

**“In Possibility”**  
**A Series of Reflections on Earth Day Sunday**  
**April 19, 2015**  
**Cary Grey, Diane Szymaszek, and Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull**

The series of reflections that follows holds the following sequence:

As told by Diane Szymaszek

The First Story: Business As Usual  
The Second Story: The Great Unraveling  
The Third Story: The Great Turning

As told by Cary Grey

In Possibility: The Permaculture Movement (text not yet available)

As told by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull

In Possibility: Eco Reverence as Spiritual Practice

As told by Cary Grey

In Possibility: A Food Forest (text not yet available)

**The First Story: Business As Usual**  
**Diane Szymaszek**

There are three stories going on right now at the same time that are affecting life on this planet. The first is Business as Usual. In this story, the main assumption is that there is little need to change the way we live. The food we eat comes from long distances. We travel far, spend money on vacations, cars, computers, televisions, iPhones, etc. Progress is measured in how much we have and how fast we can go. We are in a wonderful success story. Our lives are easy because of money and technology. This story is “more of the same”...business as usual, and it is told by the mainstream policy makers, corporations and the media. It is easy to believe that this is just the way things are. Young people are being taught in most schools that this is the goal and this belief has gone global. The core assumptions of business as usual are: that growing the economy is **all** important and is essential for prosperity, the advertisements are all about promoting consumption, nature is something that we use for human purposes, and the problems of other peoples, nations, and species are not our concern. The Business As Usual story is all about profits and getting ahead.

**The Second Story: The Great Unraveling**  
**Diane Szymaszek**

This story tells of a world in decline. Many people today are concerned about the future and what it will be like for their children and grandchildren. The areas of concern in the Great Unraveling are: \*Economic decline and can we maintain this economic growth? The Industrial Growth Society that we live in is not sustainable.

Secondly, to maintain our living standards, more and more oil, coal, and natural gas must be taken from the earth. There is not an unlimited supply. Even more crucial and somewhat overlooked is the availability of fresh water. The United Nations warns that within twenty years, as much as two-thirds of the world's population could be at risk of water shortages. Our resources are being depleted at an alarming rate.

Thirdly there is climate change. When more people consume more things, we deplete resources and also produce more waste. Not only garbage but carbon dioxide. Climate change is no longer a distant threat just for future generations to worry about. We are seeing the effects now. Another source of concern is Social division and war. The poor of our world are bearing the brunt of the Great Unraveling. Global food prices have more than doubled in the last ten years, pushing more and more people below the poverty line. At the same time the rich get richer.

And the last part of the Great Unraveling is the Mass extinction of species. With more pollution, habitat destruction, and climate change, we know that wildlife is in danger. A third of all amphibians, at least a fifth of all mammals, and an eighth of all bird species are now threatened with extinction. Many species play critical roles in the healthy functioning of natural systems that we depend on for survival.

The question is do we continue as if nothing is wrong and believe that these facts are overblown? We may also believe it is already too late so why bother?

The Great Unraveling can be seen as a hopeless disaster **but** there is a third story...to be continued.

## **Continuing with The Third Story: The Great Turning**

**Diane Szymaszek**

There is a major shift taking place now, which has the potential to change the world in extreme ways. It is similar in stature to two previous revolutions, the Agricultural Revolution of 10,000 years ago and the Industrial Revolution, which, started a little over two hundred years ago. This third revolution though needs to happen more quickly and must be more conscious. This third revolution has also been called the Environmental Revolution, the Ecological Revolution or the Sustainability Revolution but has come to be known as The Great Turning in *The Work That Reconnects*. It involves the transition from the doomed Industrial Growth Society, which promotes an economy that is all about consumption, to a life-sustaining society committed to the recovery of our world. This transition is already well underway; we just don't hear a lot about it very often.

There are three parts of the Great Turning that both overlap and mutually support

each other. The first is comprised of “holding actions.” These are actions that buy us more time by slowing down the destruction of the Great Unraveling. Examples are recycling, protests, boycotts, occupations, grass roots actions, protective legislation such as clean air acts, endangered species acts, etc. Holding actions saves lives, saves species, feed the hungry and are essential but by themselves are not enough. Along with stopping the damage, we need to change and replace the systems that cause the harm.

So the second part of the GT is “Gaian Structures, or more easily understood as Sustainable Structures.” It involves rethinking the way we do things and recreating the economic systems and social structures of our society. Finding new ways of doing things (actually old ways) include going back to the wisdom traditions of our ancestors, growing food locally instead of transporting it across many miles, permaculture and other organic ways of growing food, eco-villages, food forests, renewable energy sources, green building, new ways of settling conflicts, and alternative ways of measuring the economy. New approaches to healthcare, business, education, agriculture, transportation, communication, economics, and so many other areas are being questioned and changed. In a few moments, you will hear about two of these structures from Cary.

And the last part of the Great Turning is a “Shift in Consciousness This change in our perception, incorporating the Sustainable Structures into our everyday living is the most important part of the Great Turning because these Sustainable Structures won’t last if the way we see reality, our values, and our understandings, don’t change.

The biggest contribution to this shift in consciousness was being able to view the Earth from space. The Earth can now be seen as a self- regulating living system. The Earth **can** be seen as our larger body intricately interwoven, and connected with everything and thought of with great reverence.

## **“In Possibility: Eco Reverence As Spiritual Practice”**

A reflection by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull

Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden

Meriden, CT

Earth Day Sunday

April 19, 2015

Spirituality we call it, nodding as if all are in agreement as to what exactly that is. Spiritual practice we call it, some nodding as if we wholly understood, others casting an expression of uncertainty. Treading confidently or otherwise into this amorphous realm of the spirit, we are at risk of the trap of Western thought wherein mind, body, and spirit occupy distinctive domains. I take refuge in the Hebrew word, *nephesh*, weakly translated as “body-spirit.” As *nephesh*, we are creatures whose mental, physical, and spiritual dimensions flow in the same river of life.

We who would be “spiritual” cannot shun the physical, the material, the earthly; for we are physical, material, earth-formed, and we are spiritual. Humankind has struggled over the centuries with the tension between connectedness and fragmentation in seeking to understand who we are.

Diane spoke of a “great unraveling,” a disconnecting from the earth through depleting the resources of this planet. If we are part of the earth rather than apart from it, such behavior is akin to a species so desperate that it feeds on itself. We rationalize by convincing ourselves that we need such “nourishment” to survive, spinning in denial of the reality that we are depleting not just the earth, but our core well-being as a species that is part of this earth. Life as we know it unravels from wholeness. To call such behavior unsustainable is a dangerous understatement.

How to escape this seductive cycle? What is needed, Diane continued, has been called “The Great Turning in the Work That Reconnects.” Using cloth napkins helps. Changing economic structures toward the common good helps more. What is needed above all is a “shift of consciousness.” What is needed is a life-wisdom that understands the Earth as stated in Diane’s closing words, “as our larger body intricately interwoven with everything...”

Does this sound familiar? “The interdependent web of all life of which we are a part.” We are of the elements of the earth. We are of the substance of the stars. Rivers gurgle through our veins. Tides maintain their rhythms in the flow of blood to and from the ventricles of our hearts. Our sacred songs are “songs of the soul of the earth.”

There was more in Diane's closing words: "The Earth can be seen as our larger body intricately interwoven with everything *and thought of with great reverence.*" Reverence, a demeanor of wonder, awe, and gratitude.

There is yet another component to this shift of consciousness. Cary tagged it in her "History of the Earth" as a ribbon, stretched and streaming across this sanctuary. What portion signaled human life? It was miniscule. Will we as humans reside on this earth indefinitely, or will earth's history continue without us? "Humility is the beginning of wisdom," is a common translation of passages from the Book of Psalms and the Book of Proverbs. Humility is a bones-of-the-soul understanding that Creation is not all about me, though it includes me. I understand this not as a self-effacing posture, but a stance of soul that affirms a cosmic WE.

Some call this WE the Spirit of Life; some, Allah; some, God. Albert Schweitzer, physician, musician, scholar, missionary, healer, searcher, and even a member of the Unitarian Church of the Larger Fellowship, struggled mightily with the notion of God. As a young man, he studied to become a Protestant minister. His inclinations led him to scholarly pursuits as a seminary professor. The more he studied, the more differently he believed. In an interview with Norman Cousins, he explained:

"I decided that I would leave the seminary. Instead of trying to get acceptance for my ideas involving painful controversy, I decided I would make my life my argument. I would advocate the things I believed in terms of the life I lived and what I did. Instead of vocalizing my belief in the existence of God within each of us, I would attempt to have my life and work say what I believed."

Schweitzer's decision to let his life and work speak his belief evolved over the course of his decades as a physician serving the indigenous peoples of Lambarene in the West African nation of Gabon, raising funds for his work by performing organ concerts around the world, and pursuing scholarly interests that resulted in monumental works on J.S. Bach and the historical Jesus. Every spoke of his wheel turned in response to his relentless search for truth and meaning. It was a search that coalesced in a philosophy that Schweitzer called "reverence for life."

Rather than abandoning any deference to the Creative Force, Schweitzer bowed before Life itself, claiming that "the first spiritual act in [one's] experience" is "reverence for life." This reverence for life emerged out of what he termed "fidelity to my own nature" and blossomed into a regard for all life as sacred.

Reverence for life may also be called "eco reverence." Eco reverence evokes a transformation of consciousness. "I" defers to "We." "We" encompasses this earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars. The ecosystem of which we are a part knows no bounds. Eco reverence is a spiritual practice that engages every dimension of who we are and who we

can be.

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Diane Szymaszek, "Business As Usual/The Great Unraveling," as part of the worship service at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden, CT, April 19, 2019.

Diane Szymaszek, "The Great Turning," as part of the worship service at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden, CT, April 19, 2019.