



Dear Reader:

So we're in 2013, a new opportunity for a new beginning. As I look around I hear on the one side the sounds of confusion, violence and uncertainty, and on the other a yearning for peace, for understanding, for deeper connections to each other. So I found a little gem in the words of Thomas Berry made at a special event held during the UN World Peace Summit for Religious and Spiritual Leaders in August 2000. After two long days of keynote speakers and sessions, Berry invited the audience to step outside, and just experience the sky.

I think we all should step out and observe the night sky, every so many weeks. It helps us find the right perspective for our daily concerns and struggles. And it's always there.

Enjoy the reading!

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| Stop and Reflect | |
| Issue # 149 | January 2013 |
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| The Great Community of Earth By Thomas Berry | |

During these past two days much has been accomplished to advance the cause of peace by our discussions and simply by our being with each other. We have learned to trust and admire each other and to share with each other the traditions we represent.

This evening I suggest that we continue this presence to each other by looking beyond ourselves to the larger universe we live in. If it were convenient, I would suggest that we go outside this building, that we go beyond all the light and noise of the city and look up at the sky overarching the Earth. At this time in the evening we would see the stars begin to appear as the sun disappears over the horizon. The light of day gives way to the darkness of night. A stillness, a healing quiet comes over the landscape.

It's a moment when some other world makes itself known, a numinous presence beyond human understanding. We experience the wonder of things as the vast realms of space overwhelm the limitations of our human minds. As the sky turns golden and the clouds

reflect the blazing colors of evening, we participate for a moment in the forgiveness, the peace, the intimacy of all things with each other. [...]

Beyond the dreams of our personal future, there are the shared dreams that give shape and form to each of our cultural traditions. Because this other world cannot be explained by any technical or scientific language, we present it by analogy and myth and story. Even beyond childhood, this is the world of the human mind.

So tonight, as we look up at the evening sky with the stars emerging faintly against the fading background of the sunset, we think of the mythic foundations of our future. We need to engage in a shared dream experience.

The experience that we have spoken of as we look up at the starry sky at night and in the morning see the landscape revealed as the sun dawns over the Earth – these reveal a physical world but also a more profound world that cannot be bought with money, cannot be manufactured with technology, cannot be listed on the stock market, cannot be made in the chemical laboratory, cannot be reproduced with all our genetic engineering, cannot be sent by e-mail. These experiences require only that we follow the deepest feelings of the human soul.

What we look for is not longer the Pax Romana, the peace of imperial Rome, nor is it simply the Pax Humana, the peace among humans, but the Pax Gaia, the peace of earth and every being on the Earth. This is the original and the final peace, the peace granted by whatever power it is that brings our world into being. Within this universe, the planet Earth with all its wonder is the place for the meeting of the divine and the human.

As humans we are born of the Earth, nourished by the Earth, healed by the Earth. The natural world tells us: I will feed you, I will clothe you, I will shelter you, I will heal you. Only do not so devour me or use me that you destroy my capacity to mediate the divine and the human. For I offer you a communion with the divine. I offer you gifts that you can exchange with each other. I offer you flowers whereby you may express your reverence for the divine and your love for each other. In the vastness of the sea, in the snow-covered mountains, in the rivers flowing through the valleys, in the serenity of the landscape, and in the foreboding of the great storms that sweep over the land, in all these experiences I offer you inspiration for your music, for your art, your dance.

All these benefits the Earth gives to us, individually, and in our communities, and throughout the entire Earth. Yet we cannot be fully nourished in the depths of our being if we try to isolate ourselves individually, or if we seek to deprive others of their share by increasing our own, for the food that we eat nourishes us in both our souls and our bodies. To eat alone is to be starved in some part of our being.

[...] I recall the experience of Henry Thoreau, an American naturalist of the mid-19th century who lived a very simple life with few personal possessions. At one time he was attracted to purchase an especially beautiful bit of land with a pasture and a wooded area. He even made a deposit. But then he realized that it was not necessary to purchase the land because, he reasoned, he already possessed the land in its wonder and its beauty as he passed by each day. This intimacy with the land could not be taken away from him, no matter who owned the land in its physical reality. [...] Such was the argument of

Mencius, the Chinese writer. He taught the emperor that he should open up the royal park for others, since it would be an even greater joy to have other present with him [...]

It has taken these many centuries for us to meet with each other in the comprehensive manner that is now possible. While for the many long centuries we had fragments of information concerning each other, we can now come together, speak with each other, dine with each other. Above all we can tell our stories to each other. [...] Now a new phase in all our stories has begun, as we begin to shape the Great Story of all peoples.

I would suggest that we see these early years of the 21st century as the period when we discover the great community of the Earth, a comprehensive community of all the living and the non-living components of the planet. We are just discovering that the human project is itself a component of the Earth project, that our intimacy with the Earth is our way to intimacy with each other. Such are the foundations of our journey into the future.

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