985 GA in Atlanta.

We rolled a six when the sixth source was adopted in 1995. It reads, "spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature." There was significant controversy about this new source, which had been championed by the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans. While narrowly passing in a vote of 735 in favor to 358 opposed, it further reinforced the circle of life as central to our tradition.

Source: Touchstones

Celebrate the Sacred

Earth-Based Religions

Rev. Roberta Finkelstein

Long before there were sacred books, there were sacred stories. Long before there were ornate sanctuaries, there were sacred circles. Long before the flaming chalice became a symbol of Unitarian Universalism, fires beckoned people to communal worship. People have always, always gathered together to consider the sacred, to express gratitude for their lives and for creation, to calm fears, to ask forgiveness. The oldest religions were religions of people who lived close to the land. Their rituals revolved around the cycles of the seasons, their sacred objects emerged from nature.



Starhawk describes one of these old religions – Wicca. "The old religion of witchcraft before the advent of Christianity, was an earth-centered, nature-oriented worship.... On the great seasonal festivals—the solstices and equinoxes, and the eves of May, August, November, and February—all the countryside would gather to light huge bonfires, feast, dance, sing and perform the rituals that assured abundance throughout the year. When Christianity first began to spread, the country people held to the old ways, and for hundreds of years the two faiths coexisted quite peacefully.... But in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the church began persecution of witches as well as Jews and 'heretical' thinkers. Pope Innocent the VIII, with his Bull of 1484, intensified a campaign of torture and death that would take the lives of an estimated 9 million people, perhaps 80% of whom were women. Memory of the true craft faded everywhere

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Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "She understood that the hardest times in life to go through were when you

were transitioning from one version of yourself to another." Sarah Addison Allen

Day 2: "Everything comes from everything and nothing escapes commonality. I am building a house already built, you are bearing a child already born. Everything comes from everything: a single cell out of another single cell; the cherry tree blossoms from the boughs; ...the rivers from tributaries from streams from falls from springs from wells...." C.E. Morgan

Day 3: "Your soul awakens your mind. Your mind makes your choices. Your choices manifest your life. Your life is your lesson. Your lessons create wisdom. Your wisdom enriches your soul." Karen Baquiran

Day 4: "At last, the wheel comes full circle." Cassandra Clare

Day 5: "Gardeners instinctively know that flowers and plants are a continuum and that the wheel of garden history will always be coming full circle." Francis Cabot Lowell

Day 6: "In the circle of life / It's the wheel of fortune / It's the leap of faith / It's the band of hope / Till we find our place / On the path unwinding / In the circle, the circle of life." Elton John

Day 7: "...innocence of eye has a quality of its own. It means to see as a child sees, with freshness and acknowledgment of the wonder; it also means to see as an adult sees who has gone full circle and once again sees as a child—with freshness and an even deeper sense of wonder." Minor White

Day 8: "Sunrise paints the sky with pinks and the sunset with peaches. Cool to warm. So is the progression from childhood to old age." Vera Nazarian

Day 9: "To me, the model of success is not linear. Success is completing the full circle of yourself." Gloria Steinem

Day 10: "I love all the seasons of you...." Lisa Kleypas

Day 11: "Service or giving is the other side of receiving. Giving and receiving is a full circle: a full circle feels more natural than a half circle." Laura Huxley

Day 12: "The living and the dead, / The awake and the sleeping, / The young and the old are all one and the same." Heraclitus

Day 13: "Grown-ups don't look like grown-ups on the inside either. Outside, they're big and thoughtless and they always know what they're doing. Inside, they look just like they always have. Like they did when they were ...[young]." Neil Gaiman

Day 14: "Life is a full circle, widening until it joins the circle motions of the infinite." Anaïs Nin

Day 15: "There will come a time when you believe everything is finished; that will be the beginning." Louis L'Amour

Day 16: "All human lives are so profoundly and intricately entwined—those dead, those living, those generations yet to come—that the fate of all is the fate of each, and the hope of humanity rests in every heart and in every pair of hands." Dean Koontz

Day 17: "The books I have read were composed by generations of fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, teachers and disciples. I am the sum total of their experiences, their quests. And so are you." Elie Wiesel

Day 18: "Spring passes and one remembers one's innocence. Summer passes and one remembers one's exuberance. Autumn passes and one remembers one's reverence. Winter passes and one remembers one's perseverance." Yoko Ono

Day 19: "Youth cannot know how age thinks and feels. But old men are guilty if they forget what it was to be young." J.K. Rowling

Day 20: "Do you know that there's a halfway world between each ending and each new beginning? ...It's a bog; it's where your dreams and worries and forgotten plans gather. Your steps are heavier

during that time. Don't underestimate the transition ...between farewell and new departure. Give yourself the time you need. Some thresholds are too wide to be taken in one stride." Nina George

Day 21: "Would you like to know your future? If your answer is yes, think again. Not knowing is the greatest life motivator. So, enjoy, endure, survive each moment as it comes to you in its proper sequence—surprise." Vera Nazarian

Day 22: "And you would accept the seasons of your heart, even as you have always accepted the seasons that pass over your fields." Kahlil Gibran

Day 23: "In my end is my beginning." T.S. Eliot

Day 24: "Any transition serious enough to alter your definition of self will require not just small adjustments in your way of living and thinking but a full-on metamorphosis." Martha Beck

Day 25: "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why." Mark Twain

Day 26: "In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer." Albert Camus

Day 27: "Sometimes we can choose the paths we follow. Sometimes our choices are made for us. And sometimes we have no choice at all." Neil Gaiman

Day 28: "Aging is not 'lost youth' but a new stage of opportunity and strength." Betty Friedan

Day 29: "I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end." Gilda Radner

Day 30: "We are not all born at once, but by bits. The body first, and the spirit later.... Our mothers are racked with the pains of our physical birth; we ourselves suffer the longer pains of our spiritual growth." Mary Austin

Day 31: "Death ends a life, but it does not end a relationship...." Robert Woodruff Anderson





The Religion of the Circle

Rev. Robert Bowler

Black Elk described the religion of the circle based on his vision of "the whole hoop of the world." He saw the religion of the circle wherever power moves.... "Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle. The sky is round and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. Birds make their nests in circles for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a person is a circle from childhood to childhood, and ...in everything where power moves."

With simplicity and elegance, Chief Seattle, as well, warned those who were taking the land of his people: "This we know. The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves."

...We have fragmented ourselves from the earth and from each other. Community is an ideal lost, a practice forgotten, an art ignored. ...

Religion feeds fundamental principles; it inspires worldviews and lives. If our religion is going to be circular rather than linear, holistic rather than fragmented, we need to learn to see ourselves as part of nature, as a circle within a circle. We are parts of the whole, inextricably woven into its fabric of interconnectedness. Likewise, our challenge is to weave human circles, sit on the rim with others and offer ... [respect to all].

Fragmentation is so ingrained in our culture and in us that the religion of the circle becomes very difficult to practice. Political maneuvers and power plays end

build a community of equals, any growing confidence and self-respect for those left out of traditional power arrangements. When two people hold power, they can triangulate a third, shutting them out. When some become an "in group," they build walls to exclude. If one is not white, heterosexual, intelligent, good looking, physically fit, [and male] one is excluded from the mainstream of our culture. One cannot walk into an institution and become a valued member if one is different. It is easier to conform and perpetuate walls than to open to the rich diversity of human life and make it work in business, in neighborhoods, and in church.

...People like Starhawk and others are not afraid of the politics necessary to em-



brace a religion that sees all as part of the circle instead of fragmenting life. ...

Action for change grows out of embracing more of ourselves and more of the earth simultaneously, recognizing that "dominance over" ultimately fragments. It destroys us as whole beings. It fragments our society as a community and our earth as a living, interdependent web. It divides the people in the room. It reduces citizens to economic units, subjects to objects.

Thus, the religion of the circle ...must be in the image of the Goddess, [Starhawk] ...says, as the living, interconnected web. Her politics, she writes, is "strengthened by an underlying network of human connections, a weaving of close relationships that bind it like warp and weft." It is sitting down in a circle and looking at how we are affected by the linear, fragmenting culture in which we

live. It is sitting down together and valuing all equally.

Christina Baldwin in her book, *Calling the Circle: The Once and Future Culture*, offers an art of circling that anyone may learn. Its politics are quieter than Starhawk's, but no less challenging. She speaks of creating the space for council, for being present to one another in a way that values all who sit on the rim of the circle. The simple act of valuing and being valued is a powerful event for people today. The circle heals, it inspires, it nourishes, and it brings people to the place from which they can act together for the good of the whole. [She says], "Moving our bodies from rows to circles and our self-interests from center to edge, enables each of us to reclaim our innate knowledge of circle and carry it forward consciously."

...I have found the deepest spiritual experience ...in small groups, in adult religious growth and learning circles. In circling, I find wholeness and health. I find aliveness and spiritual awakening. I find that unity emerges in a group that is greater than the fragmenting pull of our wider culture, greater than the sum of the parts. Circling [can be] ...a compelling, lifelong spiritual practice.

...The center is as vast as life and as mysterious. On the rim, we strive to strengthen the shared power of sitting together as a community of equals. We need to feel safe to bring all of our struggling human imperfection and all of our capacity to love and value to the circle.

...I am convinced that we cannot learn to practice Unitarian Universalism as expressed in our principles and ... [sources], until and unless we can sit in a circle together as equals. Just as Starhawk's magic comes from deep within the earth and ourselves, the spiritual experience of circling comes from us, from our commitment to the whole and our respect for one another. When we listen well and speak with integrity, we gain the humility to risk personal growth and the openness to draw ever larger circles of love and trust. Magic happens, the group becomes a coherent and unified whole, a community, a basis for real change, a foundation for an ancient but ever-new culture.

Source: no longer online

Family Matters

Roots and Wings

The two most precious gifts that parents can give to their children are **roots** and **wings**. These two gifts are not in opposition, rather they complement each other. Both are necessary if our children are to live life to the fullest.



Roots bind parents and children together for a lifetime. If the roots have grown deep and strong, it is due to the cultivation that only love can provide. If they have grown deep and strong, then these roots will be nourished by the traditions and values that have been handed down from one generation to the next. Without roots, our children would never know where they stand or why. Without roots, they would not have anything to anchor their lives in times of trial and tribulation. Without roots, they would have little of that which is “wordless and full of wonder” to bless their lives and to pass on to their own children.

But roots are not enough.

Without wings, children would be unable to find the freedom to explore the fullest possibilities of their own lives. While the cultivation of roots involves much time and attention, it is the easier of the two gifts to give. The gift of wings requires letting go a part of oneself. It is an act of profound generosity, for in one’s heart the parent sees not only the child, now grown, but an infant, a toddler, a young child. These timeless memories are reminders of how quickly time has passed. While clutching these memories tightly, parents are asked to open their hearts, to bless the winged flight that will take their children onward. It is the gift of wings that gives

our children the ability and inspiration to create their own future.

And how can we ever thank and honor our parents for these precious gifts? The largest measure of our gratitude is to do as they have done. To pass on these roots, these wings to our children, to pass on a parent’s love.

Source: Touchstones

Family Activity:

The Life Cycle of Apples

Watch these two videos with your children: *Apple Life Cycle* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBzTCbGnIWo> (1:05) and the book by Betsy Maestro, *How Do Apples Grow* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fDE15B9Irs> (7:57) Discuss

with your children the life cycle of apples. Did anything surprise them? Do they have any questions? Purchase fresh apples, apple juice or cider, applesauce, apple pie and dried apples to share with your children, since part of the life cycle is how apples are prepared and consumed. Which form of “apple” do they like best?

My Daughters

What arises in you, my daughters,
on this summer day?

If I could still this moment
of joy and hold you
forever in its embrace, I might.

Do you feel stirring in you the need
to hold life against your breast?

Do you feel stirring in you that
which through me
gave birth to you both?

My kittens, purring in my lap,
content with the perfect fullness of this
moment,

I know the sound of you
and the smell of you
and the shape of you
in my lap purring.

So you reach out to life’s purring,
holding the kitten (as I held you) in the
morning light.

The distance between us grows as you
grow:

the room between us,
the window between us,

the yard between us.

In time’s turning
the fence will come between us
and then

we will be separated by the road and
more.

So I set my gaze upon you both
that I might hold in my heart forever
the delight of this day,
as you look toward me
daughter of my being,
as you look away from me,
daughter of my being,
as I place the photograph of this day
in the album that grows in my memory
as your unfolding becomes remembered
in still life;

As you are called from me
still will I remember
life purring in you
(gift of me)
seeking
life
still.

Source: Touchstones



Family Activity:

The Photograph Album

Share with your children family photos digitally or in a photograph album and share stories about the people and events in the photos. Ideally this would include you and your extended family, including grandparents. You can also ask them to look at a photograph and share with you what they think happened. Then tell them what actually happened.

In my Beginning is my End

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

that the ancient Jews were responsible for introducing the notion of linear time into the Western world. For them, time had a beginning and an end. It was a narrative with an expected triumphant conclusion in the future based both on a belief in God's justice and on optimism that, with divine assistance, good would eventually triumph over evil. The term for the "end" in Hebrew was *'aharit ha-yamim*, that literally means "the end of the days," or "the end of time." The idea of an end-time was embraced by Christianity.

Our lived experience of time seems a bit more complex, one that combines linear time with cyclical time. We live within cycles of circles starting with the daily rotation of the earth that moves us from day to night to day in an endless procession. This is part of a larger circle as the earth travels around the sun every year with the smallest leap every four years. But we are not done. Our solar system travels around the Milky Way Galaxy. A galactic year is thought to be between 225 and 250 million earth years. Further, the entire Milky Way Galaxy is moving through the universe, apparently heading for a collision with the Andromeda Galaxy in about 4 billion years (in case you were interested.)

It is telling that most children's books about the circle of life focus on death. Death is an event that both ends one circle and makes it possible for other circles to begin. Leo Buscaglia's charming book, *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages*, ends with these words, "Freddie did not know that what appeared to be his useless dried self would join with the water and serve to make the tree stronger. Most of all, he did not know that there, asleep in the tree and the ground, were already plans for new leaves in the Spring." The life cycle of a leaf is one small example of much larger cycles on the planet like the water cycle/circle and carbon cycle/circle. The intricate cycles and circles of the planet writ large exist at a much smaller scale within our own bodies as we eat and breathe and exercise and reproduce. The interconnectedness of it all

his *Gaia Hypothesis*—the suggestion that "the Earth system behaves as a single self-regulating system comprised of physical, chemical, biological and human components."

In the flow of the circle of life, we all move endlessly between balance and imbalance. In Disney's 1994 movie, *The Lion King*, Simba's father, Mufasa, explains to Simba, "Everything you see exists together in a delicate balance. As king, you need to understand that balance, and respect all the creatures from the crawling ant to the leaping antelope. You must take your place in the Circle of Life."

At one level the circle of life is simple: a progression from birth to death with passages in between, the flow of life across generations. At another level it is unbelievably complex: so many endings and beginnings in a single life, an ongoing dance of continuity and chaos.

Anais Nin reminded us that, "We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. We are made up of layers, cells, constellations."

The constancy of change and desire and wonder and fear and hope and so much more makes our lives anything but simple. Who are you? Where are you going, and why? Seldom are the existential questions of adolescence answered in any abiding way. We often simply choose to ignore the questions of being because the answers are either fleeting or unsatisfactory or wrong or....

Some of the answers handed down across the generations serve as valuable guides, but many more are now wrong, however true they may have once been, or they are answers to questions we no longer ask. And yet, questions multiply and we struggle to find answers that will serve us for more than a brief time.

Rainer Maria Rilke counseled, in his letters to a young poet, "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves.... Live

the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer." And yet he also wrote, "I live my life in widening circles / that reach out across the world. / I may not complete this last one / but I give myself to it. / I circle around God, around the primordial tower. / I've been circling for thousands of years / and I still don't know: am I a falcon, / a storm, or a great song?" Perhaps Rilke never discovered an answer in that distant day.

We name the generations to mark their time and to describe how their experience is distinct from the generations that came before (Lost Generation, 1883-1900; GI Generation, 1901-1924; Silent Generation, 1925-1945; Baby Boomers, 1946-1964; Generation X, 1965-1980; Gen Y/Millennials, 1981-1996; Generation Z/iGen, 1997-2012; Generation Alpha, 2013-2025. Each generation moves through its own cycle of life, accumulating some measure of wisdom beyond all of the trial and error, folly, and success.

In his poem, *East Coker*, T.S. Eliot, offered some wisdom about the circle of life, writing, "In my beginning is my end. In succession / Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended, / Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place / Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass. / Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires, / Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth." He continues, "Home is where one starts from. As we grow older / The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated / Of dead and living. Not the intense moment / Isolated, with no before and after, / But a lifetime burning in every moment / And not the lifetime of one man only / But of old stones that cannot be deciphered. / There is a time for the evening under starlight, / A time for the evening under lamplight / (The evening with the photograph album). / Love is most nearly itself / When here and now cease to matter. ...In my end is my beginning."

Mufasa said to Simba, "You must take your place in the Circle of Life." That is the admonition that we all must heed. Whoever you are, wherever you are, how are you nurturing the Circle of Life in ways large and small?



Seven Generations

Honor the Seed

Jim Ewing

Honor the seed. The words seem so simple. This is knowledge that was passed down to me from my father. Yet, today, those simple words — and sentiments — are so forgotten.

...It was my father who taught me how to 'taste' soil to see if it 'was any good.' If the soil tasted flat, it needed fertilizer; metallic, it needed more organic matter; if it tasted tart, it needed lime. His method was intuitive and, I guess, a matter of taste. Literally. [...]

The admonition to care for society to the 7th generation includes the careful harvesting of seeds from the crops and the planting of the best of them in the following growing season. It is a way of life that ensures the health and continuity of society. It is a nourishing way of life for all the people, not just a few, and not only those living, but a mindful setting aside of health and well-being for future generations, as well.



The seed is more than an agricultural product. It is at once a symbol of hope, of a new generation, and a predictor of the future. If we are not careful with the seeds we plant, and conscious of what we are doing, we will reap a certain harvest based on what we have planted. Feast? Famine? Future? Or end?

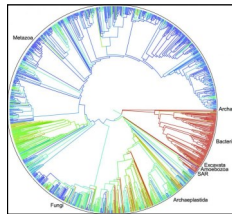
We cannot go back to a society where small farmers lived in isolated villages in rural settings that lasted essentially the same for generations. But we can learn from our ancestors.... That's the responsibility...: Honor the seed.

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=951>

Honor the Circle

The Ripple of Life

Mark Fischetti wrote in a *Scientific American* article, *The Circle of Life*, "Since Charles Darwin's day, biologists have depicted how new organisms evolve from old ones by adding branches to numerous trees that represent portions of the animal, plant and microbial kingdoms." In June 2012, scientists and



researchers from some 12 institutions began a three-year project to combine tens of thousands of trees of life into a circle of life diagram. Each line in the circle represents at least 500 species and combined the lines represent all 2.3 million living species that have been named.

This all began 3.5 billion years ago when the first single-celled organism emerged in the primordial ocean that covered the earth. It is estimated that that up to 8.7 million species may inhabit earth, with some 15,000 species discovered every year. This means that scientists have only identified and categorized about 25% of life on earth.

An important part of this work is completing a genetic sequence for each species. In 2018, scientists had sequenced the genomes of about 3,500 species. That is when the Earth BioGenome Project was launched to undertake DNA sequencing of 1.8 million species. It now involves 44 institutions worldwide. This work is critical for a number of reasons including understanding ecosystems and protecting biodiversity.

The circle of life, however, has been much larger, comprising some 4 billion species, 99% of which have gone extinct since life began. In the last 500 years, 900 species have gone extinct. There are now 41,415 species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species; 16,306 of which are endangered with extinction. This is up from 16,118 last year and includes endangered animals and plants. We have our work cut out for us if we are to truly honor the circle of life and repair the earth.

Source: Touchstones

We Must Weave Hope

Choose Kindness

Dean Koontz

Not one day in anyone's life is an uneventful day, no day without profound meaning, no matter how dull and boring it might seem, no matter whether you are a seamstress or a queen, a shoeshine boy, or a movie star, a renowned philosopher or a Down's-syndrome child. Because in every day of your life, there are opportunities to perform little kindnesses for others, both by conscious acts of will and unconscious example.

Each smallest act of kindness—even just words of hope when they are needed, the remembrance of a birthday, a compliment that engenders a smile—reverberates across great distances and spans of time, affecting lives unknown to the one whose generous spirit was the source of this good echo, because kindness is passed on and grows each time it's passed, until a simple courtesy becomes an act of selfless courage years later and far away.

Likewise, each small meanness, each thoughtless expression of hatred, each envious and bitter act, regardless of how petty, can inspire others, and is therefore the seed that ultimately produces evil fruit, poisoning people whom you have never met and never will. All human lives are so profoundly and intricately entwined—those dead, those living, those generations yet to come—that the fate of all is the fate of each, and the hope of humanity rests in every heart and in every pair of hands. Therefore, after every failure, we are obliged to strive again for success, and when faced with the end of one thing, we must build something new and better in the ashes, just as from pain and grief, we must weave hope, for each of us is a thread critical to the strength—to the very survival of the human tapestry.

Every hour in every life contains such often-unrecognized potential to affect the world that the great days and thrilling possibilities are combined always in this momentous day.

Source: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christophers/2012/03/this-momentous-day/>

Theme for Discussion

The Circle of Life

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “There are few times when we know with absolute certainty that we are going to do something for the last time. Life has a way of moving in circles, bringing us back to places we didn’t expect and taking us away from those we do. There are too many times we don’t pay close enough attention, and moments are lost in our assumption we’ll have another chance.” *Megan Hart*

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “Today I am 65 years old. I still look good. I appreciate and enjoy my age. A lot of people resist transition and therefore never allow themselves to enjoy who they are. Embrace the change, no

matter what it is; once you do, you can learn about the new world you’re in and take advantage of it. You still bring to bear all your prior experience, but you are riding on another level. It’s completely liberating.” *Nikki Giovanni*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. What was your first experience with birth? With death? How did each affect you?
2. What have you learned from nature about the circle of life?
3. In terms of the seasons of the year, which is your favorite? Why? Which is you least favorite? Why?
4. When you think of the circle of life, what elements in the circle are most meaningful to you? Why?
5. As you reflect on your own ages and stages, which were most challenging, most rewarding? Why?
6. What unexpected lessons have come with major changes in your life?
7. What wisdom was passed down to you by your elders? What wisdom do you want to hand down?
8. Share a major life-altering event where the change was either smooth and easy, or difficult to move on.
9. Share a current transition that is very alive for you now.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words:
Rev. Philip R. Giles
(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*



(Continued from page 2) Earth-Based Religions

except within the hidden covens. With it went the memory of much of women’s heritage and history, of our ancient roles as leaders, teachers, healers, seers. Lost, also, was the conception of the Great Spirit, manifest in nature, in life, in woman and man. Mother Goddess slept, leaving the world to the less than gentle rule of the God-Father. But now the Goddess has stirred from sleep. The craft is earth religion, and our basic orientation is to the earth, to life, to nature. There is no dichotomy between spirit and flesh, no split between Godhead and the world. The Goddess is manifest in the world; she brings life into being, is nature, is flesh. Union is not sought outside the world in some heavenly sphere or through dissolution of the self into the void beyond the senses. Spiritual union is found in life, within nature, passion, sensuality—through being fully human, fully one’s self.” The old religion lives still, and has so much to teach us about living on this precious earth.

Source: <http://www.uusociety.org/images/userfiles/files/Newsletters/NL%2012-13/November.pdf>

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