

## **Whose Earth Is it Anyway?**

We can envision our world in innumerable ways, but none of them – not even a photograph – is an accurate and complete image standing on its own. As Darin showed us a few minutes ago, if we want an image that reflects actual landmass, size, then what we will see distorts the shape of the continents. When we want to navigate the seas, by maps alone, then the maps we use distort the actual size of the continents and islands between which we travel.

The world in which we live is incapable of our accurate portrayal – by our own hands and in our own minds. What planet Earth looks like is now somewhat less of a mystery to us because we can see it through photographs from outer space. But the mystery of its origins, creation, composition and functioning is no less, even with what we now know is a distorted physical image.

Our world, this Earth, is no less mysterious than our understanding or images of the divine, of God, the spirit of life, source of life, the stream of unending love. Despite our partial images and inaccurate drawings of our world we do not really know more about it than we know or understand about the sacred and the divine. All of our attempts to portray it fall short. These images, and this knowledge, do not give us any more with which to

answer these compelling questions. Where do we come from? How were we created? By whom? For what purpose? How? What does it all mean?

As Unitarian Universalists we know that there is no one single image or idea of the divine, of the sacred, of the holy. We know that there is no one single conception of the spirit of life, source of love, or the great cosmic mystery that propels us through time. We don't know when that force came into existence or when it will cease, if ever. Likewise, with our world, we do not know for certain when it came into existence or when it might end.

Like the source of all life and love, our world is an ineffable mystery which is partially visible and comprehensible and that – at the same time - remains indeterminate and immeasurable. We can view it in many ways but no one view will ever tell us everything about it. In fact, everything about it, remains constantly elusive and unreachable, by even the greatest human minds and hands and souls.

The mystery of our world and its story – which is also our story – is the self-same mystery of our creation and cosmic destiny. Every culture that we have ever known has one or several creation myths. We have always considered these creation myths to undergird the religious and spiritual beliefs of a culture. Likewise

our views of our world similarly occupy the human enterprise of spiritual and religious belief and praxis.

So this Earth Day let us recognize and declare that it matters how we view our world. It matters what images come to mind. It matters that we always know and be grateful for the fact that the mystery is equal to, or even greater than, our factual or empirical knowledge. It matters that we know that our relationship with our world is of the same nature as our relationship with divine, with what is holy, with the source of life and love, with God.

And like that relationship, let us recognize and celebrate that we do not have the upper hand. We do not have greater knowledge. We do not have finer instincts or inclinations. We cannot solve the mystery. We cannot understand the depth of the mystery. We can only know it and recognize it and live in awe of it. We can only continue to live as the objects of its bounty.

*Tikkun Olam*, repair of the world, is our sacred obligation as the beneficiaries of its bounty. And while we may measure and predict and analyze the composition of that bounty, and try to visualize it through the use of thematic maps, we cannot quantify or qualify it or how it was created, or why. Those “divine sparks of creation were scattered about” and we are of them and they are what constitute this world of ours; all that is seen of it and all that is unseen of it.

“Though it is hard to believe, the perfect world is all around us, but broken into jagged pieces, like a puzzle thrown to the floor, the picture lost....” Or like a map projection beyond recognition, we can only safeguard, preserve it and share in it as equally and as widely as humanly possible and environmentally sustainable. “In every moment with every act we can heal our world and us. We are all holy sparks dulled by separation.”

How we view it, and what we feel about it, matters to how we interact with it, how we respect it, how we love it. And how we love our world matters to how we live today and what we will pass on to those who follow us. The world in which we live is as sacred as the space we occupy this morning, as the music we sing today, as the community that we form and the love that we share.

We are called to interact with, respect and love our world; just as we love that which draws us here this morning. Our world, like us, and all of creation that surrounds us, is sacred. It is precious. It too is the source of our life and our sustenance. Like existence itself, we are given the gift of it and we are entrusted with the continuation and care of it. It is the container for the interdependent web of which we are all a part.

Like the creators of the *Tikkun Olam* story, Arno Peters saw, in the maps of his day, an image of the world that did not accurately include and portray all of its parts, its size, its majesty,

its mystery. He sought to “repair” that inaccuracy but could only offer another inaccuracy in its place. We might know that what we see is incomplete, but we must also know is that we are unable to take the next step to actually imagine all that it is that we are missing. This is the ineffable mystery. This is the sacred gift of creation with which we are entrusted and which we must preserve, even with its mystery and our limitations. The mystery is part of the gift so let us celebrate the mystery.

The Native American leader Black Elk put it this way,

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. and while I stood there I saw more than I can tell. And I understood more than I saw. For I was seeing in the sacred manner the shape of all things of the spirit and the shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that make one circle, wide as daylight and starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy.<sup>1</sup>

Our world and all that is of it is holy. Our relationship with our world and all that is of it is holy. We can never know all that there is to know about our world yet we are obliged to protect and to preserve and to prioritize it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Singing the Living Tradition*. Beacon Press, Boston 1993. Number 614 “The Sacred Hoop.”

This Earth Day let us look to our spirituality, to our faith, to our religion to inspire us to love our world, and celebrate its mystery, to revel in its glory and all of its mystery. Let us nurture and sustain it, to preserve it for all of those that follow us upon it.

Amen.