

Eaarth, Part 6: Acceptance Is Awakening
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If you could open up your body you would find some pretty amazing things about yourself:

- Your gastrointestinal tubing is 30 feet long.
- You have 100,000 miles of blood vessels.
- The unraveled the DNA in all the cells of your body would stretch 10 billion miles – from here to Pluto and back!

As amazing as these facts are, I believe that if you could open up your soul and peer inside, you would see even more amazing things. Namely, you would find that every element of the earth – from the rocks and mountains to the streams and forests to the lakes, ponds, and oceans – indeed all of God’s Creation has a spiritual analog within you.

So, for instance, consider a common forest. If one were to peer inside your soul, would we not find a network of well-worn paths you take spiritually in common situations? Do you not follow a similar route each time you are in an argument with your spouse or other loved one? Are there not paths you take when you’re scared or uncertain? And how about all those dead end paths you’ve created?

And isn’t there something inside you that feels like a rushing river, or a quiet pond? Can you find nothing within you that is as hard as a rock, or as soft and fragile as a flower petal?

The native tribes of the Pacific Northwest knew that there are not only analogs within us that correspond to natural elements, but that animals find their analog in the human soul as well. Certain animals were thought to be more strongly represented – and therefore influential – than others. They fashioned totem poles to represent these particular “spirit animals.”

Do you have a “spirit animal” that is especially represented in your life? The two animals that are most influential in my life are the Dog and the Eagle (which perhaps makes me a Beagle?).

Like a dog, I love to be around other human beings; but I am also perfectly content to be alone – especially if I’m not penned in and can roam freely. Like a dog, too, I crave especially the attention of my Master. If I can’t find my Master, or have been out of the Master’s presence for too long, I start to moan and howl. I’m also highly protective of the Master’s children, whom I love and adore nearly as much as the Master Herself.

Like an Eagle, I love to soar above the earth so that I can see the forest for the trees. I love soaring so much, in fact, that if it weren't for the fact that I need to eat once in awhile – or the fact that there's a dog in me, too, who loves the company of others – I might just stay far up in the heavens exploring the world.

I have other “spirit animals” too: the Owl, the Praying Mantis, the Cat, the Raven, and the Salmon. Each of these teach me something about life and something about myself. I have no idea if these seven animals chose me or if I chose them (or both). All I know is that the particular way these seven inhabit the world looks a lot like the way I inhabit the world. And the more I pay attention to these animals, the more I seem to encounter wisdom that I believe is from the Holy Spirit concerning my particular way of being in the world. Those totem carvers didn't carve totems without good reason for doing so!

What animals have been significant in *your* walk through life's forest?

The ancient Hebrews were very much in touch with the relationship between God's Creation and the human soul. While they did not speak of “spirit animals,” per se, the scriptures are full of references to animals and other elements of Creation, and it is evident that they saw all of Creation as God-bearing. You've heard before, for instance, that the word for “spirit” and the word for “breath” and “wind” are the same. Jesus himself taught that the Holy Spirit is like the wind. You can't tell where it comes from or where it is going.

All this is helpful for understanding our Call to Worship today, which was a reading from the prophet Isaiah 11:1-6:

- 1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*
- 2 The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*
- 3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear;*
- 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.*
- 5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.*
- 6 The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.*

Would you suppose that Isaiah is speaking of a literal shoot that come out of the stump of Jesse, or literal wolves, leopards, and lambs? The fact that the stump is called “the stump of Jesse” proves that he's talking about spiritual analogs in human beings. Jesse was the father of King David. What Isaiah is trying to say is that Israel's highest, most revered tradition – that which is represented by King David and his ancestral line for three centuries – is currently dead. If you read the preceding chapters in Isaiah, you'll find all the reasons why Isaiah considers the tradition deader than a doornail.

He sees that the people's hearts have turned to every other pursuit than godly ones; there is mass dishonesty, mass corruption, massive greed, and massive indifference to the plight of the poor and vulnerable in society. Sound familiar?

It is like Isaiah is throwing a spiritual lens onto people, peering inside their souls to behold the inner forest of each individual Israelite. He's saying, "Look! That giant tree in the center of your forest – the one you praise and worship every day – it's no longer standing! Therefore, all your efforts to Make the Tree Great Again, are utterly fruitless. You cannot raise a dead tree to life. In fact, all the energy you're putting into making that tree stand again only diverts your attention and energy away from where it should be."

Centuries before Jesus, Isaiah knew that you cannot resuscitate a dead body. You can only acknowledge and accept its death ... and let God resurrect it. Acceptance is awakening, according to Isaiah. When you accept the death of the old, revered tradition – a tradition that was perfectly good and beautiful in its heyday – then all the energy you used to place in supporting it can, instead, go into watchfulness.

Says Isaiah, "a shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of its roots." That's when people will sense the life again, for a dead tradition provides the perfect nutrients to seed new life. You see, even as Isaiah was criticizing people who were trying to "Make the Tree Great Again," he was not in the slightest degree suggesting that the Tree was no good. He was saying that the God of the Tree was trying to create a new Tree from the old Tree. And if people were to remain faithful, they would look into their own souls, acknowledge and honor the death, so that God could raise new life into everyone.

When I look to my own soul life, I can find plenty of dead trees there - some of which have sprouted new growth and others of which have been waiting for me to realize they are dead so that new life can spring from them.

I'm thinking of one tree in particular this morning that has been dead for some time that I have only in recent years admitted was dead. This "tree" is the assumption that spirit is higher in God's pecking order than matter. That is to say that what is invisible inside a person is of higher worth and significance to God than the body or any other material part of Creation.

What I failed to recognize is that the distinction we make between "spirit" and "matter" is an illusion. In essence, it is *all* spirit. Which means that *everything is spiritual*. It was actually science that finally gave me the knowledge I needed to affirm this belief. Four summers ago, scientists at the CERN's Large Hadron Collider discovered what is called the Higgs Boson quantum particle. This discovery proves that every material thing we see around us ultimately finds its origin in energy, not matter. In other words, all of matter is just a "concrete" form of energy.

While most scientists would not state it this way, this discovery was enough for me to assume that everything we see around us is created by the “energy” of God’s love. Every atom, in every material object, was created with God’s intention, for the purposes of expressing and incarnating God’s love, and receiving it back again from God’s creations.

If you want to know how much God loves you, then consider that you are made of 7,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 atoms, each and every one of which was created as an act of love, and because they were created in love, which is ultimately relational, these atoms also signal the depth to which you are within God’s loving awareness.

I’ll just stop with this assumption and let it sink in a little.

How many trees in your forest would be blown down (and how many new and beautiful ones would arise) if this little speculation at least points to God’s Truth?

If you are like me, accepting the death of many of my old assumptions that were based on the essential separation between spirit and matter means embracing a lot of death ... and experiencing resurrection each and every day.